



IV499 - August 2016

The last gasp of the demonstrations

31 August 2016, by **Agnese Marra**

At Copacabana the hundred or so people wrapped in yellow and green flags (the colours of Brazil) demanding the destitution of the president are mixed up with a multitude of tourist, athletes from foreign delegations, as well as *cariocas*, as the inhabitants of Rio are called, out for a Sunday afternoon stroll or a spin on their bike. One of the rare people who succeeded in attracting the attention of the public was the MP Jair Bolsonaro (who dedicated his vote in favour of impeachment to the torturer of Rouseff when she was a guerrilla), who was walking along Atlantic Avenue with a toy Olympic torch in his hands alongside a personage familiar in the demonstrations against Dilma, who was wearing a Batman costume and presenting himself as a “pursuer of the corrupt”.

In front of the Candelaria Church, in the centre of the city, about fifty people carrying the banners of the Workers’ Party (PT) demonstrated their support of the president. The cry “out with Temer” (formerly Rouseff’s vice-president, now interim president) could still be heard, in an improvised way, in the streets. At five o’clock in the afternoon, on San Salvador Square, at the same time as the performance of *chorinho* (popular music) that takes place every Sunday, a mixed public of young and not-so-young people began to chant “out with Temer”. It was not a waste of time, since for more than two months

various left groups have been meeting on this square to discuss possible actions “against the coup”. At the end of the night, in Santa Teresa, the customers in a bar took up the war cry against the interim president and all those who were passing in the street chanted together against Temer.

The demonstrations that took place in twenty states of the country did not mobilize more than 5,000 people. The only city where there was more than this number was in Sao Paulo, where the demonstration in support of the president or, to be more exact, against her replacement, saw 40,000 people marching to Largo de Batata Square, led by Guilherme Boulos, president of the Movement of Homeless Workers (MTST), one of the important new leaders of the Brazilian left.

On the Avenida Paulista, one of the main thoroughfares in Sao Paulo, the demonstrators against Dilma were much fewer (the police did not provide estimates) and only the most radical of them attracted attention. A speech by the former porn star Alexandre Frota, who has recently become interested in politics and who is close to the group that demands a return of the military dictatorship, gave people something to talk about for the next week. Frota called Jean Wyllys, a left-wing MP (from the PSOL) a “poof”, declared that he would spit on the former Minister of Human Rights Maria de Rosario (PT) and finally described as

“dead from hunger” the singer Chico Buarque, the television presenter Jo Soares and the actor Wagner Moura, all of whom had demonstrated against impeachment.

The actress Leticia Sabatella was also insulted in Curitiba: when a demonstrator who supported impeachment saw her passing in the street he began to scream at her “whore”, “cry your eyes out, pétista”, “tramp”. Sabatella is well-known for defending various causes concerning human rights and ecology: “We are experiencing large-scale intolerance and authoritarian behaviour. The speeches inciting hate that we hear in the country stir people up to all that. They think that by speaking like that they are more like citizens, that they are more politicised. They think that for them to live well, the other, the one who is different, must not live. That is the most painful thing to see”, she declared to the Brazilian edition of *El Pais*.

At the beginning of August, the president of the impeachment commission of the Senate, Antonio Anastasia (PSDB) gave his approval for the pursuit of the political trial against Dilma Rouseff [1]. Dilma needed the vote of 28 senators to avoid the process; if she did not obtain them, the final decision would be taken, from August 29, by Lewandowski, head of the Supreme Federal Tribunal [2]. However, on

August 3, the acting president, Michel Temer, exerted pressure on the Supreme Tribunal for the vote to be brought forward to August 26. The dates have still not been confirmed.

Dilma Rousseff has also used her own weapons. She declared during an interview with BBC Brazil that if she survived the procedure of impeachment she would be ready to call new elections. That is also what 62 per cent of Brazilians want, according to the latest poll, published at the end of July by *Data Folha*. The PT has been envisaging for months the option that Dilma could call a plebiscite to ask whether the people

want new elections. However, for the plebiscite (considered to be “unconstitutional” by a number of jurists) to take place, the approval of Congress is necessary. Although Temer is rejected by 82 per cent of the population, the support of the legislative body has always been his strongest card. The meetings he has held over the last few days with various senators show that he has sufficient control over it.

For their part, social movements such as the MTST and the group *Povo sem medo* (“people without fear”) confirmed that in the course of the month, during the Olympic Games, they would conduct various actions in

Rio de Janeiro in order to attract the attention of the international press “against the coup by Michel Temer”. These Games, which began with a minimal presence of heads of state, who preferred not to come so as to avoid having diplomatic problems because of the political crisis in the country, seem also to be one of the last stages where the social battle against impeachment is being played out. The legal battle will remain in the hands of the Supreme Federal Tribunal.

[A l'encontre](#)

August 19, 2016

A Leap Toward Radical Politics?

31 August 2016, by **Socialist Project**

The Manifesto gained national prominence through a favourable resolution passed at the recent NDP Convention encouraging discussion of it within the party. But the Leap Manifesto also has an independent existence coming out of climate change struggles in Canada over the last decade, particularly with respect to pipelines development to further increase extraction of oil from the tar sands and First Nations sovereignty and ecological justice demands.

The Discussion Paper below from the Socialist Project invites debate on the specifics of the Leap Manifesto's proposals. This will unavoidably involve serious reflection on the complex politics of building a social force – and literally inventing new strategies – able to address the urgency of climate change, First Nations struggles over land and self-government, and the authoritarian neoliberalism spreading in Canada. Frustrations with what has come to be called “neoliberalism” – the hyper-capitalism of stunning inequalities, ever-deeper commodification of all aspects of our lives, environmental degradation,

corporate-driven trade pacts, and the narrowing of substantive democracy – have seriously discredited traditional political parties. This has often included parties on the social democratic left.

Canada's New Democratic Party (NDP) seemed immune from this for some time. But in the aftermath of their disastrous showing in the 2015 federal election, and the [dramatic developments](#) at the NDP's Edmonton convention in April, the federal NDP has been drawn into the maelstrom. Delegates at the convention did the previously unthinkable: they not only refused to give their current leader, [Tom Mulcair](#), the traditional strong vote of confidence, but for the first time in party history directly rejected the incumbent. The rejection clearly extended to a rebuke of the architects of the party's recent electoral platforms, notably expressed in the extent of support that delegates registered for the social movement-inspired Leap Manifesto, with its focus on ecology, indigenous rights, and social justice, all downplayed in the fall NDP campaign.

Reigniting Debates?

For the socialist left (which has in large part abstained from extensive participation in the NDP or participated only marginally), the rebellion within the NDP has reignited debates about working inside the NDP. In particular, it has raised the question of whether the delegitimation of the party elite and the emergence of the Leap Manifesto signal a new opportunity to join others in moving the NDP significantly to the left. Political developments in the U.S. and Britain have given added weight to this. Bernie Sanders, running as a Democrat in the U.S. primaries, and Jeremy Corbyn, winning the leadership of the British Labour Party, have succeeded well beyond initial expectations, with the socialist left as surprised as anyone else. Sanders and Corbyn have operated inside their respective parties as “outsiders” challenging the party establishment and their accommodations to neoliberalism. This is bound to suggest to Canadian socialists that there may be some new potential in a

strategy for rebuilding the political space for socialist politics inside the NDP.

This challenge to the socialist left involves a set of further questions. How should we assess the Leap Manifesto – is it a leap to an anti-capitalist position or a limited though significant step away from the neoliberal faith in markets? Is entering the NDP and participating in electoral politics the inherent trap some socialists claim it is? Should we instead focus on building the movements? What distinguishes social democratic from socialist politics at this time? And how, in the light of responses to the above, should we react to the Leap initiative?

The contention here, elaborated in the sections that follow, is that the [Leap Manifesto](#) represents an important contribution to thinking about alternatives to neoliberalism and the effort to make positive social change. Whatever its limits, the Manifesto opens the door to a more radical politics, and to what can no longer be avoided: the question of capitalism itself. If, however, its implications are reduced primarily to channel the energy of the Left into the NDP, it may well end up as another squandered opportunity to further the egalitarian, environmental, and democratic goals of the Left, and to advance the organizational means of developing the individual, collective, and institutional capacities to transcend capitalism.

The Leap Manifesto

The Leap Manifesto's presentation to the NDP convention elicited not only a sharply negative response from some new as well as old elites within the NDP, but an astonishingly overwrought backlash from much of the mainstream media. Far from expiring with the usual news cycle, these are attacks still being ramped up. Thus a full month after the convention, the *Globe and Mail's* veteran political commentator, [Jeffrey Simpson](#), [launched a full frontal attack](#) on the "Leapistas", as a "grouping of people with absolutely no idea of how

to run a modern economy, deeply skeptical of most elements of the globalized world, hostile to free market economics, except of the organic-market variety on Saturday mornings, quite anti-American, committed to saving the environment at the expense of crucifying the economy." Earlier "dreamers and wreckers" inside the NDP like "the Wafflers of bygone years" had been "stifled" by "every leader of the NDP, starting with David Lewis a long time ago," but now that the party is weak, "they flourish."

The Leap Manifesto had not faced anything like such hostile reactions when it was first released during the 2015 federal election campaign. The sudden hysteria seems all the more strange given that its prime defender at the NDP convention was the Canadian political icon and media darling Stephen Lewis, who had himself played the leading role in "stifling" the Waffle in the Ontario NDP. Indeed, this well may be a mark of how far the party has moved to embrace neoliberalism, and the concern of the mainstream political class to keep it there. One of the Manifesto's key architects is Avi Lewis (Stephen's son and David's grandson). He has explained that the modesty of its proposals reflects both its origins in a consensus among the diverse range of activists invited to a political gathering in the spring of 2015, and its hopes of building an even broader national consensus "to bring us together." In any case, the NDP convention did not actually adopt the Manifesto; it only passed a compromise resolution encouraging NDP members and constituency associations to participate in community discussions about its contents. This was in line with Leap's self-expressed goal of provoking a "non-partisan" discussion across the country not confined to activists and any particular party.

In fact, the Leap Manifesto's contents are "hardly radical", as was [pointed out by The Star's Tom Walkom](#), one of few media commentators who has kept his head about it. In both tone and content, the Leap Manifesto's proposals are strikingly moderate compared to earlier attempts at changing the NDP, especially that of

the Waffle Movement of the late 60s and early 70s, with its call for an "independent socialist Canada", and even the ambitions of the [New Politics Initiative](#) of the early 2000s as it emerged out of the anti-globalization initiative. In directing itself particularly to the environment crisis, it holds back from advocating the over-all economic planning that would be required and what that would entail not only in terms of fundamentally challenging corporate property rights but also in terms of democratic and participatory planning structures. Nor does it tackle the radical steps that would have to be taken to overturn the incredibly unequal distribution of income and wealth that Canada, like the rest of the capitalist world, has experienced in the last several decades of neoliberalism. There is next to no acknowledgement of the economic and social reorientation that would necessarily be entailed, given Canada's continental and global economic integration via "free trade", as well as Canada's contribution to the energy and resource needs of the American empire.

The language of the Manifesto, reaching in vain for entry points into mainstream political debate, falls far short of the references to "class", "socialism" and "political revolution" that [pepper the speeches of Bernie Sanders](#) in his Democratic primary campaign. That Sanders has incurred little criticism in the Canadian media, while the NDP is slammed for even being open to discussing the Leap Manifesto, is especially remarkable. What may be worrying the many enemies of the "Leapistas" is precisely how many primary victories – based on the hard work of tens of thousands of active supporters as well as funds from a few million small donors – which Sanders has chalked up against the likes of a Hillary Clinton. While Sanders has had a surprisingly easy ride in the U.S. media overall, Keynesian liberals like [Paul Krugman in the New York Times](#) have been sharply critical of him for being too hard on Hillary while "waving away [the] limits" of political change in an "utterly unrealistic" manner.

Those attacking the ‘Leapistas’ here may be taking their cue more from the unrelentingly hostile British media treatment of Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership of the Labour Party, despite that (or perhaps because?) he attracted some 300,000 new members to the party – unheard of in well over a half a century among any of the NDP’s sister social democratic parties. This media hysteria has reached such a height that the political correspondent of the Financial Times of London recently went so far as to contend that Corbyn “should not have been in a position to become Labour leader because he should not have been a Labour MP” (as he has been for over three decades) because a parliamentary party should have no room for those who “reject capitalism or war in principle.” The Labour Party’s ability to ‘hang on’, as Corbyn put it, in the recent local and regional elections in the UK in the face of such vitriol is itself very significant.

Could the overwrought hostility to the ‘Leapistas’ be indicative of a concern to stop the socialist contagion at the Canadian border? Here we come to the main political point: the Leap Manifesto has actually come to embody the spirit of radicalism in Canada today. This isn’t so much about its progressive policies, such as the rejection of neoliberalism and austerity, the call for a moratorium on the expansion of pipelines, retrofitting of housing, expansion of public transit and public infrastructure, or the sensitivity to the impact of environmental policies on workers as part of ecologically-responsible production. Nor is it just a matter of extending ecology issues to social justice and other issues – ‘connecting the dots’ as Manifesto advocates have put it. As important as all this is, what seems most significant has been the Manifesto’s identification with opposition to politics as usual, the anti-democratic subservience to economic elites, and the disappointments – and indeed betrayals – from the party and parliamentary institutions that claim to represent us.

What this spirit of radicalism represents is precisely the recognition that the rhetorical emperors of

‘realism’ in the face of global neoliberalism have no clothes. It is not ‘realistic’ governments that ‘run the modern economy’; it is the capitalist economy that runs them – not in the sense of corporations or bankers directly telling them what to do but rather in the sense of coping with the volatility and even chaos of economic events (it is no accident that the favourite self-description of the U.S. Treasury for the past 25 years has been that of ‘firefighters’). This spirit of radicalism is for very good reason ‘deeply skeptical of most elements of the globalized world’ and ‘hostile to free market economics’, and if it also seems ‘quite anti-American’, this is because of the massively unequal negative effects and multiple crises that a competitive globalized capitalism has wrought under the aegis of the U.S. empire. This spirit of radicalism is indeed oriented to looking kindly on organic markets – and not only on Saturday mornings – because of its real commitment to saving the environment, and its readiness in this context to look at all kinds of progressive alternatives. This spirit of radicalism recognizes that if the capitalism’s multiple crises today are not addressed in collectivist, cooperative, democratic, and internationalist ways, then the ultra-nationalist, racist, sexist and homophobic spirit of the new far right will take the lead in expressing the frustrations with what liberal democratic politics has become, offering little more than competing teams of elites offering variations of neoliberal austerity.

This is what makes this conjuncture so pregnant with possibilities. Formerly apolitical and even anti-political activists seem, on the basis of the experience of organizing through loose networks, to have learned that there are limits to a politics of protest that does not build cumulative political and organizational capacities. There is an increasing sense that we are entering a new phase of political struggle, which has given old and new activists a fresh perspective on the possibility of engaging in electoral politics, entering the state, and breaking with both neoliberal austerity and minimal efforts to address climate change.

Electoral Politics versus the Movements?

For many activists and even some socialists, the notion of engaging with electoral politics has long been anathema, an old diversion. They remain adamant that building the movements, apart from political alignments, remains the key to social change. The siren call of the NDP and electoral politics is a curse to be avoided at all costs. From past history, there is, of course, more than a little validity to this. But it may well include its own traps and delusions, not least about changing the world without taking power.

To begin with, this perspective shields the movements (other than the unions, which it doesn’t hesitate to criticize) from serious appraisal of their politics and strategies, and exaggerates their current strengths. The hard truth, however, is that mass social movements in Canada (other than some First Nations movements intersecting with specific sovereignty struggles) are at an ebb that has few precedents. This isn’t to deny the energy and commitment of movement activists, and their often remarkable achievements in spite of limited resources. Rather, it is to soberly acknowledge the limits of existing movements in terms of laying the conditions for a substantive reversal of neoliberalism, challenging capitalism, or in significantly recruiting and developing a generation of activists who might do so in the future.

Choosing between electoral politics and movements is, moreover, a false choice. On the one hand, sectional movements cannot win on their own against the combined power of capital and the state. If protests inevitably come up against the limits of ‘throwing stones’ at the state; if the state needs to be entered to effect change and block reaction; and if insurrection is discounted as a way of coming to power; then parliamentary processes and the struggle over remaking state institutions cannot be avoided. On the other hand, this historical moment seems

characterized by polarized and limited options, given the terrain of electoral politics and the increasingly authoritarian neoliberal practices of the state, as the middle ground is brushed aside by the aggressiveness of all sections of capital. It is clearer than ever that electoral politics cannot deliver on any substantive promises unless backed by the deepest mass movements, not least that of a renewed and revitalized labour movement. Parliamentary and extra-parliamentary political mobilizations, elections and movements, are not in opposition but inextricably intertwined in the struggle over power, structural reforms and revolutionary ruptures.

Part of the confusion here is rooted in the NDP's utter reduction of politics and political organization to a total focus on elections. The opposition to such 'electoralism' is then mistakenly equated to an opposition to elections per se. The point is that elections remain critical moments of political mobilization, of tests of organizational capacity, and of ideological contestation. But they are still far from, in capitalist democracies, the sum total of all politics. In this regard in Canada, the issue isn't electoral politics but the content and kind of politics that the NDP represents. The challenge is to contemplate and put in motion organizational forms, political alliances, and political parties of 'a new kind': organizations and parties that are committed to radical change, structured around the idea that developing strong and autonomous social and labour movements at the base, are a condition for making parliamentary politics relevant and a crucial dimension of the ability to carry through transformative social change.

The NDP and the Project of Transcending Capitalism

The distinction between social democratic parties like the NDP that organize to win elections and pursue policies of modest redistribution of

incomes and opportunities within capitalism, and parties committed to transcending capitalism and realizing an alternative society no longer governed by the logics of profit and endless accumulation, does not lie primarily on the terrain of the policies articulated. It lies in the vision each ascribes to the organizational capacities being formed, and the willingness to engage in political mobilizations inside, against and outside the state. In capitalist societies, all reforms involve compromises on policies in trying to make social change. The crucial differences lie in compromises that accept the 'reality' of the existing political terrain as given, and compromises that are part of a determined longer-term goal to develop the popular capacities to move beyond that particular 'reality'.

The truncated vision of social democracy - with its rejection of a world beyond capitalism - leads directly to the truncated politics of diminishing expectations and limited mobilizations. This fits so well with parties organized exclusively around electoralism. What is needed, even in relation to a more immediate objective of breaking from neoliberalism, is a larger political project oriented to developing the popular understandings, organizational capacities, and institutional supports for coming to power with the will and ability to transcend capitalism. This cannot emerge at the level of individual choices and attitudes. It can only come out of building socialist organizations that see this as a collective task, rooted concretely in local communities, and willing to engage in the struggle over state power.

Social democrats claim, in dissenting from more radical interventions, that they are being 'practical', and that anyone who challenges them from more socialist perspectives within their parties are being 'unrealistic', if not 'dreamers and wreckers'. The problem, however, is that with modern capitalism having in increasingly closed the 'middle ground' of social compromise, being practical has come to mean accommodating to neoliberal globalization (with its material

linkages to fossil fuels and ecological dumping). This is repeatedly demonstrated when social democrats have come to office: they soon become complicit in the lowering of popular expectations, disorganizing social movements, and pursuing a 'kinder neoliberalism'. The outcome, ironically, is to act in a way that is the essence of being impractical by often campaigning on worthy goals without building the capacities to get there.

In this light, Sanders has made a remarkable run with his call for a 'political revolution', but this cannot in fact be achieved within the Democratic Party. The question American activists will soon have to address is what other kind of party can build on the expectations raised and potentials revealed by the Sanders campaign. For his part, Corbyn has also showed the staying power and renewed attraction of the Bennite socialists who were long thought to be vanquished within the Labour Party, but most of the parliamentary wing and much of the party's organizational apparatus see him as an interloper, to be tolerated only until he can be gotten rid of. So, here too, the question of breaking with social democracy will surely surface. It is hard enough to contemplate transcending capitalism within a party actually committed to an alternative vision; it is impossible to imagine doing so within a party not united around that goal.

The Socialist Left and the Leap Manifesto

What then might socialists conclude about the Leap Manifesto, the NDP, and the project of transcending capitalism?

First, the Leap Manifesto represents a significant opening for the Left in Canada, as the discussions it has already engendered, and will further engender, clearly show. The anti-neoliberal thrust of its proposals deserve to be endorsed and supported. And in the spirit of the Manifesto's call for genuinely discussing and debating the present

opportunities and dangers, this will leave plenty of space for also addressing the limits of the manifesto, including the implicit expectation that even its modest goals can be implemented without profound transformations in state organization and social structure.

Second, the caution exhibited by spokespeople for the Leap Manifesto in engaging with the NDP so as not to become fully absorbed will be important to maintain. It is vital that the Leap Manifesto initiative retain its independence, especially during the coming leadership contest. If the NDP chooses a leader supportive of the Manifesto, this will likely lead – as developments elsewhere suggest – to an energetic burst of new entrants into the NDP. Those of us sceptical of the possibility of transforming the NDP (and aware of the utterly dismal record of ‘entryism’) cannot help but have mixed feelings about this. But this kind of politicization – which we could not in any case stop – should be welcomed even if it initially fosters illusions about the NDP. It makes no sense attacking those joining the NDP in search of a new politics. The policies forwarded by the Manifesto, particularly around ecology, will

provide space for those outside the party to engage with them, while offering a constructive critique of the NDP’s limits.

Third, there is the question of what constructive engagement with the Leap Manifesto might mean for the wider range of radical activists across Canada. Addressing this is essential to revive the significant militant political resistance to neoliberalism that took place over almost three decades – from the broad popular movement against free trade, to the labour movements’ Days of Action, to the mobilizations against the FTAA in Quebec City, and to the G20 confrontation in Toronto. Any space that now opens up for such activist militancy needs to be seized. This means organizing forums and deploying the array of publications of the Left in Canada to further debates so differing views can be aired. It above all means joining in particular campaigns, whether against privatization, barriers to union organizing and new global free trade and investment pacts, or for collective and decommodified services, such as free transit, a living wage, and the kinds of environmental alternatives advanced in the Leap Manifesto.

Finally, it is well beyond time to once again take up the question of what will be required in an explicitly socialist project of transcending capitalism in Canada, given the long retreat from this on the part of labour and social movements as well as the NDP. Re-establishing a socialist alternative in Canadian politics, and linking up with what is happening in this respect internationally, will have to involve building new institutions to regenerate and defend socialist ideas and strategy. This is not because new socialist parties will finally become the genuine storehouses of the ‘truth’. Rather, they will need to be seen as strategic spaces in which we can collectively come up with better socialist ideas and alternatives, and through experience and experimentation improve them further. It above all means ‘making socialists’ in the sense of developing activists committed to the necessarily long-term struggle of ending capitalism and to fostering the broadest popular analytical and organizational capacities to achieve this.

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30 August 2016, by [robm](#)

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Islamophobia on the beach - a new stage in the racist offensive

30 August 2016, by [Ugo Palheta](#)

A moral panic

In truth, hardly anyone cared a few weeks ago that some women (or men), in France and elsewhere, bathe with outfits covering most of their bodies. But elected politicians from the right and extreme right, especially the Mayor of Cannes, started this controversy by taking draconian measures against Muslim women wearing the "burkini", while other elected officials - and the mainstream media - obligingly relayed their message.

For thirty years there has been an accumulation of moral panics around everything related closely or (very) distantly to Islam: headscarves in schools, burqas in public places, halal meat, dietary laws, long skirts (again in school), and now the henceforth famous burkini. This indefinitely recreates parodies of "national debate", inevitably leading to the question asked by the mainstream media, the "compatibility of Islam with the Republic". The answer is always the same: not only do Muslims constitute a "threat", but even more seriously they are made to seem a completely foreign body to French society. This is the now well-known racist mechanism which was again employed in August, and we have to deconstruct it.

How the burkini became a national concern

Earlier this month, several senators - especially the Front National politician Stéphane Ravier, who as well as being a senator is also a local mayor in Marseille - denounced a private event at a swimming pool, the Speed Water Park, for women and their children who wanted to swim covered. The director of the aquatic centre was frightened enough to cancel the reservation of its facilities by the association that had requested it, but this was not enough to put the question of burkinis on the beaches on the political and media agenda.

The issue came up again a few days

later with the anti-burkini cause taken up by the Mayor of Cannes, who prevented access to the beaches of that city to "any person not properly dressed, respectful of morality and secularism". Under the pretext of secularism, the Nice Administrative Court ruled in favour of the Mayor of Cannes, saying: "in the context of the state of emergency and recent Islamist attacks in particular in Nice a month ago (...), wearing a distinctive dress, other than a usual swimwear, can indeed be interpreted as not being only, in this context, a simple sign of religiosity".

It was then no longer "religiosity" of which women wearing the burkini were accused (as in the Cannes ruling, which invoked "morality and secularism"), but improbable security considerations. The Director General of services for Cannes, Thierry Migoule, says that "it is not a ban on the wearing of religious signs at the beach [...] but ostentatious outfits that show allegiance to terrorist movements that make war on us".

It doesn't take a particularly subtle interpretation of political language to understand that, as during the 2003-2004 debate around "religious symbols" in schools, it is specifically Muslims - that are targeted - since neither the cassock or the kippa, nor any other religious symbol, are being treated as "ostentatious outfits that show allegiance to terrorist movements that make war on us". Conversely, any outfit or any sign associated with Muslim culture - or imagined to do so - becomes capable of signifying such an "allegiance".

The function of this criticism of these Muslim women and their alleged allegiance to the murderous ideology of Daesh, is to portray them as the representatives (if not proselytes) of this "movement". Such Islamophobic amalgams between Muslims and terrorists are now put forward in a clear and explicit way, after fifteen years of an Islamophobic offensive! At least we can be sure of not mistaking the ugly merchandise that these elected representatives seek to sell to the population, in defiance moreover of basic facts which it should not even be necessary to recall, for example the significant presence of Muslims - an

estimated thirty people - among the victims of the attack in Nice.

At the rate things are going, there is no doubt that it will become politically acceptable in a few months to demand - and obtain - a ban on the wearing on the streets of the jilbab, hijab or beard (if indeed it is worn by a Muslim, or at least by a person of "Muslim appearance", to use an expression of Sarkozy). This is done in the name of a quite "falsified" secularism (as the historian of religions and secularism Jean Baubérot has said). Does the law of 1905 [3]. not guarantee freedom of conscience (in article 1) and the possibility of expressing religious beliefs, including in the so-called "public" space?

From Morano to Valls, an Islamophobic consensus

But returning to the racist mechanics, following the ruling in Cannes, the controversy was finally launched, to the delight of a desperate political class and a media deprived of "hot topics". From there it was only a step to tweeting "Nacht und Nebel [4] to the trash bag" as a representative from Meurthe-et-Moselle, Jean-Pierre Arbey, did in relation to a woman wearing a full veil on a beach, thus demanding the type of deportation that the Nazi regime reserved for its opponents and "enemies" during the Second World war.

Former minister Nadine Morano came to the aid of her comrade Arbey. No wonder: we know how she is nostalgic for that white Christian France which General de Gaulle claimed in his time to have saved [5]. To legitimize Arbey's words, Morano argued that Muslim women wearing headscarves are "comparable with the Nazis who exterminated people" (sic). A double blow then, or rather double jeopardy: threatened with deportation and accused of Nazism!

But what about the government? While the right and the extreme right accused Hollande and Valls of not

reacting, the latter has just declared in Provence that he “understands” and “supports” these mayors: “I understand the mayors who, in this moment of tension, have the reflex of looking for solutions to avoid disturbances of public order. [...] I support those who issued rulings, if they are motivated by the desire to encourage living together without ulterior political motives”. And also beaches must be “preserved from religious demands” and swimwear supporting a political project: “The beaches, like any public space must be preserved from religious demands. The burkini is not a new range of swimwear, a fashion. It is the translation of a political project against society, based in particular on the subjection of women”.

As his name was invoked to lead a “Foundation for Islam in France”, in the purest colonial tradition, former Interior Minister Chevènement made a comment that speaks volumes about what can be expected from such a body and a government planning to offer him its leadership, recommending that Muslims exercise “discretion” in the “public space”. The advice sounds more like a threat [6]. But it was too little noticed how Chevènement [7] justified this advice: “Muslims, like all French citizens should be able to worship freely. But they must also understand that in the public space where the public interest is defined, all citizens should make the effort to use “natural reason”. It is then not only “discretion” that Muslims must show, but an effort to use “natural reason” to take their place in the “public space” and contribute to “defining the general interest”.

Islamophobia and its practical consequences

We can make fun of these rhetorical strategies seeking to pass off injunctions or orders addressed to Muslims in France as kind advice, but the affair is serious. Because the Islamophobia that ministers, elected officials, political leaders and editorialists spread or reinforce has a

real impact on millions of people living in France - by legitimizing systematic discrimination against Muslims in France, attacks against veiled women, the amalgams which corrupt life, and the imperial wars that the French state leads claiming to liberate peoples from “barbarism”.

In Corsica, according to press reports, there were confrontations in Bastia after an altercation which began when young people of North African origin reproached a group of beachgoers for taking photos of women bathing in burkinis. An account instantly echoed by the media, based in fact on one (obviously very biased) testimony. Mediapart published an investigation that told a very different story, including in particular this testimony: “We were sitting on the beach for a picnic. Everything was going well, when young people started calling us “dirty Arabs” and shouting “Allahu akbar” while taking pictures ... I went to them to explain but they would not listen. So we decided to go so as to not make waves. Arriving in the parking lot were four cars with men armed with baseball bats, they started beating us... We spent five hours in the same place, people were throwing stones at us. They burned our cars before the gendarmes who did nothing to stop them. “Such are the consequences of these Islamophobic controversies that inhabit the political agenda. These racist reactions were in no way spontaneous: they almost directly derive from the climate aroused by political leaders, elected officials and the mainstream media.

Why such controversy?

At a very immediate level, these controversies almost always represent a more or less conscious attempt to restore the prestige of a government or a party in decline. The two faces of the right in France - the PS and LR - both being in this situation, they can only compete on this terrain of Islamophobia, which they feel will benefit them electorally. Not to mention many statements by Manuel Valls, we also remember the PS minister Laurence Rossignol comparing veiled women to “black

Americans who supported slavery”. The incentive to use Islamophobia increases as the FN progresses electorally, yet it is the latter which ultimately benefits from this game.

On a larger historical scale, the issue is much more important: on the backs of millions of French Muslims, but also others potentially considered as alien elements - particularly migrants, Roma and black people - it is to promote national unity based on a renewed racial pact, to unify the white population around an enemy, to crush dissent and any form of social conflict. It is not just the movement of this spring but the “prolonged crisis of hegemony” (Stathis Kouvélakis), i.e. the inability of the French ruling class to build a majority social bloc around the neoliberal project, which makes an Islamophobic and authoritarian response necessary.

Need for anti-racist response

In such a situation, one can easily succumb to despair. Yet anti-racist or anti-imperialist mobilizations in recent times have shown that people “issuing from colonization” (as Sayad puts it) have an autonomous political ability and willingness to confront the state: from the March of Dignity to the recent protests against racist crimes by the police (following the killing of Adama Traoré), as well as the events of summer 2014 in solidarity with Palestine and the movement of the “sans-papiers”. Similarly, the audience gained by the CCIF - (Collectif contre l'Islamophobie en France), primarily among Muslims but not entirely, reflects a widely shared willingness to take the fight against Islamophobia and its roots seriously.

The radical left and the labour movement still too often treat these mobilizations with paternalism, if not with contempt. Yet they are a crucial component of any emancipatory politics in our historical period. It is not just about supporting them from outside but developing a political approach to the racial issue, building alliances with organizations and groups already present and active, seeking to formulate with them

unifying demands and proposals, to intervene on the ground.

In the fight against Islamophobia, the minimum would be to demand the repeal of all anti-Islamic laws, particularly the law of March 15, 2004 on religious symbols in public schools, and advancing a systematic plan of struggle against discrimination

against Muslim people. The Islamophobic episode this summer shows once again that racism is a central component of the political situation in France and cannot be circumvented by simple economic struggle (for wages, jobs and so on) that would magically unify the various fringes of the popular classes. It is not clear how the social bloc that the ruling class seeks to build around a

national/racial pact (of which Islamophobia is the touchstone) can be broken without a political anti-racist movement, radical and autonomous, led by those most affected. In the months and years to come, it is also what an anti-capitalist party should contribute.

August 17

The long year of migration and the Balkan corridor

29 August 2016, by Moving Europe

[Moving Europe](#) was started by [bordermonitoring.eu](#), [w2eu](#) (Welcome to Europe) and [FFM](#) (Forschungsgesellschaft Flucht und Migration) in collaboration with the NGO [Medico International](#). It is embedded in a network that has existed for several years and that supports people travelling towards Europe, both by monitoring the external EU borders and by collecting and re-distributing information to people on the move.

Before we begin we must first understand the distinction between two terms that are often confused. The 'Balkan route' is a migration path that has existed for years and is still in use. The 'Balkan corridor', by contrast, refers to a quasi-legal pathway through Europe that, according to the Schengen and Dublin agreements, should not exist. It appeared in the autumn of 2015 as a 'humanitarian' and safer, but still ambivalent safe passage for a few months, which completely closed on 8 March 2016.

History of the Balkan corridor

The migration movement itself, which had been happening in increasing numbers since last spring but which became unstoppable by summer, forced open the corridor in early fall 2015. It is one of the greatest

achievements of migration's struggle against Fortress Europe. The opening had several contributory factors, starting with more people coming out of Syria due to the continuation of the war and the growing harshness of conditions in neighbouring countries. In addition to this, the change of government in Greece decreased controls on the Mediterranean Sea. But most important for maintaining the momentum of the corridor was the power, strength and unstoppable determination of those willing to travel on.

People were no longer travelling clandestinely, but became highly visible. As a result, lots of supporters began travelling down the Balkan corridor to support the people on the move, mainly jumping in where the states and big NGOs failed to quickly provide 'humanitarian aid'. States, however, quickly moved to re-assert control by establishing state-run camps and transportation. This narrowed and militarised the route, and access to it became harder as state policies sought once again to make the people using it invisible.

Starting in November 2015, states started to segregate between 'real' refugees - Syrian, Iraqi and Afghanis - and the rest, who were no longer allowed to travel on the corridor; a 'divide-and-rule' strategy. This was

used to legitimate the building of fences and the further militarisation of the corridor. The segregation process was done on a very questionable basis through translators and racial profiling. Then, in February 2016, people from Afghanistan were also denied access and absurd rules were made, like declaring Damascus and other cities - including ones under ISIS rule - 'safe' territory or 'non-war zones'. Eventually, the corridor was closed completely by the end of February.

The ambivalence of the corridor lies in the fact that while migration movements successfully created a safe and quick flight route for thousands - a great achievement - as that route became institutionalised it became increasingly state and police controlled. This led to people being treated like goods, with strong controls over who can come and who cannot.

Before the corridor closure

Until the corridor closure our central activities were to gain and distribute information, monitor mainly police violence, and provide legal aid. Being in regular contact with local activists along the route, we could also be part of a strengthened network that now provides independent information through the various online platforms

mentioned above.

However, we could always more or less assure people that in a few days, they would be in Germany. In hindsight, this seems like a 'golden age' but at the time it was not as straightforward as it may now seem.

In November 2015, when the corridor became restricted only to people from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, there were then two sets of information to be prepared: for those allowed on the corridor and for those not allowed. Those not allowed to travel on the corridor were rendered invisible so it was sometimes difficult to access them. This was a difficulty we encountered, as by placing too much focus on the three 'acceptable' nationalities – even if we did so for purely practical reasons – we somehow became complicit in this segregation.

Despite all our hesitations and discussions, giving verified information was in line with our political goals. It meant that people were more in control of their decisions, more empowered if they knew what was coming ahead. Often we would spend time speaking with them about things such as fingerprinting and asylum processes in different countries.

After the corridor closure

It was a big shock for all of those who had arrived in Greece with the expectation that they would be able to travel onwards easily. The realisation that this situation was a totally new scenario took a while to sink in, and even long-term activists were overwhelmed by the situation. Now there were thousands of people stuck, with little money and little idea of how to go on. Also – although we were very weary of the 'vulnerability discourse' – it was very clear that many of those stuck were older generations and women and children, often with husbands already in Germany.

Just after the closure there was much confusion about what was going to happen with Idomeni, formally a transit point and now a protest camp. When we first set up information points there people were starving for

information. Information and news was – until today – the last thing that was provided from officials of any kind.

Our role was difficult to negotiate. We became the bearers of bad news. When people asked us if we thought the border would re-open, we had to be honest but also were worried about creating a lot of expectations. We already had some info sheets on the relocation programme and quickly made one on family reunification under Dublin III. But distributing them in such an unclear environment was more than challenging, especially with the knowledge that the relocation programme was an empty promise.

Support structures

The countries along the Balkan route have longstanding support and solidarity structures for local networks: from purely humanitarian approaches to those expressing an explicit political framing of solidarity. Often they are not very strong and don't have a lot of resources, as these countries were and remain emigration countries as well. The supporters that arrived last summer from central Europe depend to a large extent on this local knowledge.

Our information gathering would not have been possible without the network of local activists that have been monitoring and following the migration movements through their countries for years. What we distributed to people was information such as: where do I find support, what are my rights, what is the behaviour of police and authorities, etc. We were travelling along the route in a bus, stopping at different spots and collecting information about the constantly changing situation along the route, including information regarding planned political collective actions.

It's also important to point out that the ambivalence within activist and volunteer structures is a constant matter of debate. On the one hand supporters from abroad perceive Balkan countries as blind spots, continuing a neo-colonial discourse. Often accompanied with a lack of awareness of the history and political

context of the so-called Balkans, this goes hand in hand with discourses about the 'wild Balkans' and a central European outlook on local cultures and institutions. On the other hand, material differences and hierarchies are obvious: who has got the resources and privileges to support the Balkan route for a sustained period of time?

Change of discourse

After the march of more than 2,000 refugees on 14 March, there was no more agency ascribed to refugees and a constant accusation that protests were initiated by western activists started up. Many activists were targeted for their political expression. Also within solidarity networks this was seen as suspicious. Consequently only 'purely humanitarian' work was valued and remained unharassed in mainstream political discourse, media and within supporter networks. State practices such as illegal pushbacks got less attention in media discourses and activist circles as well.

Ever since the closure, the situation of the people on the move has become increasingly precarious and people are placed in extremely vulnerable positions. They are made to wait in miserable conditions and in complete uncertainty about what will happen to them. The asylum system in Greece is completely dysfunctional, and so is the relocation programme. Many people have family in Germany or other countries, and according to Dublin III they should be transferred to those states once they have filed their asylum claims. However, it is impossible at the moment to claim asylum in Greece. One theoretically must fix an appointment with the Asylum Service via Skype, but they are only open one to two hours a week and nobody ever gets through.

Outlook

The Balkan route is not closed completely. People who have some money are left to travel on with smugglers. Those without money try to walk across Macedonia, then reach Serbia and from there go through Hungary and Austria to Germany. Up to 300 people reach Belgrade daily. Nobody wants to stay in Greece and

people are determined to travel on.

In short, while the corridor is closed the route is not. People are still on the move. The EU-Turkey deal has decreased the powerful movement through the Aegean. It remains to be seen if the summer will bring a new moment of collective and massive arrivals by boat, and if the route will change towards the more dangerous route via the central Mediterranean.

Regardless of what this year has in store, the collective memory of last summer lingers in many ways. We witnessed what can happen when state control and EU border politics meet migrant mobility strategies and self-organisation. It gave rise to something new. The migration movements not only challenged borders and border regimes, but core narratives of the EU as well. They also challenged the answers given by EU

and its nation states to the current financial crisis, to austerity politics, to questions of housing, labour, citizenship and education – just to name a few. In other words, the migration movements reminded societies all over Europe of those core social and political narratives and also of the lack of alternatives given by EU and its nation states.

12 July 2016

Anti-imperialism and the Syrian Revolution

28 August 2016, by **Ashley Smith**

Tragically, too many have failed this test.

From the very beginning of Syria's revolution—even before the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and al-Qaeda's Nusra Front some years later—a whole section of the left opposed the popular uprising against the Assad dictatorship that began in early 2011, part of the Arab Spring wave of popular rebellions against dictatorship and repression.

Since then, they have turned a blind eye to Assad's massacre of some 400,000 Syrians, and his regime's use of barrel bombs, chemical weapons and barbaric sieges of cities like Aleppo. Today, 11 million people—half the country's population—have been displaced, with the Assad regime responsible for the lion's share of the death and destruction.

The U.S. has been seeking a resolution that might push Assad aside, but that above all maintains his regime in power, preferably with representation from reliable pro-Washington figures associated with the uprising.

Barack Obama came under pressure to intervene militarily in Syria after the regime carried out a chemical weapons attack in a suburb of Damascus in 2013, but he backed a Russian-brokered resolution that protected Assad.

His administration has hoped to use figures on the rebel side to provide a new face for Syria's dictatorship. But Assad held on—thanks in no small measure to the fact that the U.S., while accepting some supplying of the rebels, denied these forces the heavy weaponry they pleaded for to stop the regime's assault.

The result today is that the Obama administration has struck a de facto alliance with Russia to wage the war on ISIS, with the acknowledged consequence that even the Syrian regime's hated figurehead will likely stay in place, while those who rose up for democracy and justice continue to bear the brunt of the violence.

EVEN IN the early stages of the Syrian uprising, when it was plainly following the inspiration of the popular revolts in Tunisia and Egypt, Stalinist groups like the Workers World Party, Party for Socialism and Liberation, and Freedom Road Socialist Organization never wavered in their support for the Assad regime. They have always preached uncritical support for opponents (perceived or real) of the U.S. government, no matter how oppressive and reactionary.

But they weren't alone. Prominent figures on the broader left adopted a similar position.

Journalists Patrick Cockburn and Robert Fisk erase the anti-Assad revolution in their coverage of Syria and present the situation as a geopolitical conflict—between the U.S. and its proxies on one side, and Assad and his Russian and Iranian allies on the other.

Even important antiwar formations like Britain's Stop the War coalition have adapted to Assad supporters, giving a platform to allies of the dictatorship, while denying the same to supporters of the revolution. For example, Stop the War toured regime apologist Mother Superior Agnès Mariam de la Croix, despite an open letter protesting this decision signed by dozens of Syria solidarity activists.

In the U.S., the small antiwar formation United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC) staged a demonstration that included people carrying the flag of Assad's regime—some even wore T-shirts emblazoned with the dictator's face.

The American Communist Party's U.S. Peace Council went so far as to send a delegation that met with Assad and his henchmen. They justified their sympathy with Assad by claiming that he was resisting U.S. imperialism's backing of Islamic fundamentalist forces to carry out regime change in Syria.

"Most of Syrian society [has] unified

behind the state to protect a secular Syria against the divided and sectarian result the U.S. and its nefarious allies have been working and killing to generate," wrote Henry Lowendorf about his visit with Assad in a post that circulated on the United for Peace and Justice e-mail list. "Syria has what is apparently a national unity government, focused during the crisis on fighting off the vicious mercenaries of most powerful country in the world and its allies."

This is a complete distortion of reality that is used to justify standing on the side of dictatorship, counterrevolution and imperialist intervention. The pro-Assadists are discrediting the left in the eyes of Syrians who have fought heroically on the side of the revolution.

A genuine internationalist left must stand with Syria's popular resistance to Assad, which began as a nonviolent uprising against the dictatorship—and against intervention by American and Russian imperialism, as well as by the region's main powers.

HOW COULD opponents of U.S. imperialism end up supporting a dictator—one who has been known to collaborate with the U.S. in torturing "war-on-terror" prisoners in the CIA's extraordinary rendition program.

The answer starts with the Stalinist left's support of Stalin's Russia and Mao's China during the Cold War era. It supported those state capitalist dictatorships not only as opponents of U.S. imperialism, but as positive models of socialism.

Thus, some of the same currents that today support Assad yesterday defended murderous repression of workers' rebellions and even imperialist invasions in the past.

They stood with Russia's crushing of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, Czechoslovakia's Prague Spring in 1968 and Poland's Solidarity in 1981. They supported Mao's China when the regime wrecked workers and peasants' lives through the Great Leap Forward and oppressed Tibetans in a decades-long occupation. They

defended regimes like Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe as anti-imperialist, despite his relentless crackdown on all dissent.

Even today, when all the world's states are obviously capitalist, these leftists support oppressive regimes as "anti-imperialist" so long as they oppose the U.S. in some form. Under the faulty logic that "my enemy's enemy is my friend," popular struggles for democracy are denounced as the work of American imperialism if they protest the wrong regime.

This attitude, referred to as "campism," has distorted much of the left's response to popular uprisings in the Middle East. For example, Iran's "green movement" was dismissed as a creation of the U.S. drive to overthrow former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

As a consequence of this flawed underlying approach, the campist left reacted to the Arab Spring in a completely incoherent fashion.

Everyone on the left supported the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions of early 2011 because these countries were considered U.S. allies. But the campists opposed pro-democracy uprisings in Libya and Syria, even though these revolts were driven by the same economic and political grievances—and clearly inspired by the revolts in Tunisia and Egypt.

Why? Because the dictatorships that masses of people were rebelling against could be depicted as "anti-imperialist" opponents of the U.S.

In reality, both the Libyan and Syrian regimes had been "frenemies" of Western imperialism—sometimes collaborating with and at other times dissenting from the designs of the U.S. government and its European allies. And both regimes were happy to work with Russian and Chinese imperialism. In no way can they be accurately categorized as "anti-imperialist."

Libya's Muammar el-Qaddafi curried favor with Europe by acting as a border patrol for the EU, stopping North Africans from crossing the Mediterranean Sea and imprisoning large numbers of them in his country's

gulag.

As for Assad in Syria, his dictator father joined the first "coalition of nations" for the U.S.-led Gulf War against Saddam Hussein's Iraq in 1991. Bashar al-Assad got his chance to collaborate with a Bush during the "war on terror" years after 2001, when prisoners of war were smuggled into Syrian jails to be tortured for information and then returned to U.S. custody.

At one point, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton went so far as to call Assad a "reformer" worthy of engagement.

THE CAMPIST left's attitude is based, to at least some degree, on a misreading of the structure of today's world order and America's position in it. They presume that there is only one imperialist power in the world—the U.S.—and that it is an all-powerful manipulator of international events.

The U.S. does remain the world's dominant imperialist power, but as a result of its failed war in Iraq and other factors, it has suffered a relative decline in strength. Washington is now challenged internationally by imperialist rivals like China and Russia, as well as regional powers. In this new imperial order, the U.S. is less capable of controlling world events—it fears popular revolt all the more.

The campist misreadings, however, have led them to the conclusion that the U.S. government is pulling the strings in the rebellion in Syria. Some have gone so far as to argue—absurdly—that the U.S. backs ISIS against Assad. Ironically, this puts the campists in agreement with Donald Trump, who, in his latest ravings, claims that Obama and Clinton were "founders" of ISIS.

Leaving everything else aside, such arguments display an arrogant dismissal—not unlike defenders of imperialism—of the capacity of exploited and oppressed people to fight for liberation. Instead, we get a classic Orientalist trope: Western imperialism manipulating the ignorant

and reactionary local tribes for its own purposes.

In reality, the U.S. retreated in general from outright regime change as its strategy in the Middle East after the failure of its invasion and occupation of Iraq. The main priority behind the alternative direction for U.S. imperialism pursued by Barack Obama is that the U.S. should avoid destabilizing regimes for fear of the chaos that ensues in the aftermath.

Thus, the voices of the campist left are stuck in the past, trying to find the evidence to expose a strategy of regime change that the U.S. has abandoned.

The rebranding of U.S. imperialism under Obama left its mark on Washington's response to the Arab Spring.

The first instinct was to rally to the defense of the old regime—as Hosni Mubarak's police were killing protesters, Secretary of State Clinton praised the government for "demonstrating restraint." But when that became untenable, Washington pressed for a policy of orderly transition, sacrificing dictators in order to save the existing state apparatus.

After the first tide of the revolt receded, the U.S. was all too happy to support the reassertion of the old order—as when Washington's ally Saudi Arabia sent troops to crush an uprising in Bahrain. And now, after the rise of ISIS, chiefly as a consequence of the disastrous occupation of Iraq, the U.S. is solely and obsessively focused on defeating this counterrevolutionary force in Iraq and Syria.

IN SYRIA, however, Washington's goal is obvious, and has been for some time: It doesn't want regime change. Perhaps the hated figurehead of Assad will be pushed aside, but U.S. policy from the beginning has been to preserve the core of Assad's state.

Why? Above all, the U.S. fears an unpredictable outcome, whether as a result of the advance of the Nusra Front or ISIS—but especially in the

form of a popular revolution.

Anyone who doubts the popular nature of the Syrian Revolution should read Robin Yassin-Kassab and Leila al-Shami's stirring account of it in their book *Burning Country*—or for a shorter online description, Mark Boothroyd's article "Self Organization in the Syrian Revolution." This is a struggle from below that imperialism has always feared the most.

In its initial stages, the uprising in Syria had a nonviolent and mass character, but the savage repression and violence carried out by the regime militarized the conflict. The U.S. blocked the shipment of heavy weaponry, such as anti-aircraft systems, that would have strengthened secular and democratic forces that have borne the brunt of the Assad regime's terror.

The net effect of U.S. policy was to assist in the marginalization of anti-Assad forces committed to the democratic goals of the uprising from its beginning—and to provide an opening for the predominance of reactionary jihadist military forces like Nusra or ISIS.

Perversely, Assad himself sought to cultivate these fundamentalist currents by releasing hundreds of jihadists from prison while jailing and torturing the leaders of the popular uprising. Assad rightly understood that the reactionaries could be used to crowd out popular forces, uprising and would be an easier opponent to defeat.

Today, Washington's goals are to wipe out ISIS and to secure a negotiated settlement in Syria that preserves the regime, if not Assad himself. In America's camp, regional powers like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey have tried to push the envelope even further, backing various jihadist forces to strengthen their position in region and weaken their opponents, from Assad to Iran, as well as challengers from below such as the Kurds.

On the other side of the international geopolitical rivalry, Russia—profoundly weakened since its defeat in the Cold War a quarter century ago—is reasserting its imperial power through its all-out

support for the Assad regime in Syria.

Russia wants to secure its position as a power broker in the region, push back against the U.S. and maintain a base in Syria. For its part, the Iranian government wants to stop Assad from being toppled for fear of losing a valuable ally in the region. And Assad is eager to manipulate all of the above to preserve his dictatorship.

While each of these players has different interests, they overlap in ways that confound the campist left's flawed analysis.

For example, the U.S., Russia and Assad are in a de facto collaboration in the war against ISIS. Thus, Obama's Secretary of State John Kerry is pursuing a cooperation pact with Russia that would cement a counterrevolutionary peace based on preserving the existing state.

However, Russian and Iranian intervention in Syria has been successful enough that Assad may be able to block demands for a transition that sidelines him. With at least a section of the U.S. foreign policy establishment willing to support a resolution that leaves Assad intact, it's quite plausible that Washington could bless such an outcome, creating yet another awkward point of agreement between campists and the U.S. imperialists they deplore.

UNFORTUNATELY, CAMPISM has shaped the viewpoint of whole sections of the left—even parts that are far removed from the Stalinism of the Workers World Party. It has, for example, informed the attitudes of Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein and especially her vice presidential running mate Ajamu Baraka.

Stein rightly opposes U.S. intervention in Syria, but has made little to no criticism of Assad and his war on the Syrian people. Even worse, Baraka openly supports the Assad regime. Both have appeared on Russia's state-sponsored, English-language RT television network to speak in opposition to U.S. war crimes, while remaining silent about Putin's and

Assad's atrocities.

Many Syrian revolutionaries and solidarity activists are rightly furious about this stance from the major left-wing alternative in Election 2016. Stein and Baraka each have proud records of standing against exploitation, oppression, racism and war, and their campaign is, in almost every other respect, a principled challenge to the two parties of capital and militarism—the Democrats and Republicans. But anti-imperialists must not stay silent about this awful exception.

Certainly, the candidates of the two capitalist parties have no alternative on Syria, let alone any other question.

Donald Trump is a racist bigot who wants to bar Muslims from the U.S. and supports Assad's regime as a lesser evil to ISIS.

But Hillary Clinton is no ally of the Syrian people. She calls for the U.S. to enforce a no-fly zone in Syria, and some of her advisers support air strikes against the Assad regime for

the stated aiming of stopping attacks on civilians. But Clinton certainly does not support the original aspirations of the Syrian Revolution.

At most, Clinton supports another strategy to achieve the same aim her former boss, Barack Obama, advocates: a negotiated solution that preserves the core of the Syrian state, preferably with Assad out of power, but possibly with him remaining.

No one committed to solidarity with the Syrian struggle can align themselves with either wing of the U.S. imperial establishment. Instead, the left must reject imperialism in any form, including Russia's.

Rather than look to imperialist powers or dictatorial regimes in either camp, the left should stand for workers' struggle across borders and in defense of oppressed nations and their fight for self-determination.

In Syria, the revolution has suffered a defeat for the time being. While civil society activists continue to seize

every opportunity to assert their goals, their forces have been ravaged by counterrevolution—in the form of the Syria regime and its international allies on the one hand, and the Nusra Front and ISIS, which was particularly eager from the start to target the rebels than regime forces, on the other.

But as Gilbert Achcar argues in his book *Morbid Symptoms: Relapse in the Arab Uprising*, this setback, however devastating, comes amid a long period of revolutionary crisis in Syria and the whole region.

The task of the international left today is to oppose intervention by any of the imperialist and regional powers, reject the tyranny of the Assad regime itself, demand the opening of the borders to those fleeing the violence and chaos, collaborate with Syrian revolutionaries—and win people away from campism to the politics of international solidarity from below.

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socialistworker.org

Some aspects of US politics today

28 August 2016, by **Joanna Misnik**

Can you explain to us the significance of the Black Lives Matter movement?

In just a few years, the Black Lives Matter movement has become a political force in the U.S. The movement that began with a call to action by three women has focused public attention on the brutality of police assassination of Black people. A new generation of young African-Americans has been propelled into action and organization. Now, anywhere in the U.S. where Black people are murdered, the BLM movement can mount militant protests, often including civil disobedience. Some victories have been achieved, such as the resignation of several big city police chiefs, new

regulations for police conduct, mandatory body cameras for cops, swift and more impartial investigation of police conduct. The crucial issue of the role of systemic racism has been brought to the foreground on the left and within the general working class population. BLM stands aside from elections and the presidential race and refuses to endorse any so-called "lesser evil" candidate such as Hillary Clinton.

A recent study estimates that a Black person is murdered by police every 28 hours. The BLM movement arises at a time when the social position of the African-American community has drastically altered under the neoliberal assault. The civil rights movement of the 1950-60s operated in

a climate of general prosperity and the expansion of the social welfare state. The Black population was considered a reserve army of labor and the civil rights movement sought full equality and integration into the American dream. Neoliberalism has reduced the role of the inner city Black community, particularly youth, to an excess, disposal workforce that has been set aside from economic activity nearly completely. Estimates are that it would take the average Black family 228 years to accumulate the wealth that the average white family has today.

The response of the ruling class is the militarization of the police as an occupation force in Black neighborhoods, the school to prison

pipeline that sees one in three Black males in jail at some time in their lives. When Obama took office, expenditures for local police were around \$30 million. In a few years, the federal government was spending \$787 million subsidizing local police forces to provide heavy military equipment like armored trucks, grenade launchers, riot gear, drones, etc.

This is the formidable system that Black Lives Matter is fighting. Inside BLM there is a debate: do we demand abolition of the police or do we demand community control of the police, civilian review boards, etc. After one year of work, some 40 organizations under the umbrellas of the Movement for Black Lives has issued a political platform that goes beyond spontaneous outcry against each individual police murder. Titled "A Vision for Black Lives," the program raises demands on all aspects of Black oppression and Black economic degradation. It is a giant step in the creation of a new Black liberation movement in the US. (The program can be found [here](#).)

How do you assess the impact of the Trump candidacy on the Republican party?

Donald Trump's victory in the Republican primary is the product of years of change in the core constituencies of the Republican Party. Beginning with the George Bush junior presidency, waves of fundamentalist Evangelical protestant sects invaded the Republicans to secure a base of operations against the godlessness of modern government. After the 2008 depression hit, they were joined by the Tea Party, a mass movement with over 1,000 chapters of white workers and middle class reactionaries clinging to religion as well as opposition to liberal ideas of the Democrats such as abortion rights, immigration rights, government social welfare programs. By 2010, 87 new members of Congress were elected by the Tea Party Republicans, causing paralysis in federal government. Republicans of this fundamentalist type have won governorships and majorities in the legislative bodies of 24 states. This has resulted in major restrictions on

abortion rights, illegalization of the right to form a union, lack of protection of voting rights in those states. Trump's vice presidential running mate, Governor Pence of Indiana, is typical of the victorious right wing Republicans in state governments. Among other things, Pence believes that condoms are "too modern" and should be illegal.

In reality, the vast majority of the 17 contenders for the Republican nomination were extremists in their beliefs. Trump stood out as a renegade, different from the professional politicians. Most importantly, he denounced NAFTA and promised to put a stop to the trade agreements like the pending TPP and bring "our jobs" back to the U.S. Many white people were drawn to his cry to "make America great again," in part by stopping immigration from Mexico and Muslims from everywhere.

Trump's victory in the primaries broke the Republican Party to bits. Traditional Republicans, typified by the Bush family, refused to attend the Republican convention or campaign for Trump. Money and endorsements began flowing to Hillary Clinton and the Democrats. Hillary, after all, in her support for the war machine, big business and the big banks, is a good a Republican as any. In the age of neoliberalism, to pretend there are distinctions between liberal and conservative becomes increasingly meaningless.

It's one thing to win a Republican primary and quite another to triumph in a general election. As he stumbles from one misstatement-apology to another, without the full support of his party, Trump is losing this election. It remains to be seen whether the Republican Party can be put back together again or whether the U.S. will finally have a third political party. Unfortunately, this party would be a product of a relationship of forces that favors the extreme right wing and not working class for itself independent politics.

What does Hillary Clinton's campaign represent?

Poll after poll shows that US voters are faced with two candidates for

president in whom they have no real trust. Hillary has a broadly based reputation for not telling the truth and seeking to use her positions to enrich herself and her family. Even after she has secured the nomination, federal agencies and investigative journalists continue to try and unearth more information about the Clinton Foundation. What did donors to this supposed non-profit receive for their generosity to the foundation from Secretary of State Clinton or her former President husband. This story, along with the private email server debacle, remains to be written in full - and won't be until well after Hillary is no longer president. Hillary Clinton is under protective cover by the ruling class to ensure her election. After all, this is her reward for faithful service to that class.

Neoliberalism dates from the serious collapse of U.S. profit margins in the early 1970s. President Ronald Reagan is considered the leader who, along with Margaret Thatcher, crafted state policy that set up unfettered reign of the free market at the expense of working class standards of living and institutions. However, Democratic Bill Clinton, with Hillary Clinton at his side as a close adviser and more than a traditional first lady, did as much or more to set the direction of state government into a neoliberal framework. The Clinton Dynasty rests on the legacy of the "Third Way," a blurring of the liberal lines of the Democratic Party in favor of a consensus on behalf of corporate America between the two parties. Bill Clinton styles himself as an Eisenhower Democrat, perhaps unmindful of Eisenhower's opposition to the military-industrial complex.

The Clinton presidency saw the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act, banking regulations that, when lifted, contributed to the crash of 2008. The Clintons opposed gay marriage and helped pass the "Defense of Marriage Act." Bill Clinton abolished "welfare as we know it," throwing hundreds of thousands of children into abject poverty. They defended capital punishment and supported legislation on crime that began the flooding of the prison system with thousands of Black and Brown men serving impossibly long sentences for

relatively minor crimes. They were, as Hillary admonished, "bringing the predators to heel." The Clintons failed to bring relief to 40 million Americans with no health insurance, erecting a plan that was profitable for the private insurance corporations and useless to those enrolled. Yet, the dot com boom brought some prosperity for a time during their administration, Bill played the saxophone and was a cool guy and his wife was super smart and talented.

Somehow, the Clinton team masked the pernicious nature of how they ruled and in whose interests. It will be much harder to do this time around in the age of austerity, with a new radicalization out there and poised to strike. Hillary Clinton is a war monger and a lover of the US "right" to regime change in order to protect "our" interests. Her overthrow of the elected government of Honduras has been highlighted through the murder of human rights activist Bertha Caceres. She has collected up the great proponents of US might from both parties into her big tent for this election, headlined by Henry Kissinger. All of the movement to the left she exhibited during the primary in order to accommodate to Bernie Sander's success is already eroded. The Democratic Party platform is only a piece of paper, not a promise. No one who saw it can forget Hillary's reply to a question during a television interview about the incursion into Libya and Gaddafi. Well, she told the interviewer, breaking into an ominous cackle, we came, we saw, he died.

There are some leading feminists who advocate support for Hillary Clinton because she is a woman. What do you think about that?

Hillary Clinton is not the lesser evil, just one of the evils who happens to be female.

For observers from the left everywhere the movement for Bernie Sanders was an astonishing development. What about in the US?

No one on the revolutionary left foresaw the Bernie Sanders movement. Bernie himself never saw it coming. Much like the Occupy

movement before it, this mass upsurge simply appeared and then swept the country. In the end, the Sanders campaign did the impossible, raising over 225 million in small contributions from 2.5 million people, received 43 % of the votes " over 14 million " winning the primary contests in 23 states, and attracted well over 2 million people to giant rallies all across the nation. Bernie's campaign proved it was possible to run for president without the financial backing of the big corporations and their super-PACs, that a mass insurgency could reject the influence of corporate funding. [8] This exposed how politicians like Hillary Clinton were dependent on big money from Wall Street and how the corporations and banks owned and controlled our government.

The indelible lesson of the Occupy movement " that there's the 99% versus the 1% " took the form of legions of young people determined to wrest control of the society from the wealthy by electing Bernie Sanders. They were led in their struggle by Bernie the socialist. Even prior to the Sanders campaign, poll after poll had revealed that U.S. youth favored socialism over capitalism by a slim margin. Bernie socialism was classically post-war social democratic, the redistributive welfare state. He pointed to Northern Europe and Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal as he campaigned for healthcare for all, free college tuition, \$15 an hour minimum wage, paid leave for parents, jobs programs through rebuilding the infrastructure and addressing climate change, making the corporations pay their fair share in taxes and ending corporate control of the government. Sanders stressed that no president could achieve these ends alone; people had to remain politically mobilized in mass movements to win our demands. He pointed to the example of the social movements like the civil rights and women's liberation struggles.

Sanders has been the lone independent in the Congress for decades. When he announced his campaign as a Democrat, he pledged to support whoever won the primary. As his campaign gained momentum, his supporters, many active in politics

for the very first time, began to disbelieve that Sanders would give up "the revolution" and endorse Hillary. It was a shattering disappointment to the 1,900 Sanders delegates at the Democratic Party convention when Sanders stood up to nominate Hillary by acclamation and honored his "deal" with the Party. Most youthful Sanders supporters had no interest in reforming the Democrats from within or becoming a left caucus inside that Party. After the primaries in particular, they had seen the dirty tricks and how the Party had rigged the election against Sanders. Hundreds of delegates walked out of the convention in disgust. Many will give their vote and energy to Jill Stein, the Green Party presidential candidate. There is a substantial movement saying Jill Not Hill.

Where will the Bernie rebellion go from here? Will it continue in some form or disappear as an organized force, leaving individual activists to find projects and organizations on their own. Bernie is offering up something called "Our Revolution," an organization and funding source for progressive Democratic Party candidates around the country that, if elected, would change the balance of forces in the Congress. Early indications are that Our Revolution is having trouble getting off the ground. My organization, Solidarity, and others on the revolutionary left are counterposing the idea of building coalitions to run candidates who are independent of the two parties on the local level. We are seeking to capture the Bernie momentum into beginning efforts to break with the Democrats and build working class political independence. This includes, but is not limited to, the Green Party.

The radicalization that surfaced around the Sanders campaign is a rebirth of rebellious ideas in the U.S. and the determination to fight for them. It is a welcome and hopeful sign. It should be noted that, unfortunately, the 20th century organized revolutionary left is far too small and socially weightless to have been able to provide a pole, an ideological gathering point for this new upsurge. This also retards the ability to keep the Sanders momentum above ground and growing. There's a

great deal of work to be done.

Demonstrate by Day, Strategize by Night: A Report on the Socialist Convergence

27 August 2016, by Johanna Brenner

An early core of organizers quickly expanded to include representatives from many groups and organizations who worked together extremely well as we negotiated the rocky road of planning a very ambitious undertaking: Solidarity, Philly Socialists, Philly Chapter of Democratic Socialists of America, Green Party of NY State, International Socialist Organization, Kentucky Workers League, Left Elect, Party for Socialism and Liberation, and Socialist Alternative. Members of Philly DSA, Philly Socialists, and Solidarity provided crucial infrastructure to the project.

Having secured the Friends Center for every evening of the DNC, organizers set about developing a program intended to offer a range of socialist politics on pressing topics including the capitalist economy, racism/white supremacy, environmental crisis, elections and independent politics, and intersectional feminism.

From Saturday through Thursday, organizers fanned out across Philadelphia to distribute cards about the Socialist Convergence at every gathering, rally, march, and protest—and there were plenty of them! In addition to giving away at least 3,000 cards advertising the event, we made an effort to engage people in conversation about socialism. It was encouraging to observe how many expressed support and interest, whether or not they planned to attend.

The March for a Clean Energy Revolution was led by Indigenous people and front-line communities, and turned out upwards of 10,000 people.

The best organized and largest protest was the March for a Clean Energy Revolution on Sunday where upwards of 10,000, led by Indigenous people and front-line communities, turned out to demonstrate against fossil fuels and against the TPP and other global agreements because they undermine environmental regulation. A spirited, but smaller, march on Tuesday afternoon was organized by the Philadelphia Coalition for REAL Justice which started in the area around Temple University, where community members are fighting gentrification and a new stadium.

A bilingual rally and march featured Laura Zuniga Cáceres, the daughter of Berta Cáceres who was recently assassinated in Honduras. Zuniga Cáceres also spoke briefly and movingly at the Socialist Convergence. Various events were organized by the People's Human Rights Campaign, by Global Women's Strike for Peace, Black Men for Bernie, Jill Stein campaign, and Grassroots Global Justice, among others.

Discussing Socialism

The Socialist Convergence intended to address these various movements and campaigns from a socialist perspective. Titling our program "Carrying Forward the Political Revolution," we hoped to center strategic questions, not least of which is how to build coalitions and mutual support across this wide range of issues. Over the four nights there were many thoughtful presentations; but not all of the panels sparked the sort of dialogue about strategic

possibilities that organizers had hoped for.

The panel on electoral politics, with well-known speakers including Chris Hedges and Jill Stein, drew the largest and most boisterous crowd. It had been organized to discuss "what next" after Sanders' defeat and the coming installation of Hillary Clinton. A good part of the audience came to cheer on and support the Jill Stein campaign. Stein obliged with a repeat of her stump speech, claiming (rather amazingly) that if all 43 million people burdened by student debt were to vote for her, she could easily win the presidential election.

The Wednesday night panel of the Socialist Convergence featured Jill Stein, Chris Hedges, Bhaskar Sunkara, Steve Williams, and Lev Hirschhorn.

Chris Hedges' moralistic attack on Sanders was roundly booed, as was Lev Hirschhorn (of the DSA) who argued for taking over the Democratic Party. Hedges and Stein gave prepared remarks while Hirschhorn, along with Bhaskar Sunkara (Jacobin Magazine) and Steve Williams (Left Roots), attempted to engage the strategic questions organizers had built the panel around. The open discussion following the presentations gave a better picture of the range of attitudes in the room, as Sanders supporters and delegates asked for advice about running for office and offered other strategies for continuing "the revolution."

Throughout the four evenings the presentations led to lively sessions of questions and comments. On separate panels, Glenn Ford of Black Agenda

Report and Tony Monteiro from Black Radical Organizing Collective and Philly Coalition for REAL Justice challenged the audience to think about the link between white supremacy and the rise of fascism through the Democrats' complicity in mass incarceration, militarized police, and the expansion of the national security state. Gayle McLaughlin, from Richmond Progressive Alliance in Richmond, CA, made the case for the importance of local independent political action as building blocks toward challenging the two-party system and offered lessons from the Richmond experience.

Howie Hawkins, New York Green Party activist and candidate, reminded us about the role of socialists in building successful third parties in the U.S. in the late 19th and early 20th century. Other candidates speaking about their experience in electoral

politics were Gloria Mattera and Margaret Flowers from the Green Party, Kshama Sawant from Socialist Alternative, and Eugene Puryear, from the Party for Socialism and Liberation.

Philly teachers Ismael Jimenez and Tamara Anderson, both from the union's Caucus of Working Educators, spoke on different panels about building "intersectional" movements. Nazia Kazi, professor of anthropology at Stockton University, vividly connected patriarchy, Islamophobia, and pink-washing (the cynical use of LGBT rights to justify U.S. interventions in the Middle East). The System Change panel linked the movement against global warming to struggles for democracy such as public control over energy generation and ending corporate personhood. Dramatically, Victor Wallis, from Monthly Review, called the Paris climate agreement "a suicide note for

capitalism."

Although not quite what we planned, the Socialist Convergence did provide a space for activists excluded by the corporatist politics of the Democratic Party to express their anger, their hopes, their defiant support for third-party efforts and their solidarity with the many movements represented in the program. Perhaps the most positive outcome of the Convergence were the respectful relationships built among the organizers. At our evaluation meeting, everyone expressed a desire to continue working together, particularly in local projects or regionally. From the perspective of Solidarity's commitment to building a "next left," the Socialist Convergence was a real success.

August 24, 2016

[Against the Current](#)

Under Duterte, 'The Punisher,' Death Toll Continues to Soar

26 August 2016

Director-General Ronald dela Rosa told a Senate hearing there was no declared policy to kill drug users and pushers and that about 1,100 deaths were still being investigated.

"We are not butchers," he said.

The rest of the dead, he said, were confirmed slain as a result of police anti-narcotics operations, dela Rosa said.

"This has a chilling effect," said Senator Frank Drilon after the police chief's deposition. "We are all concerned about the number of deaths, by any language this is alarming."

Duterte, nicknamed "the Punisher," [remains popular](#) despite allegations of human rights abuses. The former mayor of a southern Philippines city

promised to rid the country of its illegal drug woes, and in his inaugural address, invited vigilantes and rebel guerilla factions to single out, and kill drug dealers of their own volition.

The inquiry into the deaths, is led by a staunch critic of the president, Senator Leila de Lima, who has summoned top police and anti-narcotics officials to explain the "unprecedented" rise in the body count and reports of vigilante killings.

Duterte has warned legislators not to interfere with his campaign, saying they could be killed if they blocked efforts aimed at improving the country.

Nearly 700,000 drug users and drug peddlers have turned themselves in to escape the crackdown, police chief dela Rosa said. He said there was a

decrease in overall crime, although murders and homicides had increased.

Outside the Senate building, dozens of supporters cheered dela Rosa for leading the war against drugs, chanting his nickname, "Bato, Bato."

Some carried placards reading: "We are with you Bato in the fight against drugs."

The United States, a close ally of the Philippines, said overnight it was "deeply concerned" by the reports of the killings and the State Department urged Duterte's government to abide by human rights norms.

New York-based Human Rights Watch said the United States and European Union members "should make it clear to Duterte that inciting such violence is unacceptable and will reap

potentially severe diplomatic and economic costs."

"Otherwise, it's hard to envision when these killings will end," it said.

The number of those killed provided by dela Rosa at the Senate hearing was higher than the 1,800 he gave at the hearing on Monday. He gave no explanation for the higher number but said the figures were updated.

Dela Rosa said about 750 of the dead were killed in police operations against drug peddlers. The other deaths were being investigated, he said.

"Not all deaths under investigation are drug-related," dela Rosa said, adding that 40 killings were known to be due to enmity or robbery.

He also said about 300 of his officers

were suspected to be involved in the drugs trade, warning these personnel will be sacked and charged in court if found guilty.

There has been speculation in the local media that some of the killings were carried out by corrupt police officers who were wiping out drug peddlers to avoid exposure.

[Telesur](#)

The LGBTQ Movement Today

25 August 2016, by **Donna Cartwright**

Millions celebrated the Supreme Court's decision on marriage equality. But some of these victories have been constrained by the social structures of neoliberal capitalism, and by a misleading yet widespread public perception that with the achievement of marriage equality, the fight for queer liberation is largely over. The LGBT movement has also undergone problematic changes, having become increasingly professionalized and money driven in the last 15 years or so. Major donors and large foundations call the shots. Many young activists have been drawn into a top-down, NGO-based model of organization.

Marriage Problems

While marriage equality was a great victory for LGBT people, it comes with some problematic consequences. The substantial material benefits of marriage are now available to those in the LGBT community who choose that path, but they've come only on capitalism's terms. This has meant giving up on the more radical vision of the movement's earlier years—one that sought "recognition of diverse kinds of partnerships, households, kinship relationships and families," in the words of "Beyond Same-Sex Marriage," a 2006 statement signed by dozens of intellectual leaders and activists in the movement.

That statement called for "access to a flexible set of economic benefits and options regardless of sexual orientation, race, gender/gender identity, class, or citizenship status." Instead, gay couples who choose to marry are, like straight people, enmeshed in the restrictions imposed by capitalist social reproduction: the nuclear family, difficulties in access to child care and family leave, and inadequate systems of health insurance and retirement security.

For example, for most adults who are in school or working, access to health insurance is available, or not, based on who your employer is, who your spouse is, or who your parents are. All of these are dependency relationships. Universal access to benefits remains out of reach. Domestic partner benefits, developed to give same-sex couples who could not marry access to health insurance, were sometimes extended to straight people as well, offering a glimpse of a less rigidly structured framework of social relationships.

But in the last few years, some states, like Maryland and Arizona, that offered domestic partner benefits only to same-sex couples have eliminated them. Washington converted all domestic-partners under 62 to married couples automatically. And private employers seem more likely to drop these benefits than public ones. A survey by the Society for Human

Resources Management (cited in a Pew Charitable Trusts publication) indicated that almost half of employers that offered d.p. benefits to same-sex couples only are planning to drop them, while more than a third of companies that offered domestic partner benefits to straight and gay couples said they might curtail them.

Loosening Social Solidarity

Another problematic aspect of the over-emphasis on marriage equality in the queer movement has been the shift in focus toward the relationship of individuals with the state, obscuring the role of private employers in maintaining conventional social norms, and de-emphasizing the need for broader social solidarity.

As sexual and gender diversity are becoming the new normal, the ties of solidarity that sustained a marginalized and persecuted community grow looser. Assimilation appears to be weakening the social cohesion of the LGBT community and starving its once-dense network of institutions and resources. Now, with money drying up, many of the smaller organizations and some large ones are shrinking, merging, or closing down.

For example, Empire State Pride Agenda (ESPA), New York State's

leading LGBT policy advocacy group for the last 25 years, abruptly closed its doors last December, claiming that it had accomplished its major policy goals. ESPA, which had long been one of the largest and wealthiest LGBT organizations, apparently was facing fundraising difficulties. Queer activists and even some politicians expressed outrage, pointing out that transgender people still lack statewide anti-discrimination protection in New York, and that much needs to be done to support queer youth and gain legal status for alternative family structures (see Slate, Dec. 16 2015).

Tellingly, the mainstream LGBT movement's efforts to project a public image of queer people to the general public have been influenced in the same "normalizing" direction. The rebellious street-fighters of the Stonewall Rebellion, the sexual radicals of the 1980s, and the angry Act-Up protesters have been mellowed into monogamous, well-educated, middle- to upper-middle class professional couples blending effortlessly into suburban landscapes complete with white picket fences. Racial and ethnic diversity is often played down, and working class queers are largely invisible in this homogenous public-relations dream.

The emergence of "non-binary" identities among queer youth (those who reject either traditional male or female identities) has also been neglected.

All of the preceding has serious implications for the part of the LGBT community that is not white, male, and well-educated or well-connected. Discrimination and social exclusion remain major issues, particularly for queer people of color, youth, and trans people. About a quarter to a third of gay, lesbian, and bi people report experiencing discrimination; for trans people the proportions are two-thirds to three-quarters.

New Attacks, New Struggles

Meanwhile, the right-wing opposition has regrouped and is seeking to exploit public fears of transgender people. Scores of anti-LGBT bills have been introduced in state legislatures, culminating in North Carolina's notorious HB 2, which forbids municipalities to enact anti-discrimination laws, and prohibits transgender people from using restrooms in public buildings that correspond to their gender identity.

National anti-discrimination legislation is still badly needed. In large parts of the country, same sex couples can marry on Sunday and get fired on Monday if word gets out. But anti-discrimination legislation has its own limitations—as with marriage, it provides protection only within the framework of capitalist social relations, so employers and businesses have a built-in advantage against individual claims of discrimination, and the time and expense of the process renders it only marginally available to many people.

The mainstream LGBT movement, weakened by complacency and narrowness of vision, seems ill-prepared to deal with these challenges. Fortunately, there are some organizations like Southerners on New Ground (SONG) and BreakOut!, to name just two, led largely by young queer and trans people of color, that are doing good work and can help show us a better path to resistance. We can only hope that revitalized, mass-based struggles will emerge to develop these struggles.

August 19, 2016

[Against the Current](#)

The European Challenge

24 August 2016, by George Souvlis, Josep Maria Antentas

In Spain, the popular challenge to austerity that began with the indignados movement — commonly abbreviated as 15-M, for May 15, the day the protests began in 2011 — has contributed to the rise of new political formations with broad support. Podemos, a party that emerged from 15-M, is now a major player in national politics.

In December 2015, the Spanish

general election failed to produce a majority for the first time since the end of Franco's dictatorship in 1977 — Podemos won about 20 percent of the vote, coming in just behind the center-right Popular Party (PP) and the center-left Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE). Because Podemos refused to align with PSOE, no coalition could be formed, triggering a second round of voting.

Before the second set of ballots was cast in June 2016, Podemos entered

into an alliance with [United Left](#), a smaller party with roots in the historic parties of the Spanish left.

But this new coalition, dubbed [Unidos Podemos](#), failed to mobilize its base, and the PP emerged from the second election victorious. Josep Maria Antentas spoke with George Souvlis for Jacobin, discussing his roots in the 15-M movement, Podemos's troubling trajectory since 2014, and the open question of Catalan independence.

By way of introduction, what experiences have strongly influenced you, politically and academically?

I belong to a generation that was politically shaped in the 1990s, in a context marked by the historic defeat in which the “short twentieth century” ended. These were bright times for neoliberalism. The hegemony of what [Ignacio Ramonet](#) labeled the *pensée unique* was overwhelming.

In the middle of the decade, the first major challenges to neoliberalism emerged, such as the Zapatista uprising in January 1994 or the French strikes of November-December 1995. But it was not until the end of the millennium that we entered a new phase “thanks to the blooming of the global justice movement after the World Trade Organization (WTO) summit in Seattle in November 1999.

I actively took part in this new movement “which during its brief existence changed the international political climate and showed that history had by no means ended.

During the first decades of the 2000s, I participated in building what became *Anticapitalistas*, an organization that went on to participate in the formation of *Podemos*. We formed *Anticapitalistas* because we felt that that, in addition to taking part in social struggles, we also needed to build a real political alternative, which we imagined as a product of the plural gathering between different organizations and individuals.

It was a strategic wager “and one opposed by the majority of social activists, who held a “movementist” strategy. Our hypothesis was not to build a political tool that could become majority in society “but one that could have a significant audience and influence.

Intellectually, in the 1990s and 2000s I was engrossed in studying the globalization process and resistance movements. I was interested also in

the strategic debates that emerged inside the global justice movement, as well as those concerning the “[Bolivarian](#)” experiences in Latin America and those between the European left parties.

The most decisive intellectual influence to me was Daniel Bensaïd, who combined the revolutionary tradition of the workers movement with a range of diverse theoretical explorations.

After the crisis in 2008, and all that came after, I have been particularly interested in coming back again to the oeuvre of two authors that I always liked “Walter Benjamin and Antonio Gramsci, who are useful when thinking about the contemporary world.

Tell me about the origins of the 15-M movement and its effect on Spanish politics. How did the movement influence the rise of Podemos?

The 15-M movement was a turning point in the Spanish political and social trajectory.

Even though 15-M soon dispersed and ceased to exist as an articulated social movement, it transformed into myriad initiatives that together constitute a sort of “15-M galaxy” that draws inspiration from the movement.

The indignados rebellion put the financial and political elite at the center of its critique “and adopted “democracy” as its banner, but with the meaningful adjective of “real.” It expressed a reaction against the subjugation of the whole of society to the interest of a tiny financial minority “with the crumbling middle class playing an important role.

The movement’s emblematic figure was the young person, especially the graduated youth whose professional prospects were blocked and whose only trajectory appeared to be downwards. But the movement went beyond this base of middle-class youth, also reaching working-class neighborhoods and becoming more diverse in terms of generational and class composition.

The movement emerged outside the

traditional militant milieu, in a context of real helplessness on the Left, to successfully confront the financial dictatorship.

15-M not only opposed the political system and financial powers, but also a left that had either been an accomplice to the neoliberal project or proven unable to successfully fight it.

At the same time, 15-M deployed itself on the basis of the values historically associated with the Left “values that have nevertheless been in permanent tension and sometimes contradiction with the very practice of the Left itself.

In this sense, the “15-M event” modified the terms of the political debate and the political landscape by putting the elites on the defensive. The passivity, apathy, and resignation that until then were overwhelming gave way to a period of greater politicization, although this politicization was partial and contradictory. In other words, 15-M helped to modify the hegemonic “common sense” (in the Gramscian sense of the term).

15-M put some unsolved strategic questions on the table, to which the movement itself had no answers, and that actually went beyond what the movement could have offered.

The birth of *Podemos* in January 2014 marked a significant strategic shift “a leap towards electoral activity.

A real paradigm change gradually took place between 2012 and 2014, thanks to three factors: the worsening of the financial crisis in summer 2012 because of the Bankia bankruptcy and the bailout to the banking system; the rise of Syriza in the elections of May and June 2012; and the verification of the limits of social resistance.

The strategic hypotheses prevalent in the 1990s and the 2000s “changing the world without taking the power, creating free spaces, engaging in social activism while ignoring party and electoral politics, engaging in NGO institutional lobbying “simply got suddenly old.

These strategies proved insufficient to providing an answer to the political

crisis. Step by step, the idea that it was also necessary to participate in the electoral arena began to gain strength, albeit still in a vague way.

It is necessary to point out that Podemos is not the party of 15-M and has never claimed to be. It is neither an organic emanation of the movement nor an inevitable consequence of it.

Rather, it is the product of the specific political choices of a certain group of people – Anticapitalistas (then named “Izquierda Anticapitalista,” or Anticapitalist Left) and a bunch of activists around [Pablo Iglesias](#), strongly influenced by “Bolivarian” Latin American experiences.

Both had the sense to propose something besides dealing with the crisis in a routine way, as if it was business as usual, and recognized the crisis as a potentially vital moment of rupture.

Nevertheless, without 15-M Podemos would have not existed. It was 15-M and the struggles against austerity that came in 2012 and 2013 that created the conditions for the development of a project like Podemos – an initiative that, anyway, would have not existed without the strategic good move of its founders.

The independence movement in Catalonia has posed a challenge for Podemos. What's at stake in the debate over the so-called “national question,” both inside and outside the party?

The multinational nature of the Spanish state and the rise of the [Catalan independence process](#) have together constituted one of the major challenges to Podemos' populist project.

The party has been forced to reconcile its popular nationalist discourse with its recognition of the multinational reality of the Spanish state – a recognition that, by the way, has never been so well defined by a mainstream political party, symbolically or explicitly, as it is by Podemos.

But Podemos has made several zig-zags concerning the specific question

of Catalan independence.

Before the European elections of May 2014, it defended a referendum on independence in Catalonia that was fiercely opposed by the Spanish government and other powerful sectors of Spanish society.

But after its success in those elections, Podemos began to dissolve its defense of the Catalan referendum, entering an erratic phase with multiple changes of position and increasing ambiguity in its platform. This ended in an electoral fiasco in the Catalan elections of September 27, 2015.

Afterwards, there was a new turn and Podemos participated in the building of a broad, plural coalition in Catalonia – [En Comú Podem](#), led by Ada Colau, the current mayor of Barcelona and former spokesperson of the anti-evictions movement. This implied that Podemo Podemos had once again embraced the Catalan independence referendum.

Beyond the national question, Podemos's decision to adopt a “patriotic” discourse has presented another difficulty. Spanish national symbols (including the flag and the very notion of patria, or homeland) have been the currency of the Right since at least the Spanish Civil War. As a result, Podemos's attempts to resignify the concept of patria to evoke a democratic and multinational vision have appeared quite artificial.

What is the party's position regarding the national debt? Spain recorded a government debt of 99.2 percent of the country's GDP in 2015, and this debt reached an all time high of 99.3 percent in 2014.

First of all, Podemos has developed a conception of politics in which the specific political program is very secondary to the electoral effort.

In fact, in each of the elections in which Podemos has taken part (elections to the European Parliament in May 2014, the regional elections in May 2015, and the legislative elections in December 2015 and June 2016) its program has consistently

changed in favor of a more moderate approach that dropped any proposal that could seem too “radical.”

Podemos avoided adopting public and firm programmatic commitments, and did not make any effort to describe its project in specific terms – much less articulate what an anti-austerity government might look like. Nor has it worked to popularize mass demands that could serve as levers for mobilization and political combat.

Podemos's program has been both quite invisible and liquid, to use Bauman's famous expression. At the same time, over the last two years Podemos's leaders have repeatedly presented contradictory proposals.

This is the context you need to consider if you want to understand Podemos' position concerning [the debt](#).

At the beginning Podemos defended a citizen's audit, but later this was watered down in favor of debt renegotiation and restructuring. Since then, Podemos has not offered much in the way of a coherent position on the debt issue.

For example, when the European Commission announced that the new Spanish government would have to make steep cuts to public expenditures shortly before the July 26 elections, Iglesias didn't explicitly come out against the logic of cuts. Instead, he simply emphasized that the required deficit reduction could be made without touching basic public services if the state got more money from a better tax system.

Podemos emerged from a protest movement associated with a horizontalist ideology not found in the traditional left-wing parties. Did the institutionalization of the movement in Podemos stifle this tradition by limiting the room for opposition within the party?

The founding group of Podemos included two projects. One, represented by Anticapitalistas, advocated a “movement-party” that could work in harmony with the legacy and the culture of 15-M, based on internal democracy and participation

in the spirit of rupture.

But the tendency that prevailed was the project of “populist” inspiration around Pablo Iglesias and Áureo Errejón, in which internal democracy and rank-and-file participation played no role, and which was only centered towards short-term electoral victory.

This party model was officially confirmed by Podemos’s founding congress in Vistalegre in October 2014. There it set up what Errejón dubbed an “electoral war machine,” closing down any attempt of organizational experimentation.

Podemos was shaped as a party centered only in electoral competition and political communication. It completely neglected the work of rooting the party in unions, community organizations, and social movements.

This electoral war machine had a highly hierarchic and centralized structure that created weak local and regional leaderships “regional leaders were often promoted on the basis of their loyalty to the party’s central leadership, to which they remained politically and materially dependent.

Internal decision-making bodies were elected by non-proportional methods in order to exclude minorities. As a result, internal bodies became the expression of the dominant faction in each place and not plural bodies of political synthesis.

In this scheme, local branches (called *cárculos*) played no role and had no function beyond organizing electoral campaigns. They never became places for real political debate, nor were they places to plan everyday political work.

The result has been an organization with a strong central political and communication team, superimposed on a very fragile structure. Internal crises in local and regional bodies are recurrent, there are precious few political cadres, and the party is poorly embedded in social life outside of its capacity for mass communication.

Any party organized in such a short period of time and experiencing such

huge electoral success would have had all these kinds of problems, but the party model adopted by Podemos helped to amplify them.

Following Iglesias’s decision to replace the secretary of the organization in March, there have been some concrete improvements and a better working climate has been created. But the party model must be entirely changed.

How do you explain Podemos’s poor showing in the recent elections, when the party lost a million votes compared to the previous round of voting?

From a large historical perspective, Unidos Podemos “the alliance between Podemos and the smaller United Left party” was a success. In fact, it demonstrated the profound transformation of the traditional party system in the Spanish state “never has a political force such as Unidos Podemos had so much electoral support.

Nevertheless, from a short-term perspective, the results were below what was possible and what was expected. The alliance missed its chance to deliver a definitive blow to bipartisanship in Spain.

Between the first round of voting in December of 2015 and the [second round in June](#), Podemos issued too many contradictory messages.

Repeatedly, voters have seen Podemos say one thing and do the opposite: rejecting left unity and then making an alliance with United Left; saying they would never form a joint government with PSOE only to then make an offer to do just that; refusing the label “left” and then embracing the label of “social democracy.”

The cumulative effect of these contradictory messages is to not only disorient the party’s social base, but to also give the impression that Podemos is fickle force that adapts its politics depending on the moment. This has torpedoed its credibility.

To make matters worse, Podemos mounted a very mild and feeble campaign, designed more to [appeal to moderate voters](#) than to mobilize

Podemos’s own social base. Podemos has traditionally been a daring force in the electoral field. But this time the party designed a conservative campaign aimed to not take any risks.

It didn’t pay off. Unidos Podemos lost one million votes compared to what Podemos and Izquierda Unida obtained separately in the first round of voting in December. Most of those votes were lost to abstention, not to other parties. Clearly, Unidos Podemos failed to sufficiently mobilize its electoral base for the second round of voting.

Since June, Errejón has said that it is necessary for Podemos to move beyond the electoral war machine and develop a “popular movement.” But he understands a “popular movement” in cultural terms “as a strategy aimed to win long-term cultural hegemony, and as a parallel complement to electoral work. Again, social struggle, not to mention self-organization, is missing.

For his part, Iglesias has expressed the idea that after the June elections Podemos should move from being a “partisan army” to a “regular army.” It is not clear what concrete political consequences may follow from this, and it is likely that Podemos will swerve and shift suddenly as has done since its formation.

But there seems to be a general desire on the part of the Podemos’s leadership to further moderate the party’s positions in order to increase its governmental and institutional credibility, especially among those potential voters still suspicious of Podemos.

I believe that the party should actually take another direction. Podemos must permanently distinguish itself as a different kind of party “a party that does things differently, that says what others won’t, that has as coherent practice and discourse.

It is not about being trapped in a classic debate between being a governmental force or an opposition force, but to discuss what type of credibility it is required and how it can be obtained. The traditional political parties are not especially credible, and

so acting like them won't help Podemos advance in this field.

What effect has the experience of Syriza in Greece had on Podemos?

The Tsipras government did the opposite of what was necessary. It capitulated fast and almost without struggle. It had to face real difficulties, with hugely powerful forces arrayed against it. But Tsipras refused to be daring, to actually try to live up to the party's radical promise.

He never had a Plan B, beyond trying to square the circle, and without Plan B there is no Plan A. Now, he has become a caricature of himself. In less than one year he buried the hopes for change, folded to financial powers, and stabbed his supporters in the back.

History has shown that in many cases the gravediggers of the future can come from the ranks of the people's camp. When this happens, consequences are devastating. Disorientation and confusion expand without control and it takes time to recover. This is precisely what the troika was looking for.

Podemos made a big mistake in [offering its support](#) to Tsipras, and so it found itself without arguments when political adversaries pointed at the Syriza example and said "See? It is not possible to rule in a different way."

The Greek situation was not easy for Podemos. To admit that Syriza capitulated is not nice, but to pretend that nothing happened and that all is going well is even worse.

Podemos should have tried to send two strategic messages about Greece. First, change is possible but complex, so it is not enough to vote for an anti-austerity party "it is also necessary to mobilize and organize.

Second, Podemos has an unbreakable commitment to the interests of the majority of the Spanish people, and so will not hesitate to distance itself from friendly forces such as Syriza if they take a wrong path.

Maybe this approach to the Greek situation wouldn't have won Podemos as many voters. But at least it would

have better positioned the party for the mid- and long term battle.

In reality, there has not been a serious debate about what happened in Greece in any of the relevant organizations of the Spanish left "including Podemos, United Left, or the local candidacies that won the local elections of May 24, 2014 in Madrid, Barcelona, Zaragoza, A Coruña and other cities.

Why has this opportunity been missed? First, the lack of a practical and concrete internationalism in the everyday practice of the main organizations of the Spanish left, whose leaderships are not projected towards what's going on in other European countries.

Second, the focus on domestic tasks hampers their ability to address non-immediate issues. The intensity of the Spanish political crisis and the concatenation of elections ensures that the urgent always prevails over the necessary.

Third, people within Podemos have been reluctant to see [the Greek reality](#) as it is, because in a certain sense it projects some shadows on their own project inside the Spanish state.

This self-deception takes three forms: denying the gravity of what Tsipras has done; considering his memorandum turn a temporary deviation, and hoping that when the balance of forces are more favorable Syriza will take an anti-austerity turn; and thinking that in the Spanish context things will be different because Spain has a more powerful state than Greece, so a left government will be able to negotiate in better terms with the European Union.

Why do so many people continue to vote for a party as corrupt and discredited as the Popular Party (PP) , which won the recent elections?

PP managed to use the specter of a possible Unidos Podemos victory to mobilize the conservative vote and to concentrate it around PP "to the detriment of Ciudadanos, a new neoliberal party promoted artificially

by the media as a replacement for the traditional right-wing parties.

To this we have to add the effect of Brexit. The Brexit referendum occurred precisely in the final decisive stage of the electoral campaign, and it was presented in an apocalyptic manner by the media.

This helped to foster a climate of fear that led many voters to support PP because of their supposed commitment to maintaining Spain's EU membership.

In addition to all this, when analyzing the electoral strength of PP it is important not to forget the generational factor. Most PP voters are people of advanced age. This is not a problem for PP in the short term "after all, they operate in a country with high abstention rates among young people. But in the long run, the lack of contact with new generations is a problem for any political party.

What is your take on the recent developments in the United Kingdom and with Brexit? Could a left-wing nationalism be a progressive solution today?

The referendum shows several contradictions and paradoxes. Brexit is a blow to British financial capital as well as to other ruling classes in Europe, whose continental integration project is now confronted with a new crisis.

At the same time, the Leave campaign was dominated by reactionary and xenophobic forces that have been emboldened by their victory and will now be able to set the internal British political agenda in the short term.

However, the referendum may also reignite the independence process in [Scotland](#) , which could contribute to the weakening of the British state in the future.

The British left was off balance, forced to either campaign for Lexit (but without a real chance of silencing the reactionary Leave campaign), or to campaign for Remain while at the same time criticizing official Europeanism and the European Union.

The European left, particularly the

Euro-Mediterranean left, has to seriously deal with the European question.

We must develop a systematic critique of the whole EU project, but on an internationalist basis that openly confronts the xenophobic right, without any nostalgia for the Keynesian national-state.

The Greek lesson is clear: breaking with the EU framework is crucial for any anti-austerity government. The proposals to reform the European

Union or to negotiate a more flexible agenda with European authorities are a strategic dead-end.

The Left needs to push forward an alternative based on sovereignty from below and international solidarity "not cling to the futile hope for reform within the EU.

In the Spanish case, most forces on the Left have insufficient proposals concerning the [European Union](#) and seem strategically disarmed. Podemos

refused to deal with the EU question in a consistent way, instead dodging the issue.

Of all Podemos's programmatic limits, this is for me the most important and most urgent. If ever there is a government led by Podemos, this futile faith in an improbable compromise with the troika may push the government into a cul-de-sac not so different from the one Syriza encountered in Greece.

[Jacobin](#)

2/3 of people who still have a job are paid several months late

23 August 2016, by **Tassos Anastassiadis**

Further there is the recent trend of bankruptcy, means that workers receive what's due to them only after the banks and other Europeans or Greek creditors. In the last few weeks alone, bankruptcies have included one of the biggest Athenian luxury hotels (Ledra, although it had an occupation rate of 98 %!), one of the biggest security companies (Pyrros, 800 people) and the biggest supermarket chain (Marinopoulos) with 12,500 workers.

In Salonika, another big hotel company (Metropolitan and Theoxenia) has imposed a wage cut on its employees which, at 500 euros, is below even the minimum wage (586 euros) which had been imposed nationally by the Troika. With the reversal of the hierarchy of agreements, they are allowed to do it! It is true that most of the major employers have until now confined themselves to the national fall in wages required by the Troika (751 euros in 2011) and other flexibilities,

possibilities of non-remuneration, precarity, outsourcing and so on.

More attacks on pensions

Yet this destruction of the rights (and lives) of workers still does not satisfy the voraciousness of capital: therefore a new step is planned for autumn, with the European program of Hollande-Merkel-Tsipras which is to "liberalize" redundancies even more and to destroy the legislation on trade unions and strikes: legalizing lock-outs, erasing the protections of trade unionism and making strikes illegal without a vote.

Apparently, they realise they have politically unique opportunity, as demonstrated by the destruction of the pensions system voted on recently. In effect, the Tsipras government has not only has imposed general supplementary cuts in retirement

pensions (already lowered 12 times in 3 years by an average of almost 40%!), but has also managed to structurally remodel the distribution system in a capitalistic sense, with scheduled reductions in the long term and systematic programmes, while using allegedly egalitarian "Marxist" arguments.

Yet the big workers' mobilization of February 4, 2016 as well as - in another register but very linked - the mobilization of the solidarity of the impoverished Greek population in support of the refugees from war that "civilized" Europe prefers to see drowned, like other trade union, social, and ecological struggles, more fragmented but continuous, announce a gestating explosion against this rampant barbarism. The question of the political outlet, necessarily anti-capitalist, will be key: the broad mobilization of French workers gives hope that we are no longer isolated, no longer alone.

July 25

The left face of the Putin regime

22 August 2016, by **Russian Socialist Movement (RSD)**

Russian Socialist Movement (RSD)

For nearly a quarter of a century, Russia has been in a historical impasse. The impossibility of a harmonious development of the former socio-economic forms of society led to the rupture of constitutional order in 1993. The perspectives which were imposed as a result over the following decades consisted of social regression and the destruction of institutions which organized the lives of millions of people. In the late 1990s, in order to preserve the new architecture of society and at the same time prevent social upheaval in Russia, the Putin regime imposed itself as a compromise between deepening the transformations under the reign of the market and strengthening the role of the state.

1. The victory of Vladimir Putin in the presidential election in March 2012 marked a conservative turn of the regime, redefining the content of the consensus around the figure of the president. The aggressive reaction against the Maidan in Kiev, the annexation of Crimea and the "hybrid" interference in eastern Ukraine aimed to transform the relationships between the regime and society. In this sense the events of 2014 have confirmed the old motto of Clausewitz: "War is the continuation of politics [by other means]." Since then, support for the existing regime is no longer presented as a rational choice, but as a civic duty, similar to the patriotic devotion to one's country.

This new ideological content was succinctly formulated by Vyacheslav Volodin: "With Putin Russia exists, without Putin there is no Russia." Such a personification effectively means that the figure of Putin as symbolic "father" rises above day-to-day politics. You can be liberal or nationalist, in favour of state control of the economy or a supporter of the free market, demand the resignation

of the government, of certain ministers or governors, but the "Putin-Crimea-Russia" link cannot be questioned or discussed. Those who do not fundamentally agree with that simply put themselves outside the boundaries of the Russian political spectrum and become "traitors to the nation".

In this logic, the responsibility for the sharp decline in living standards and the adverse consequences of neoliberal "anti-crisis" measures is borne by everyone, by whoever you like - except by the President. Even now, while the effect of the propaganda about the "return of Crimea" is obviously starting to wane, the personal rating of Putin remains high. Support for the existing regime is not a subject for discussion and becomes a civic duty. And the question of the status of Crimea completely replaces the question of who owns our country.

2. It is in this context of ideological changes in the structure of the regime that the preparation of the legislative elections in September is unfolding. Throughout the Putin era, legislative and presidential elections were part of the same political cycle, played out according to a single scenario: the triumphal success of the "United Russia" party was to anticipate and ensure the even greater success of Vladimir Putin. In December 2011, this mechanism failed: the large-scale fraud in favour of "United Russia" sparked mass demonstrations, whose participants expressed their rejection of the political system as a whole.

Today, the new political logic of Putin's "third term" aims to break this cycle. In the context of a sharp decline in confidence in the government, the Kremlin took in the summer of 2015 the decision to bring forward the legislative elections from December to September 2016, and to postpone the presidential election to March 2018 -

thus prolonging the president's term to six years. The meaning of such a manoeuvre is obvious: from now on the presidential and legislative elections must no longer be the two sides of the same scenario, but two totally different political enterprises. In the first stage, the limited number of parties that make up the "patriotic consensus" symphony will criticize the government and its opponents, thus competing with each other to win the sympathy of the discontented part of the population. In a second stage, support for Putin as candidate for president should flow from an organic patriotic instinct.

Already today, the parties of the "official opposition" - the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) and "Fair Russia" - focus their campaign on harsh criticism of the government and even demand its resignation. These two parties, controlled by the Kremlin administration, serve as a barometer of tolerable criticism. Gennady Zyuganov and Sergei Mironov have supported all the important political initiatives of the Kremlin, from the new repressive laws against "foreign agents" to the military support for the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria. At the same time, speaking as the left flank of the political spectrum, they spread out a wide range of views within the Putin consensus, which authorizes the criticism of some unpopular decisions. In conditions of rising social discontent (still mostly passive) "United Russia", which not only leads the government but holds a majority of regional governors, may become the ritual "scapegoat".

However, this predictable scenario, developed in the Kremlin, could be supplanted by another, connected with the strengthening of military and police structures and their increasingly active interdepartmental competition. This process, which started with the creation of the

National Guard, is growing in importance: each power structure is engaged in self-promotion, not only to remind people of its existence but also to demonstrate to its rival ministries its fighting capacity, unique and unsurpassable, against the potential threat.

For example, Alexander Bastrykin, in a recent programmatic article, proposes cancelling the election, because they might be too dangerous. He bluntly calls to stop "playing the farce of democracy" and to give enemies a "serious, adequate and symmetrical response (...) in the perspective of the forthcoming elections." With the appointment of Tatiana Moskalkova, even the apparatus of the mediator for human rights, hitherto neutral, seems to be turning into a new bastion of the struggle against conspiracies.

Obviously, this gesticulation is related to the fact that the deepening economic and social crisis does not for the moment have visible political consequences: there are no spontaneous mass uprisings, no strikes on the level of an industry (whereas the total volume of isolated labour disputes is increasing).

The diminution of the role of the elected bodies of the administrative entities of the Federation, to the benefit of appointed officials who represent the interests of the executive, is an integral part of the degradation of the entire political system. The local government reform of 2014, which abolished the direct election of mayors in some megacities and deprived municipal assemblies of their power to define how heads of towns and districts are elected, is part of the logic aiming to take away the powers of local governments over the population and install local political elites in harmony with the business community. In the context of the allocation of budgets by the federal centre and the concentration of power in the hands of unremovable local leaders ("princelings"), who are in no way accountable to the public, the model of Putin's repressive government is becoming more widespread.

3. The social consequences of the economic crisis are now affecting the

majority of the population. The propaganda that justifies this situation by the machinations of the West is perceived as being less and less convincing. The introduction of international sanctions and falling oil prices that began in 2014 have intensified the decline in production which began from 2012. In addition, in late 2014, when the collapse of the rouble on the exchange rate market peaked, Prime Minister Medvedev admitted that Russia "was not coming out of the 2008 crisis." The global crisis is not only reflected in the weakness of the Russian economy, but has caused the slow collapse of the whole system of post-Soviet capitalism, which has led to a further strengthening of military activity and to the strengthening of the regime in the country. Similarly, over the past two years, a sharp decline in oil revenues, combined with the stopping of the possibilities for Russian banks to refinance themselves in the West, has reduced the room for manoeuvre of the government. The previous strategy -plugging the holes in the economy with the help of the huge government reserve fund - is now almost exhausted. Yet the scale of the current crisis makes more real the perspective of a catastrophe.

Thus, at the end of 2015, the slowdown of the Russian economy was marked by a decline of 3.7 per cent of GDP; inflation reached 15.5 per cent (with a maximum of 16.9 per cent in March 2015). During this short period, the poverty rate is impressive: the number of people with incomes below the poverty line increased from 16,100,000 to 19,200,000 (13.4 per cent of the population). It should be noted that at the end of last year, the poverty line was officially set by the government in 9,452 roubles (around 123 euros) per month. And how many people have incomes only slightly higher than this paltry amount, just exceeding the official poverty line? Moreover, according to a recent survey, 73 per cent of Russians have no reserves "for a rainy day" and spend all their salary for the bare necessities.

In this context, the unemployment figures are at first glance not so bad: the official statistics indicate a rate of 5.8 per cent (4.4 million people). This

number also includes those actively seeking employment without being registered at the labour exchange. At the same time, during the first three months of 2016, the number of those who declared themselves as unemployed increased by 70,000, thus amounting to 6 per cent of the active population, according to the statistics office Rosstat. The persistence of relatively low growth of unemployment in a situation of a very rapid decline in living standards is explained by government measures to preserve formal employment (with lower wages and reduced working hours). For example, the practice of unpaid long-term leave is common in large industrial enterprises. The "maintenance of social stability" is an important reason, not in large cities, where in case of layoffs it is possible to find another badly paid job, but in the so-called "mono-industrial towns" built in Soviet times around key industries. If there was a drastic reduction of jobs in such enterprises, a significant part of the population of the city would automatically come into the category of long-term unemployed, and those cities would become potential places for social explosions.

The contradiction - between maintaining employment (to avoid a sudden drop in income of the population) and the use of austerity recipes against the effects of the crisis - has been the basis for the fiscal policy of Russia over the past two years. During the adoption of the 2016 budget, Prime Minister Medvedev announced: "We cannot achieve this without a rationalization of expenditure, and it should be done not just, as we have done too often, by increasing the tax burden on businesses, but by reducing inefficient expenses." Among such expenses, Medvedev ranks for example the indexation of pensions on the cost of living. Thus it is proposed to completely remove indexation for working pensioners (14.9 million) and to cap the overall index at 4 per cent (whereas inflation is officially expected to beat least 10 per cent). The increase of the retirement age to 65 remains one of the most important ways indicated to fight against the budget deficit. Yet the practical implementation of this measure has been postponed for obvious reasons

until after the parliamentary elections, or indeed the presidential election (the total number of pensioners in Russia today stands at 41.4 million, almost one-third of the total population).

The indexation mechanism for wages in the private sector is not really developed in labour law in Russia and in fact has the character of a "recommendation" (it must be decided in collective bargaining agreements, which exist only in the largest enterprises). Over the past two years public sector workers have not benefited from the indexation of wages. It is significant that the increase in wages for this sector (which cannot even compensate simply the loss caused by inflation) is planned by the government for autumn 2016, and will obviously be used for propaganda purposes on the eve of parliamentary elections.

Although it was austerity that guided the 2016 budget, with significant spending cuts in education and health, a few months after its adoption it was further reduced by 10 per cent. The very structure of government revenues - in which profits from the export of oil and gas are essential (up to 70 per cent) - means that there will be continual cuts in the future.

4. Apparently the Putin elite has no long-term plan to rescue the national economy. The "anti-crisis measures" that are taken aim rather to preserve the social status quo until there is a natural increase in oil prices, for example. The boundless cynicism of the Russian elite is accompanied in a spectacular fashion by an almost mystical faith in "the invisible hand of the market" which will save it, more or less as in the early 2000s, when soaring oil prices appeared to be a real gift of fate. In December 2014, just after "Black Tuesday" (when the rouble plunged by 15 points), Vladimir Putin was therefore quite sincere in stating that "growth is inevitable, in particular because the external economic environment will change."

The logic of "megaprojects" - priority programmes with personal responsibility and a limited time limits, focusing the resources and the efforts of the bureaucratic apparatus

(for example the Sochi Winter Olympics, the integration of annexed Crimea, the construction of the Vostochny [Eastern] cosmodrome, etc.) - is a characteristic feature of Putinism. Huge building projects, launched regularly since the mid-2000s and demanding huge budget investments, were presented as the way to orient socially excess oil profits: every project involves the creation of jobs and investment in infrastructure, which should mean a positive economic effect. In fact, the benefits of such large-scale works accrue to big companies, which receive state orders and bank guarantees; as for the "jobs" created, they have quickly proved to be a trap for the workers, who, under pressure from their employers and the bureaucratic machinery of the state, cannot defend their rights (which has been seen in a particularly glaring fashion with workers being cheated during the construction of facilities for the Sochi Games and the Vostochny cosmodrome).

In short, the concept of megaprojects, presented by the Russian state as a means of redistributing oil revenues for the benefit of the people, turns out to be actually a tool to quickly enrich a microscopic elite at the expense of the population. Yet propagandists still manage to focus attention on the "success" of these projects (thanks to the authority of their main sponsor, the President of the Russian Federation) and to ignore their catastrophic perversity. Thus the "anti-crisis" actions of the government are determined mainly by the desire to ensure at all costs the re-election of Vladimir Putin in 2018. But what then? For the moment, few people care.

At the same time, another logic, neoliberal, appears clearly behind all this: use the economic recession and the impoverishment of the population to promote "structural reforms" that radically reduce social norms and the cost of labour. Thus, according to estimates by experts of the state bank Vnesheconombank, incomplete indexing and continued falling incomes of the population will mean that in 2017-2018, the share of gross profits will exceed the total share of wages and the country will again

become attractive to investors.

To this are related the discussions about the possible privatization of large public state assets, such as the railways or Sberbank, the largest bank in Russia. It is no coincidence that, with the continuation of sanctions, the combined mission of the IMF and World Bank, meeting in Moscow in March of this year, greatly appreciated the "anti-crisis" course of the Russian government. The recent appointment of Alexei Kudrin to the President's Economic Council is part of this trend.

5. It is important to stress that the search for new sources of state revenue in the context of the deepening crisis and of the fall in hydrocarbon prices will lead to an even further militarization of the economy, and, consequently, to an aggressive foreign policy. Over the last few years, large-scale investments in the production of weapons have been one of the major priorities of the government, while in 2016 the military budget has reached 4 per cent of GDP (0.8 per cent more than the year before). Over and above its foreign policy goals, the intervention in Syria has clearly fulfilled the task of publicizing the latest military innovations. Thus, one of its results has been the order by India, Algeria and other countries, for a total of \$7 billion, of Russian bombers and military helicopters.

Both the "hybrid" aggression in Ukraine and military operations in Syria are not related solely to geopolitical games and the fight to assert Russia's position against the West. They are directly linked to the crisis, ever deeper, of the entire political and economic system of Russian capitalism. The militaristic choices that are made make it possible to reinforce the legitimacy of the government within the country - in the general population as well as within the elite.

6. One of the principal components of the "patriotic consensus", until recently, has been the criminalization of any political or social discontent. The massive anti-Ukrainian propaganda that has filled the governmental media since early 2014,

has consistently emphasized the link between large-scale protest and the inevitability of chaos and impoverishment. The classic conservative argument of "futility" [9], according to which to satisfy the desires of the masses would at the end of the day only lead to worsening the social situation, has been employed from the start. The other side of the same argument is to denounce the external character of all social conflicts: behind each of them lies concealed the ambition of foreign forces to destabilise the situation and lead, ultimately, to a change of regime that would have catastrophic consequences for the national independence of the country. Every strike or local social movement was immediately called an attempt to "organize a new Maidan". In addition, the new "post-Crimea" rhetoric of the Kremlin has cemented the position of the local state-business bosses. To retain power, they have only needed to denounce any political competitor as an agent of subversive revolutionary forces. We can observe that it is only towards the end of 2015 that these propaganda formulas began to lose their strength.

Protests, related to different manifestations of the crisis and the government's "anti-crisis" course, are becoming more numerous, although they are still very far removed not only from the formulation of their own alternative programme, but also from coordinating actions at the national level.

The most significant was the protest action of lorry drivers which started in November 2015 [10]. From the beginning, the government took an unequivocal position: no concessions will be made on the question and the level of taxation will not be revised in any way. Strong political pressure, but also the absence of a strong organization of lorry drivers capable of coordinating their protest in a difficult situation, led to the gradual extinction of their movement.

Since 2015, the number of protests by workers has increased - spontaneous actions or those organized by independent unions against the

suppression of jobs, cuts in wages or delays in payment. Thus, last year the number of protests increased by 40 per cent compared to 2014. Among those who take part in strikes (one-day strikes or slowdowns), there are workers in big enterprises of the productive sector, public sector workers (hospitals, municipal employees), those who work in the service sector and even armament factories.

The opposition parties belonging to the "patriotic consensus", the KPRF and "Fair Russia", play an ever greater role in the disorientation of the participants in these up to now disparate actions. There does not exist any powerful organization determined to engage in the combat of those who struggle; they therefore seek political intermediaries, those who have resources and are therefore obviously integrated into the system, who are able to make their demands known. It can already be seen that this function of being a "safety valve", which was habitual for Russian "communists" in the 1990s, is increasingly sought after by the Kremlin and is organically embedded in the logic of the electoral campaign for the comic-opera parliament.

For its part, the liberal opposition, which is normally situated outside the institutional political system and which emphasizes the need for its radical democratization, remains isolated from the rising social anger. In the first place this stems from its political tradition and its social nature. In the wake of the "liberal reformers" of the Yeltsin era, leaders such as Mikhail Kasyanov and Alexei Navalny consider that the key to change lies in is the growing discontent of a number of sectors of medium-sized and big capital. In addition, Kasyanov - like the political émigré Khodorkovsky - recognizes the possibility of joint work in a future "free Russia" with representatives of the "liberal wing" of the Putin establishment, such as the former Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin, the current head of the Central Bank, Elvira Nabiullina and the director of the Sberbank state bank, German Gref. The demands for "lustration" of corrupt officials and for democratization of the system are

closely combined, for the radical liberal opposition, with the recognition of the need for "structural reforms" and for a "stop to confrontation with the West." It seems to them that the dismantling of the personal regime [of Putin] should rather take the form of a transformation at the top in collaboration with the present elite, whereas they consider the extra-parliamentary street movement as a secondary factor of pressure.

7. The radical left, which is not part of either the "patriotic consensus" opposition or the liberal one, must find a connection with this growing movement of social protest, which is not yet structured organizationally or politically. The problem, however, is that this radical left is today itself in a state of decline. Some of its well-known spokespersons, such as Sergei Udaltsov and Alexei Gaskarov, are still in prison. The events in Ukraine have also led to a deep split in the left, part of which has effectively supported the Russian intervention.

In this situation, we must begin to develop a broad programme for change, based on the demand for a revision of existing property relations, whose origin lies in the privatizations of Yeltsin and Putin. The natural consequence of this revision is the demand to dismantle the entire political system engendered by the ultra-presidential Constitution of 1993, which should be replaced by a parliamentary republic. Such a programme should ensure the recognition of the value of political democracy not as an instrument, but as a fundamental principle of people's power, essential for the consistent realization of the aspirations for social equality.

The deepening crisis and the constant weakening of the magic of the "patriotic consensus" offer new opportunities to promote democratic and socialist policies. The tactics for the action of the left in the evolution of the present situation will have to be built on the basis of the analysis and the designated strategic objectives presented here.

Moscow, 8-9 May 2016

Culture of Impunity in Cambodia: 20 Years, No Justice

21 August 2016

"My community is still living on the street next to our land. We hang banners on our tents in front of the land to show we have been living here since long before the land law was issued. Why can't the court pass the ruling for us to live here?"

Ms. Heng Chenda, resident of Kompenh Chas community, Preah Sihanouk, in personal interview with the author in Kompenh Chason 5 July 2016.

Do Cambodia's leaders care about the people living in this country? Honestly, I find it hard to say "yes." Seeing the political situation nowadays I feel hopeless with the leadership. They might say they intend to do something good, but people have observed what they have done to this country and for themselves, and do not believe that they can do good for the country's peoples.

People are crying everyday in every province because of so-called "sustainable development" as it is destroying community wealth, well being, solidarity, security, significance, livelihoods, land, water, fish and nature, and transferring control over life from local people into the hands of businesses, and rich and powerful individuals and families. To explain why I say this, I will present examples from two communities that have had land conflicts with powerful people and companies since 1996. Twenty years have passed since the conflicts started but the affected families have still not received justice.

The first example is the conflict between Lor Peang community in Kampong Chhnang with KDC International over 196 hectares of farmland. KDC International is owned by Chea Kheng, wife of Minister of Energy and Mining, Suy Sem. The second example is the conflict

between Kompenh Chas community in Preah Sihanouk and Thai Bun Rongover 42,710 m square. The owner of the company, Thai Bunma who passed away mid June 2016, was well known in the country as a powerful tycoon.

Affected families from both communities sent many petitions and complaints to different government institutions and the courts, but state agencies do not act on complaints against rich and powerful people. When ordinary people file such complaints in the courts, the courts ignore them and delay proceedings. But if a company or politically powerful person registers a complaint against ordinary people, the court will not even investigate the truth. Instead the accused will just be thrown into jail without due legal process and locked up for a long time in order to silence and threaten other community members from conducting actions. Authorities usually arrest men but the struggle does not stop with these arrests. Women take over leadership and continue their advocacy for justice, although they face a lot of criticism that women should stay at home and look after the family, and not engage in such high-risk actions.

This is a culture of impunity: the courts are not independent, fair and unbiased; they usually act and rule in favour of rich and powerful individuals and companies; and cases are not resolved in favour of ordinary people like those in Lor Peang and Kompenh Chas communities. Over the past 20 years local people have not been able to get justice from the judicial system.

The same story is repeated from one community to another: when their lands are seized or threatened by a company or wealthy person, affected people have mobilized, organized and

risked their lives to face bulldozers, military police and company security forces. They have used all the government mechanisms and judicial procedures available from local to national levels, seeking fair and timely resolution to the land conflicts. Lor Peang community members walked 30 km from their village to the provincial hall and provincial court in Kampong Chhnang town, and 70 km to Phnom Penh to file complaints and petitions. By walking, they won the attention of many people in Phnom Penh, who recognized the injustice that the community has been facing. But there is no mechanism that can bring real justice for Lor Peang and other community people. Why? Because the company owners are very rich and politically powerful and have high-ranking positions in the government. Judges, prosecutors, police, justice officials and other authorities are not brave enough to conduct real, independent investigations against such powerful people.

In both Kompenh Chas and Lor Peang communities, affected families have land possession certificates, and/or family books and other documents that show how long they have been living on their lands. But these documents are only recognized at the local administrative levels. On the other hand, both the companies were able to acquire ownership titles for the same lands on which local people have been living for a very long time, and these titles were recognized by the courts. Our judicial system and laws do not take into account the realities of peoples' lives. Instead judgments are based on documents that can be acquired by purchasing, collusion and nepotism.

Most rural people in Cambodia lead hard lives. They work in their fields, share natural resources equally with

one another and protect them for future generations. They struggle to defend their rights to land and for social justice. But when they are not able to get justice or when the courts are used against them, people leave their villages or migrate to work in another country, where they face different types of hardships.

After receiving many complaints regarding land conflicts between rural communities and private investors, the government introduced the idea of "social land concessions" (contrasted with "economic land concessions" that private investors get), through which affected families can get land at a different location. By so doing, the

government facilitated and helped companies and private investors to get what they want, instead of resolving the conflicts in a fair, just way for local people. However, affected families did not accept these offers because the lands were infertile and poor quality, and very far from their villages.

Economic land concessions and other investment projects supported by the government in the name of economic development have had extremely destructive impacts on peoples' lives: people were evicted from their lands, their houses were destroyed, they lost many years of livelihood, their families were separated and forced to migrate

to escape from threats, violence and judicial harassment and victimization. Rural people want to see local development that does not displace them from their homes and communities. They want real development that allows them to participate using local knowledge, that creates job security for local populations and strengthens local economies. Most of all, people want fair, impartial and honest legal and judicial systems that enable protection of their rights and deliver justice to them instead of allowing the rich and powerful to get away with theft, violence and other crimes.

[Focus on Global South](#)

Statement on the Attacks of AKP against Kurdish Movement

20 August 2016, by Sosyalist Demokrasi için Yeniyol

The AKP, which by the way took advantage of holding the power and discharged the ex-owners of the regime along with "the congregation" and gained the power it has today by means of these discharge operations, resort to every sort of show in order to make this history disappear, from turning Gulen's old house into public toilet to opening traitors' cemetery; it tries meticulously to preserve the legitimacy of its weapon of revenge.

The AKP, which justifies itself in such a way and also strengthened its hand legally with the state of emergency it declared, targeted Kurdish movement as the first opportunity after the

congregation. Many politicians were detained in Kurdish cities with the operations; the debate on assigning trustees to the municipalities has restarted; social media accounts of many individuals and organizations from the movements were censored and two days ago in the afternoon hours Â-zgür Gündem newspaper was shut down, its office was raided and its staff was taken into custody.

The war that has been going on for a year, the efforts to leave HDP out of the national assembly, the fact that there's no news from Hur?it Kùlter for the last 84 days and lastly what happened in Â-zgür Gündem prove

that AKP takes up the "90s concept" eagerly and even desires to bring a new phase which goes beyond that into existence.

Â-zgür Gündem, of which 21 employees were murdered, editors and columnists were given 197 years of imprisonment in total, offices were bombed, shut down several times, hundreds of issues were confiscated since 1992, has survived through all the oppression by resisting.

This attempt of censoring and silencing will be facing with defeat, too. The truth and those who pursue it will survive the future.

Kurdish women's battle continues against state and patriarchy, says first female co-

mayor of Diyarbakir

20 August 2016, by **Gltan K?anak, Latif Tas , Nadj**
Al-Ali

She has been a long-term activist in the Kurdish women's movement in addition to being a former MP for the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP). Ms Ki?anak was imprisoned as a student after the military coup in 1980, and as a woman's rights activist and Kurdish politician has witnessed the violent aftermath of previous coups as well as the radically changing political landscape over the past decades.

Given the recent developments in Turkey, we were also eager to enquire about the recent failed coup, particularly in relation to the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, prospects for peace and gendered implications of recent developments.

Nadje Al-Ali (NA) and Latif Tas (LT): Based on your own experiences, could you tell us about the history of women's roles within the Kurdish political movement?

Gltan Ki?anak (GK): Since the beginning of the Kurdish political movement in Turkey, women have taken active and important roles. However, we should accept that in the 1970s and 1980s women's rights were sacrificed for the sake of general political and national aims. The slogan was to first have a revolution and then make some improvements in women's rights and gender equality. This idea was not only part of Kurdish independence movements, but it was also followed by Turkish and other leftist and democratic groups who wanted to change the regime of their countries.

A few select women were given some positions to further wider political aims but they were also forced to postpone any initiatives focusing on their own rights for the sake of the national and political revolution. Key roles for women were not taken by

women themselves, but 'given' by a male-dominated political leadership. After any success or political achievement, women were easily forgotten and forced back into the home to continue in their 'traditional' roles. Sadly, this has been the destiny of women in almost all countries and many contexts throughout history.

NA,LT: Was this trend also evident within Kurdish political ideology?

GK: In the beginning, the Kurdish movement was also influenced by this tradition. Our main aim was to promote national aims and a revolution. The movement had to show a strong and tough 'male' face if we were going to have any success with these political aims. Most of our male friends and comrades came from this old, patriarchal tradition. Patriarchal structures, even including many progressive leftist movements, did not want to change their position and include any real focus on women and their rights. But after a while, we, in the Kurdish political movement, began to strongly and continuously question - and we still question - this perspective.

Especially in the 1980s and 1990s, the issue of women's rights became important internationally, and we benefited from this trend. We started not just questioning the position of the state and the regime but also challenged the role of patriarchal structures. We started believing and supporting the idea that if there was going to be a real, sustainable and positive change than this should include women's rights from the beginning and at all levels. Without real democratization and inclusion of all minority rights, especially women's rights, any new model will not be much better or substantially different from the old one.

So we started to prioritize changes in democratic rights. This has become more important for us than the creation of an independent state. Within this new environment, women began to assume important roles and created their own separate branches, not just following what the general political movement says, but also creating alternative policies, which the party must follow. This change is not just limited to the political elements within the movement, but also includes societal changes. It has influenced all levels of the Kurdish movement. These changes were not easy and the rights were not just given by men: Kurdish women have fought at all levels and achieved these changes despite barriers within patriarchal society and despite the resistance of some of our male comrades.

NA,LT: Give us more details about the kind of changes Kurdish women have achieved and what kind of positions and roles they have gained?

GK: When society needs to make sacrifices in difficult times, like conflict and war, male-dominated societies may establish some new roles for women, including for women to sacrifice their lives. But after all these difficult times, the same people suddenly forget their promises to women. Similar to today, the 1990s were especially difficult for the Kurdish movement. The state was oppressive and applied considerable pressure. Women experienced those difficulties and paid a huge price. Women organized and led many demonstrations against state brutality in villages and towns. Many of our female and male friends were arrested, tortured and killed. They had to defend themselves during their trials. They read and researched about their rights. Women not only learnt

about Kurdish rights and freedoms, but as women who were simultaneously oppressed by the state and by society, they recognized their rights, their equality with men, and their freedom.

This was an important element of the enlightenment of Kurdish women. We have gained confidence and trust in ourselves. We did not simply follow established policies but also took part in creating new policies. We came onto the streets with new innovative slogans. We challenged not just the state's perspective but also the established rules of society. The male-dominated political establishment usually does not make women's issues their main argument. However, day-by-day, women's participation and active demanding of their rights while coming out onto streets has been increasing. When women come onto the streets for a demonstration, some of them bring along their children. Others leave their husband at home, to look after the children.

NA,LT: How do you assess the role of the Kurdish political leadership in addressing these changes?

GK: Women have fought a lot for their rights. But especially for the initial movement and involvement you need a strong leadership. We are lucky that we had - and still have - this. Of course the changes and evolution of the role of women within the Kurdish movement and Kurdish society would not be easy without the full support of the Kurdish leader, Abdullah Â-calán, who has been imprisoned by Turkey since 1999, more than 17 years. Since the 1990s, Â-calán advised women's organizations to create separate branches to promote rights and equality within the wider movement and society. He repeatedly said that if women do not create their own free and autonomous branches, dominant and traditional men would try to destroy women after any achievements. These separate branches should not be just created within society or locally, but also within political parties and guerrilla movements. He also advised men to abandon the traditionalist perspective, the primitive ideology of men and masculinity. He believes that most societal problems are the creation of

dominant masculine men. This is the reason why people make decisions for others without their agreement. This is the reason that many wars and conflicts are so often about power and ego. If we are going to change society, Â-calán and many of us believe that we should first eliminate patriarchal masculinity and the ego born from this masculinity.

NA,LT: We have interviewed many different Kurdish women, including peace activists, mothers of martyrs, politicians, mayors, guerrillas, students, lawyers, community members and house wives. Different women experience historical developments and struggles differently. You have a very important role and hold a very important position as the co-mayor of Diyarbakir/Amed. What kind of difficulties and problems have you faced as a woman and a co-mayor?

GK: My own life story has followed the development of the Kurdish women's movement. In the 1980s, I was imprisoned in Diyarbakir prison. This had notoriously brutal conditions, with torture and killings. To be Kurdish, to be a woman and to be leftist created triple difficulties for me. I was kept in a dog kennel for six months because I refused to say "I am not a Kurd but a Turk". Our older women friends, our mothers' age were tortured because they could not speak Turkish. I still have signs of torture from those days on my body.

This prison was a place for me to question everything about humanity. It was a place for me to recognize the importance of gender. It was a place for friendship and to create strong bonds with other women. After my life in prison, I became a university student. Together with many other Kurdish women, I took part in the women's struggle, both while I was in prison and also during my time in university. This destroyed any fears I had. In fact, the heavy burden and difficulties developed my self-confidence. If I think back to those days, when I was a 19-year-old university student, it is difficult now to imagine how I managed all those difficult challenges whilst almost continually being under attack for my Kurdish identity, for my mother

tongue and most importantly for being a woman.

It was not an easy period in my life and in the lives of many other Kurdish women. The difficult conditions forced us to make choices: to surrender and accept the state's idea of a unitary identity and to assimilate - or to resist against all oppression. Under those difficult conditions, we questioned the role of state and society, and the established role and identity of women. But we also thought about human rights, the importance of diverse identities, and our own Kurdish identity and practices. We decided to work against all oppression since they fed on each other. Without that historical development and those experiences, I would not have my current advantages, and my strong role. The women who jump into politics, without the kind of experiences we all had, may well face some difficulty in the beginning. We fought with masculine politics at every stage of our movement.

NA,LT: How did your political experiences develop after your university days?

GK: In the 1990s, when conditions were very difficult and there was no sign of freedom - just like it is now - I worked for newspapers where Kurdish and women's rights were the main issue. These were alternatives to the mainstream newspapers. The conditions for journalists, especially for Kurdish journalists were harsh - just like today. Some of our journalist friends were killed while they were doing their work. I worked as a journalist for 13 years and published sections focusing on women's issue within the newspaper.

During the hard time of the 1990s, many autonomous women's organizations were established. I took different roles within these, and worked to support their activities. In 1996, the Kurdish political movement created a separate women's branch. This developed into a system of political representation. In 1999 for the first time three Kurdish women were elected as local mayors. This number more than tripled in 2004 and we had 14 women mayors. Most importantly, we started co-chairing in

2004, although at the time this was not legal. But the women were all pressured by their male co-chairs. They were perceived as assistants. After 2007, women became more visible and powerful. The 2007 elections were revolutionary for both Kurdish and Turkish women. 8 out of 26 Kurdish MPs were women. Women became more confident as co-chairs and men had to accept them as equals. Other political parties were embarrassed and started to introduce a co-chair system as well. But it was not simply a matter of a quota and co-chairing, but the actual style and work of parliament changed. Women did not ask for permission any more to speak on important subjects such as the defence budget. All these steps have helped Kurdish women to develop their own independent branches. The aim was to put new brick on top of the existing ones and so to move forward women's issues. We are becoming stronger with every passing day.

NA,LT: What do you consider as your main challenges in the past?

GK: It might be difficult to believe but when I look back at my own experience and story, the hardest time for me as a woman was not in prison. It was not my time at university or when I was working as a journalist. But it was the struggle we had to fight in order to get a women's quota for MPs. During the time before the 2007 general election when we made our first important moves towards a quota, our male friends were happy about our hard work. We were organizing meetings and demonstrations, and were facing the police on a daily basis as we worked hard in our political and gender struggles. In the 2007 general election, the Kurdish political party did not run as a party, because of the ten-per cent threshold, but put forward independent candidates, and the Kurdish women's movement wanted to achieve a women's quota even it was for independent candidates. We wanted an equal number of male and female MPs. The 40 per cent quota for women had been one of our party policies since 2002, but its implementation had been postponed to the next election. We did not want any further postponement. We wanted the policy to be put into practice. Our attempts created a big

discussion within the Kurdish political movement. There were several barriers from the established political traditions and from dominant men. There were two main questions: first how many women should be put into electable positions; and secondly who was going to decide about these women candidates?

NA,LT: A woman's quota was already part of your party policy. Why did many men in the Kurdish political movement object?

GK: Yes, it was there and for that reason - theoretically at least - they could not be against our demands. We had already had this as a party policy for almost 5 years. However, some men created different excuses, such as society was not ready yet. Other argued that women should be happy with a smaller quota, and once society becomes ready we will put the 40 per cent into practice. In other words, we were supposed to wait years or even decades for society to become ready. They knew that a good number of women were going to be elected and also that it was going to affect some men's chances to become MPs. We were ready to do political demonstrations in every part of the country, to communicate with people in the cities, but also to go to villages, to talk to old and young members of our society, to convince them about our role in representing them. We did not want to fail for lack of trying. However, many of our male friends continued to offer just a few positions to women. Even though we started co-chairing in 2004, until 2007 they did not really include women co-chairs in any meaningful way. They even called our female co-chairs Yenge (sister-in-law), as a way of showing they were not equals but assistants. We wanted to change this symbolic representation and instead make it full and meaningful.

Most men and even some women following the old traditions did not want to recognize that the Kurdish women's movement was not fragile any more. It was strong enough to take what it deserved. Yes, we had Leyla Zana as an example of an MP in 1991, but her role and power did not come from women's organisations or representation. She was the wife of a

famous Kurdish politician, Mehdi Zana, a former mayor of Diyarbakir, who also went to prison in the 1980s for his political views. When Leyla Zana was first elected, her social status and her being the wife of somebody famous was the main reason for her to be elected. Of course, later she has become a very important Kurdish figure and politician in her own right. As an elected MP, Zana had to face prison, along with several other Kurdish MPs, and she stayed there for almost a decade, just like her husband and many other Kurdish politicians..

In 2007, men in the Kurdish political movement accepted the number of women to be elected, but they came out with a new offer: to put a few famous women or the wives of famous men onto the list. According to our male friends, that would have been easier for society to accept. But we said no. Because the number itself was not going to be meaningful as long as the proper acknowledgment of women was not recognized by men and society. We were strongly against accepting a few symbolic women. We wanted to exist and make decisions at all levels. We also decided that the female candidates should not be decided on by men or in joint meetings. Women's organizations should decide on their own candidates. After long and harsh arguments, we won this battle as well. We created a women's election committee in parallel to the previous general election committee and the women's branches decided on their own candidates. In the end, 8 out of 26 women MPs were elected in 2007. Almost all our women candidates had more votes than their male colleagues. The women found it much easier to make connections with different social groups. Their messages were much clearer. Society was ready; even if the previous male dominated power holders were not.

NA,LT: Many commentators see the involvement and power of Kurdish women as a simple change in policy and practice. But your experience illustrates that it is an on-going struggle that has been difficult on many levels.

GK: It looks simple now, but it was

certainly not easy to put this simple action into practice. The discussions before, and the results of the 2007 election marked a radical revolution for Kurdish and Turkish women rights and position in Turkey. First, the idea of women not being able to succeed was destroyed. Second, the well-known male stereotype of society not being able to accept women was challenged as well. Society actually welcomed women. Third, the general tradition of electing only well-known, famous women or wives of famous men was challenged. Women were elected with their own identity, from a mix of economic, social, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Before the 2007 election, people in our society still called women who had been elected as mayors ‘Mr. President’ (Baskan Bey). When a mayor visited somewhere most people were expecting to see a man. They asked ‘where is Mr. President’, and found it difficult to see a woman in power. When a woman mayor was elected, people would speculate that the city was run by men behind the scenes. The outcome of the 2007 election destroyed all these ideas and women mayors or MPs can now be accepted with power without any shadows behind her. Our system of co-chairs at all levels has become more visible, strong and stable since the 2007 election.

NA,LT: Do you feel that you have achieved gender-based equality within the Kurdish political movement and in Kurdish society?

GK: It is not easy to make deep societal changes in a short time, but it is happening. Now many Turkish and Kurdish people may not know the names of male Kurdish MPs, or politicians, but they usually know the names of Kurdish female politicians. 2007 was a big test for us. But the real test of success is continuity and the normalization of gender equality and representation in politics for the next generations. We have worked very hard, sometimes more than our male friends, to make this happen. The future generations, the young members of women’s organizations, have important responsibilities for the continuation of equality and to change the established male-dominated tradition of power. We should also

know and accept that there are many women who have played passive or even active roles in the continuation of patriarchal society. There are many women who have become masculinized and act like men in our society. They are a barrier we need to deal with and change. If our progressive women’s organizations ever relax with the power they have gained, then that power could easily be taken away again by male dominated power holders. Equality of power must be institutionalized and become one of the most important societal norms if our advances are to continue.

NA,LT: How have these changes translated into Turkish politics and affected the work of other parties?

GK: Our new gender role and practices have pushed changes in the Turkish political parties and the legal system. I would like to share a few examples, beginning in the Turkish parliament, where our Kurdish umbrella party at the time (DTP – Democratic Society Party) secured a female deputy leader in 2007. This was a ‘first’ for any political party in Turkey. This position allowed the leader, Fatma Kurtulan, to organize all party politics, and to speak in the name of the party. Other political parties joined in. The CHP (Republican People’s Party), which claims to be a leftist party, was embarrassed by this initiative and they also elected a woman deputy leader. And then the Erdoğan-led AKP (Justice and Development Party) also followed with these changes. It has almost now become a rule for political parties in Turkey to elect one male and one female deputy leader.

The second radical change was that for the first time in the Turkish parliament, women started to talk about important issues, including defence, foreign relations, economic and energy investments and the state budget. I was the first woman who was elected to the commission of state budget planning and became the only woman working with 44 men. Previously, women were almost always limited to a few issues, like family matters and some social problems. All other topics, especially

those connected with defence budgets and policies, were left to men to deal with. We challenged this conservative approach and our female MPs started to make proposals regarding almost all issues.

This was another shock for the other political parties. They could not understand and accept that women should also take part on defence budget issues. They did not want women to have any involvement with important state matters. They wanted women just to speak about women’s issues, children and family matters. We destroyed this very bad, men-oriented political tradition.

The third important change is that with our party co-chair leadership system and practice we pushed for the Turkish legal system to be changed. Now it is legal in Turkey, other political parties can use the same system. However, until now, no other political parties except the Public’s Democratic Party (HDP), the Kurdish dominated party, have adopted this practice in parliament.

NA,LT: These very important changes have challenged many traditions in the Turkish political system. Do you think these positive changes will continue and perhaps further close the gender gap in practice?

GK: Of course the long history of inequality has created huge gaps and it is not possible to close these in 10 or 20 years. After 2007 we did not stop. In the 2011 election, more women gained power, and in the 2014 local election and the 2015 general election we have reached almost equal levels of representation in the Kurdish political party, as well as at the levels of city, town and village representation. As a party, we hold mayoral power in 102 different cities and towns in Turkey and in all of these, the mayors rule according to the co-chair system, with one man and one woman. We have had to fight for this. Our male friends started with the idea that they could understand equality at the level of the political party, but not for mayors. They thought it was a position where men can do better and make decisions more quickly. After a long battle we

have won this argument as well. As you see at all levels we have to fight to have any meaningful equality. Now co-mayors make decisions together and equally. One is not more important than the other. We try to create full and permanent equality.

This is not just about numbers of individuals but also about the equality of input from different genders. We are now working on making the co-chair system at the mayoral level legal: it is practiced de facto by us but is not yet legal. But we made similar changes around political leadership and I believe we will do it at mayoral level too. As a party and as a community, we have increased trust in women's roles and positions.

This is not something we were given. We have had to fight for every single advance. For that reason I want to believe that these rights and the fight for equality is not going to be taken away from women. But we cannot relax and must keep on working even harder than we have already done.

NA,LT: From your experiences we can see the creation of any permanent equality is not an easy process. The outcome of our research in the Middle East but also other contexts around the globe indicate that in many places successful women forget their gendered identity after a while. Especially women leaders often buy into and project masculinist identities. As co-mayor of Diyarbakir what are the advantages or disadvantages of working as a woman? How much, and in what ways can you represent your gender identity?

GK: To be mayor of Diyarbakir is a very important and honourable position. However, this can be sometimes a problem, especially if you come from a strong political background, like me. To have the experience of my political background and having been an MP for two terms, as well as having been the co-chair of the party in the past might all look like an advantage. But in practice, all this does not help women's rights in general. Many of our male friends say that I can do it, because I have this great experience unlike other women.

They do not want to see me as a result of the success of the Kurdish women's movement. Instead they want to believe and see that Gültan is an exception. I try to explain and fight against this very wrong assumption. There is the strong power of the Kurdish women's movement behind my individual success. Without this movement, I would not be here. We, within the Kurdish women's movement, now try to make those still adhering to the patriarchal tradition understand that every woman can be as successful as every man, at least if they are given equal support, chances and trust. My story is not just my story; it is the story of the success of Kurdish women.

Another danger we should be aware of is that those in the male dominated tradition do not want to see a successful woman as a woman any more. They de-genderise successful women. They try to kill our gender identity, to see us as men, even expecting us to act like men. They believe that every successful woman has male hormones. We must not tolerate this. They do not mind if I as a Gültan, co-mayor of Diyarbakir, enter male areas, such as mosques or teashops. But they don't want me as a woman. They say: 'you are welcome, because you are our President, but we don't want other women here.' According to them, if somebody is mayor, they have reached the level of men. When I remind them that I am also a woman they still hesitate to accept this idea. As you can see, there are still many barriers. One ends and another one starts.

NA,LT: If we look at work places and traditionally male dominated public spaces more broadly, what level of change have you witnessed over the last years?

GK: There were not any women deputy mayors previously in Diyarbakir. All four deputies were men. After several months of battles we managed to get a position for women. There were 19 different departments below the mayor of Diyarbakir and women were managing just two of them. Now we have increased this to six, but the aim is to have equal numbers. The problem was not that we did not have qualified

women for these positions before, in fact we had much better qualified women than men ready to work. But these positions were seen as positions for men.

Many women also accepted these traditions until recently. As part of Diyarbakir municipality, we have established a special department named Department of Women Policies. There are no similar examples of this in Turkey in any other local areas. This new department will have three main foci: 1. to deal with and reduce violence against women; 2. to increase women's education, including making them aware of their rights; 3. to help women gain new skills and become more economically independent. This women's department has the right and a sufficiently senior position to observe all investment programs and to evaluate to what extent these programs include the gender dimension or not.

Our aim is to confront all male-occupied spaces and make women more independent socially, economically, and legally. Our previous mayor, Mr. Osman Baydemir, also tried to challenge this male dominated ideology. During his time, 20 women were hired for fire-fighter positions and 15 for bus driver positions. These are very important changes. The aim of these policies was to break down traditional barriers. But their male colleagues and the established male ideology made life very difficult for these female fire fighters and bus drivers. Many of them wanted to return to office work. Our male friends defended their actions and claimed that 'fire-fighter and bus drivers are heavy jobs, requiring 24 hour work, including night shifts. How can women do this? We cannot create separate bathrooms and sleeping rooms for them. It will be too expensive and too complicated. Society is not ready'. Our answer is that if doctors, nurses can do their job with separate living conditions, something should be done for fire-fighters and bus drivers too. As you can see many of our male friends are not against women's equality in theory, but when it comes to practice and practicalities, they create many obstacles.

Resistance is not simply coming from society, but it is coming from some of our male friends within our political movement. There is still a long way to go. We should not sacrifice our gendered identity and should not tolerate when they come to us with sexist offers. We also have to remember the obstacles society and we face all the time. It's not just about equality in leadership or gaining some specific numbers in more powerful position. New traditions of equality in the workplace and in society need to be generalized and normalized. If this does not happen then just having women in symbolic positions, like the one I have now, will not be enough for any real, meaningful and permanent equality and freedom.

NA,LT: How do you evaluate the latest situation in Diyarbakir and in the region in general?

GK: As you already know, we have been going through a very difficult time with war and atrocities recently, following a more hopeful time starting with the peace letter of Mr. Abdullah Öcalan during the Newroz celebrations in 2013. We were hoping for true negotiations, reconciliation and democratization in Turkey. However, due to many reasons and developments, the ruling AKP government decided not to pursue a democratic solution to the Kurdish issue and waged another war on Kurds on all fronts, including our city Diyarbakir, other neighbouring cities and towns as well as Rojava. We have lost thousands of people, many of whom are innocent civilians, young children and women. Our cities and towns have almost been invaded and many districts were completely destroyed with all houses demolished, and the infrastructure destroyed. As if all this was not enough, we, as co-mayors are also facing judicial injustices. 22 of our co-mayors were arrested and 31 others were dismissed from office without any concrete legal grounds. Among them, 17 are female co-mayors. Despite all the difficulties and obstacles, we are trying to continue our municipal services on the one hand and show solidarity with the people affected by the clashes on the other hand.

I cannot say that international bodies,

organizations and the media have been sensitive and attentive enough to the problems we are facing. However, as we know from past experiences, international campaigns and solidarity work is crucial in stopping atrocities and clashes. I hope the western world breaks its silence and puts more pressure on Turkey and the ruling AKP so that the government will shift towards negotiation for a peaceful solution of the problems.

NA,LT: How did the more recent wave of crack down and clashes influence your work and struggle for greater gender-based equality and justice?

GK: I think Kurdish women are having a more difficult time now than at any other time in the last three decades. The state's military operations in the Kurdish regions during the last year was no longer limited to rural areas. They have destroyed all city life and put a huge burden on people's shoulders, especially on women. The Turkish Human Rights Organisation has published a report about what has happened between 16 August 2015 and 18 March 2016 in 7 cities and 22 towns in the Kurdish regions. According to this report, a total of 1 million and 642 thousand people were affected by the state's operations and curfews. 320 people have lost their lives (72 children and 62 women). Tens of thousands of houses were destroyed. At least 250 thousand people are homeless now, because of the destruction of their houses. Women and children have been especially affected by this damage. Most of them have been living in uncivilized conditions in tents without water and electricity for months. They cannot find enough food and clean water to keep them alive. They don't have access to any health system. Although women have tried to protect themselves and their children from illnesses, the rates of premature birth, neonatal deaths, stillbirth, and child deaths have all increased. Children are traumatised and most have lost their normal lives and trust.

During the military operations, the death of 62 women illustrates how women have been used as easy targets by the state. In Silopi, the 57 year old Taybet Inan was killed by state forces

but her body was left on the street for 7 days, because snipers targeted anyone who tried to remove her body. This shows how the state uses women's bodies as part of its politics and sees women and their actions as dangerous. It is an important proof that the masculine state hates women.

In the Kurdish women's movement, we have tried to help our people. We continue our education programmes and close connections with women. We are organizing to help people with their daily needs. We try to limit the effects of trauma among women and children. Despite the relentless war by the state against our people, women have not surrendered. They continue to resist in many ways. Many of our friends and political activists have been killed, including Asya Yuksel (the spokesperson for the Cizre Women's Council), Seve Demir (the Women's Rights representative for Silopi), Fatma Uyar and Pakize Nayır. These women did not leave their towns, cities, but continued to help their people despite knowing their lives were in danger.

Because of the war conditions and other urgent priorities, we are focusing less on violence against women within families. We are not ignoring this important issue, but most of our workers have to deal with other problems at the moment. This provides important evidence of yet another way that war and conflict increases violence against women, especially within families and on the street. I hope the war conditions will not continue - this would put women's rights in further danger and even put us back to the old days. I hope this difficult time will end soon and will even help us to move the Kurdish women's movement one more step further on, as we managed in the 1980s and 1990s.

NA,LT: Did you expect the latest military coup? How is the failed coup and its aftermath affecting Kurdish women and people in general?

GK: As I mentioned at the beginning of our interview, myself and many other Kurds have directly suffered as a result of previous military coups in Turkey. I was taken to the infamous

Diyarbakir prison following the military coup (12 September 1980). I know very well the bad effects of a military coup. There has always been the possibility of a military coup in Turkey. For that reason, the recent military coup was no surprise to me. I am very angry that no proper measures were taken to stop this coup. As a mayor of Diyarbakir, I have responsibilities for my people. I worry that this will affect our city and our people negatively. This is what always happened during and after the previous military coups. If I go back to that evening, on 15 July 2016, we first tried to work out if there were any street clashes and conflict happening in our city. The leader of the HDP, Mr Selahattin Demirtaş, was in Diyarbakir that evening. I visited him and talked to him about the coup and its possible results. The HDP made a strong official statement straight away and made their position very clear: they were totally against any military coup. We anxiously followed all developments that evening and afterwards, just like many other Kurdish people and HDP members.

Looking at the results: we can see that the high ranking military generals and

personnel who carried out a very brutal war against Kurdish people were directly involved in this military coup. This shows that the war in Kurdistan and the level of democracy in Turkey are directly connected with one another. Sadly we can see that these generals, who have carried out crimes against Kurds and violated all human rights in Kurdistan, are not blamed for this reason. They are only blamed for a coup attempt, carried out against democracy.

But we should know that the war in Kurdistan and the coup mentality are interconnected. If the crimes and war in the country continue, especially what we have witnessed against Kurds in the last two years, there will be always a strong possibility that entrenched military ideologues will continue to attempt coups, as they try to control power. War in Kurdistan increases the military mentality and opens a way for anti-democratic actions in the country. With no shame, the generals who organised the coup, are claiming the significant role they played in the war against Kurds as part of their defense. They try to justify themselves by proclaiming

what big Turkish nationalists they are.

I am quite sure that the war against Kurds in the last two years, which was led by the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government, was planned and carried out by these military generals and police chiefs. We understand exactly how well these generals and police chiefs understand democracy. However, even after the coup, the AKP government has not shown any clear sign that they are going to stop the war against Kurds. If the AKP is really keen on democracy and is a true champion of democratic values, they could learn lessons from the latest military coup and adopt democratic solutions to the Kurdish issue. We do not yet know what kind of strategy will now be followed by Erdoğan, the Turkish president, concerning the Kurdish issue. After the coup Erdoğan and the AKP have started a dialogue with most of the opposition political parties. However, since the HDP and Kurds are not included in this dialogue, this has created suspicions that a democratic solution may not be the priority for the Erdoğan and his government.

12 August 2016

The Neoliberal Education Reform on Shaky Ground

19 August 2016, by The Revolutionary Socialist Coordinating Committee of Mexico

The CNTE strike began last May 15 in the states of Michoacán, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas, and many other regions of the country. It was the only alternative left to this sector of the teachers' union for defending their right to job security, free education, and the secular, social, and nationalist educational content at risk today from the individualistic criteria dictated by the great international economic powers.

The strike was initiated by the almost

300,000-member CNTE, the democratic current inside the corrupt, bureaucratized National Educational Workers' Union (SNTE), Latin America's biggest union with almost 1.3 million members; the union apparatus is completely subservient to the dictates of the federal government currently in office. The strike has been gaining the active support of parents and other democratic unions, and which has spread to new sectors still under the yoke of corporatist/Institutional Revolutionary

Party (PRI) control known as "charrismo."

In addition to the work stoppage, the CNTE teachers, women and men, have used all kinds of different forms of mobilizations to make their movement strong and visible. The most forceful of these has been to put up blockades on major highways and train tracks to stop the transport of big national and multinational companies' goods. These actions have bitten into the profits of these companies' owners and affected

the functioning of key sectors of the economy, like the car industry and the wholesale and retail trades.

In one town in the state of Oaxaca, Nochixtlán, militarized police massacred a dozen people who were supporting one of the blockades by indigenous teachers and community members. This unmasked the criminal nature of an increasingly unpopular government, radicalizing and strengthening the movement.

This situation showed the government that for the moment it could not beat the CNTE without negatively impact the prospects for the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party in next year's local elections, and that the possibility of a broad social explosion was real. They needed to sit down to negotiate, whether to "manage the conflict" or to come to some sort of agreement that would momentarily cool down a movement that threatens to boil over.

The beginning of negotiations came as a complete shock to a ruling class accustomed to imposing its neoliberal reforms without major obstacles. The

bourgeoisie expressed its fury in statements like that of the Business Coordinating Council that cynically demanded "respect for the rule of law" and that all political parties must assume "the political cost of greater repression," or that of the Confederation of Industrial Chambers threatening to "stop investment and job creation."

Mexico's bourgeoisie knows very well that behind the CNTE and many other sectors in movement today there is sufficient potential to begin a process of strengthening the working class and the possibility of bringing down its neoliberal "reforms."

Regardless of whether the CNTE decides to continue its mobilizations until it brings down the educational reform or it accepts a transitory agreement while continuing to demand the reform's repeal, the freedom of its political prisoners, reinstatement of fired workers, and the cancelation of the punitive nature of the testing imposed by the reform, while strengthening itself inside the SNTE union as a whole, we must continue to surround this magnificent

movement with solidarity.

It is in the heat of great struggles like the one led by the CNTE today that unions need to discuss and propose strategic objectives to change the relationship of forces in society. The most important thing is to take on board the fact that no union organization, no matter how large and powerful, has enough power to change the course of the country. What is needed is the broadest, most disciplined class unity and a political proposal of the class itself to be able to do that. That is the reason that dozens of unions and cooperatives are building a New Workers Confederation.

- Long Live the CNTE Struggle!
- Down with the Neoliberal Educational Reform!
- Freedom for All Political Prisoners!
- Out with Enrique Peña Nieto!

Mexico City August 11, 2016

How Does a Teachers' Union Keep a Government in Check for 90 Days?

19 August 2016, by Heather Dashner Monk

As revolutionary activists, we often think the only sector of society that can really challenge governments are industrial unions. When we do that, we're thinking of the long-term general ideas about point-of-production workers and neglecting to look at each social formation as it has developed historically. Obviously, in the last 40 years, we have seen the rise of many non-union movements that have challenged different aspects of bourgeois society (feminism, LGBTIQ, ecology movements), but when it comes to unions, we still tend to think only of industrial workers as central to our strategy.

In Mexico and the Fourth

International, we've had this debate since the 1979 congress that oriented us to what we called then "the turn to industry." At that time, in Mexico, we said that we also had to turn to certain service unions like the teachers, not only industry, to embed ourselves in the central sectors of the working class. Although at the time it was rather controversial, I still think it was the right move.

Why is that?

Mexico's teachers' union, the National Educational Workers' Union (SNTE) is the largest in all of Latin America (1.3

million members). In a country with approximately 16,000 registered unions —that is, enormous fragmentation— and only 7 or 8 million of the 30 million workers in the formal sector unionized, 1.3 million workers make up a big chunk. At the same time that we were talking about the turn to industry including a turn to this union, an enormous opposition movement was emerging in it, which gave rise to the National Educational Workers Coordinating Committee (CNTE), which demanded the ouster of the bureaucratic PRI-controlled leadership in office "for life" and decent working conditions and wages for teachers. Several years later, it

was successful in toppling the original bureaucratic leader, who the PRI abandoned as unsustainable and replaced with another, who ended up doing exactly the same thing and is now in jail.

The CNTE has survived to this day, with a membership of from 300,000 to 400,000, and leads several big locals around the country. In many states those locals have been the prime movers for broad popular mobilizations; the case of Oaxaca in 2006, when CNTE-led Local 22 spearheaded the huge APPO popular movement for different demands, is the most noteworthy until the current movement.

But there are other reasons that this union and its democratic opposition are important in Mexico: traditionally,

teachers are some of the most respected members of almost any community, neighborhood, or town —“unfortunately, this is not reflected in their pay today, as evidenced by the constant struggles of the CNTE over the last 30 years.

Their relevance dates back at least to the Mexican Revolution. A rural society at that time, in Mexican towns at that time, the most important authority figures were often the priest and the local teacher, even more than elected officials. They were consulted on any and all matters. During the Revolution, two national groupings were particularly relevant: railroad workers and teachers; the former because they controlled the rails, vital for troop movements, and the second, because they were the ones who knew how to read and write, and often played important roles as advisors to

local and regional secular and military leaders. After the Revolution, brigades of teachers went out into the countryside to carry out literacy campaigns as part of the 1930s “socialist education” drive.

The term “maestro” (professor, teacher) continues to be a mark of respect. And this respect is amplified when the teachers are bilingual and work in —“and are often from” indigenous communities. This tradition has migrated with people to the cities, where education continues to be seen as the stepping stone to progress and personal social mobility.

I hope this introductory article offers a little more context about Mexico and why teachers can have the kind of effect they are having on an entire society in crisis.

Stop state Islamophobia! No to the burkini ban

18 August 2016

“I understand the mayors who, in this moment of tension, have reacted by looking for solutions to avoid public order disturbances. (...) So I support those who have issued bans, if they are motivated by the desire to encourage living together without political ulterior motive,” Mr Valls said in Provence. Or a masterly demonstration of how to say the opposite of what one does! For mayors who make orders banning “burkinis” and Valls in supporting them do not solve any problems, they create one from scratch. Like JP Chevènement, tipped in a spurt of national unity to chair the Foundation for Islam in France, who, in his first speech, advises Muslims to show “discretion”, a whole programme! These statements consciously maintain a racist and

Islamophobic climate, which then allows hundreds of people to demonstrate as they did in Bastia with the exclusionary cry “We’re at home here”. They are preparing explosions of street violence and rolling out the red carpet for the FN nationally who will just reap the benefits in the elections.

The NPA denounces this instrumentalisation of women’s rights and defends women’s right to freely decide for their own bodies against those who want to force them to cover or uncover them.

In the name of fighting terrorism the government has created a permanent state of emergency. Racism, Islamophobia are aimed at making

these attacks on freedom acceptable through stigmatizing a particularly exploited and oppressed part of the population, designated as potentially dangerous.

Erecting barriers to enclose all in their supposed “community” and prevent solidarity and a common fightback against antisocial and repressive policies, this is the dreadful trap before us!

Faced with this sickening outburst and the law and order offensive, a broad-based response is needed against racism and Islamophobia, against repression and the state of emergency, for equal rights.

Montreuil, August 17, 2016

The Long Struggle of Mexican Teachers

17 August 2016, by **Dan La Botz**

The Mexican Teachers Union (SNTE) has 1.4 million members, with two hundred thousand or more active in the dissident National Coordinating Committee (CNTE). For four months, CNTE has been engaged in strikes and direct actions that have at times paralyzed the states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Michoacán.

The CNTE has been leading a massive movement for thirty-seven years in a struggle to win teachers higher wages and protect public education. [More recently](#), in its battle against the government's education reform law, it has proposed a new educational model for the country.

How did teachers in Mexico acquire such a central place in the country's social and political history? How did they become such an organized force both in the government's corporative labor and political system, as well as in the working class and social movement that challenges the government? What is the dissident teachers movement and what does it want?

The Era of the Mexican Revolution

The root of the teachers' role in modern Mexico is in the revolutionary period in which primary and secondary educators played the role of political advisers to the peasant movement for agrarian reform.

From the Spanish conquest in the 1520s to the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the Catholic Church had provided what little formal education there was for the Mexican people. While the best Catholic schools were reserved for the wealthy and the tiny middle class, schools for workers and the peasantry were few and the

quality of education was poor.

During the dictatorship of Mexican president [Porfirio Díaz](#) (1876-1911) the government had established the first public education system, though it too was very limited and reached very few of the country's young people. It was the Mexican Revolution that brought mass public education to the country.

The Mexican Revolution had several implicit goals and eventual achievements: distribution of land to the peasants, recognition of labor unions, nationalization of the oil industry, and the establishment of a free, secular, public education system for all. When the violent period of 1910-1920 ended, [President Álvaro Obregón](#) created the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) in 1921 and appointed [José Vasconcelos](#), the philosopher and writer, the author of *La raza cósmica* (The Cosmic Race), to head it.

Vasconcelos, who had been allied with the revolution's left wing "the Convention of Emiliano Zapata and Francisco "Pancho" Villa" had earlier been appointed to head the National University of Mexico appointed by President Adolfo de la Huerta. Vasconcelos had created the university's famous motto: "Por mi raza hablará el espíritu" ("The spirit will speak through my race"). To make that idea a reality he promoted popular education that was nationalistic, but also Latin American in character.

As head of the university, Vasconcelos had launched a national literacy campaign with volunteer teachers, and as head of the SEP he continued to promote the idea of education as a vehicle for the emancipation of the Mexican people.

Vasconcelos compared his teachers to missionaries, evangelists of the

revolution. The teacher had a sacred mission: the uplift of the poor, the oppressed, and the uneducated.

The Period of Agrarian Reform

The teachers accepted the assignment, sometimes at the risk of their lives.

During the [revolutionary upheaval](#) of 1910 to 1920 and again during the agrarian reform movement of the 1920s to the 1940s, when peasants rose up to demand the return of ancestral fields from the hacienda landlords, it was the local schoolteacher who often helped the illiterate farmers to formulate their demands. Teachers, we might say, became the union stewards of the peasant movement of the 1910s and 1920s.

The teacher, almost surely the only one in the village who read the newspaper from time to time and very likely the only one who had ever read a book, took on the task of phrasing the villagers' demands in the language of the radical agrarian reform movement, which in regions like Michoacán and Veracruz often had a socialist character. In fact, in the early 1920s some of the leaders of the radical peasant movement in those states joined the newly founded Communist Party.

The local village elementary school "few went beyond the sixth grade in those years" became the bastion not only of the agrarian reform movement but also of the Mexican Revolution more generally.

Before the revolution, the Catholic Church had provided most of the schooling available and almost none to the rural poor. The [Constitution of 1917=><https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/>

[mexican-revolution-and-the-united-states/constitution-of-1917.html](#)] ended the Church's role in education and required the state to provide free, lay education for all.

The public schoolteachers tended to be free-thinkers and often militant atheists who accused the Catholic Church and its clerics of keeping the people in ignorance, filling their heads with superstition, and charging them exorbitant fees for the required sacraments of baptism, marriage, and absolution. The rural teachers, though hampered by their own limited education, strove, on the contrary, to offer a modern, rational, and scientific view of the world.

During the 1920s, the teachers' role as advocates for the peasants, opponents of the Church, and campaigners for continuing and deepening the revolution made them targets for the landlords who sent the pistoleros (gunmen) of their guardias blancas (white guards) to assassinate the local schoolteacher, an all-too-common occurrence in that era. Still rural teachers stepped forward, continuing to put pen to paper to give expression to the peasants' demand for their land.

Socialist Education

The Great Depression of the 1930s had led to the collapse of some agricultural sectors and to the failure of many haciendas, weakening the landlord class. When [Lázaro Cárdenas](#) became president in 1934, he provided support both to the agrarian reform movement fighting for the haciendas' land and to the rural schools and their teachers.

With his support a stronger movement of both peasant leagues and industrial labor unions developed and became strong supporters of the president. Cárdenas not only distributed millions of acres of land to indigenous and peasant communities in the form of the collectively owned ejidos, but also in some cases provided arms to peasant organizations to defend that land from the guardias blancas.

At the same time, Cárdenas worked to strengthen public education but also to radicalize it. Cárdenas, who considered himself a socialist, saw his project as using the government to control economic developments and modern industry to create socialism in an agrarian society.

As part of that project, the ruling party that he headed amended the constitution in 1934 to read, "State education will be socialist in character." The Mexican Communist Party (PCM), which provided some staff for the SEP in this period, shared the president's goal of socialist education.

The government's implementation of the new [socialist education project](#) "which many quite correctly interpreted as atheistic education" led immediately to conflict with the Church and with other conservative forces, as well as with the country's pious peasantry.

In some areas the locals burned the schools and cut off the teachers' ears; in others, they assassinated teachers. Many areas of the country were deeply divided over the issue and some were in virtual rebellion.

Many from both the Left and the Right look back on Cárdenas's decision to implement socialist education as a great error in political judgment, though some historians argue that the struggle around socialist education contributed to the formation of a sense of multicultural nationalism.

The Founding of SNTE

During Cárdenas's tenure (1934-1940), the labor unions had supported him, and he had encouraged the unions' organization drives and strikes. At the same time he pressured the unions to centralize, forming national federations while also dividing them into three different federations, one for workers (the CTM), one for public employees (OATSE), and one for peasants (the CNC). (While teachers in some large cities and in some states had organized, forming various teacher

federations, the teachers did not succeed in forming a single national teachers union during those years.)

Cárdenas brought the new labor federations into the state-party, changing its name from the Revolutionary National Party (PNR) to the [Party of the Mexican Revolution](#) (PRM) with the slogan "For Socialism."

Cárdenas envisioned an agrarian socialism guided and created from above through the state-party. So, ironically, Mexico's most left-wing president was also the creator of a corporative system "that is, one where the state-party dominated the unions and workers.

Then Cárdenas chose as successor to the presidency [Manuel Ávila Camacho](#) (1940-46), a leader who was far more conservative.

It was Ávila Camacho who in 1943 created the SNTE, the merger of the Union of Education Workers (SUNTE), the Mexican Union of Teachers and Education Workers (SMMTE), the Autonomous National Union of Education Workers (SNATE), and the Union of Workers of Mexican Education (STEMRM) and other smaller organizations.

Between 1943 and 1949 SNTE became the locus of struggle between the religious right, the state-party, and leftists. The ruling party succeeded in breaking the power of the clerical conservatives in SNTE.

Then in 1949, under the pressure of the US State Department, the Cold War came to Mexico "a development welcomed by the leaders of the state-party, opening a second front of struggle in the SNTE.

The Cold War led the ruling party, now known as the [Institutional Revolutionary Party](#) (PRI), to drive the Communists out of the Secretary of Education. The SNTE excluded them from the union.

During the 1950s Mexico's educational system came to be controlled by two powerful state bureaucracies: the SEP and the SNTE, the leaders of which collaborated to control the teachers, many of whom

were veterans of the social movements and struggles of the 1920s and 1930s.

In Mexico's system, labor bureaucrats were often imposed on the unions by the state-party, sometimes violently. The SEP collaborated with the SNTE to provide funds for an army of union staff and for no-show teaching jobs. State SEP and SNTE officials collaborated with the PRI governors and local officials with the village bosses, the *caciques*.

Union officials were expected to ensure that the workers did not strike for higher wages and did vote for the ruling PRI, for which the officials were rewarded by also becoming congressmen, senators, and governors, as well as leaders of the PRI itself.

The teachers played an important role at the grassroots to ensure that the PRI, through fear and favors, won all national elections, held all political offices from city hall, to governor, to the congress, and the presidency. The president controlled the justices of the Supreme Court.

The First Dissident Teacher Movement

This was the era of the "Mexican Miracle," the rapid growth of the Mexican economy at a rate of 3 to 4 percent with 3 percent inflation rate from 1940-1970.

The miracle was based on the nationalist economic model, the substitution of imports, the deployment of the state's nationalized industries that controlled much of the economy, and on keeping workers' wages low. The state-controlled union's job during this period was to keep workers "from demanding higher wages."

It was this that led to the first dissident teacher movement in Mexico.

The movement was led by [Othón Salazar](#) (1924-2008), a teacher who had been born in Guerrero, studied first at the Oaxtepec Normal School, then at the Ayotinzapa Normal School, and finally at the National Teachers

College, becoming a teacher in 1951 and a member of a Young Communist Club in 1952. He was soon the recognized leader of the teachers at the Superior Normal School in Mexico City.

Under Salazar's leadership, Local 9 of the SNTE struck for higher wages in 1956. Then in 1957 he and his fellow teachers organized the Revolutionary Teachers Movement (MRM), initiating a broader movement among teachers in Mexico City and other parts of the country. In 1958 the MRM began to lead a series of protest demonstrations and marches for higher wages in Mexico City.

The government responded to the protests by breaking up teacher demonstrations and arresting and briefly jailing Salazar, accusing him of being a Communist and agent of the Soviet Union, and guilty of sedition.

The government [suppressed the movement](#), and when Salazar led a second strike at the Normal Superior in 1960, he was fired. He continued to head the MRM from 1956-1977.

The MRM protests took place at the same time that another Communist, Demetrio Vallejo, became leader of the Mexican Railroad Workers Union and led a general strike of the country's railroads.

That strike, which paralyzed the country, interpreted by both the Mexican and US governments as a Communist attempt at revolution, was suppressed by the army; a few were killed, hundreds arrested, and the movement absolutely broken.

The defeat of the Communist Party led railroad worker and teacher movements put an end to large-scale social movements in Mexico for a decade.

Suppressing the Democracy Movement

Mexico changed dramatically in the 1950s and 60s. The revolution of 1910-1940 had given the peasants land, brought schools and health

clinics, and the population expanded dramatically. The postrevolutionary governments also built roads and highways that led to the cities. The children and grandchildren of the revolution moved from the countryside to urban areas by the millions, leading to an astronomical expansion of urban areas and populations.

The PRI's old structure of workers and peasants no longer adequately represented the country's expanded social structure with its middle class and millions of high school and college students. Young Mexicans had higher aspirations for themselves and their country.

Then came the [Cuban Revolution](#) of 1959, inspiring movements for radical social change in Mexico.

A new movement for democracy developed at the base of Mexican society, leading in 1968 to massive demonstrations for democracy on the eve of the [Mexican Olympics](#).

While students and their teachers had been at the center of the movement, hundreds of thousands throughout the country rallied to it. [President Gustavo D  az Ordaz](#) (1964-1970) responded by calling out the police and army, which attacked the movement, killing as many as three hundred at Tlatelolco, the Plaza of the Three Cultures.

The events of 1968 became a great turning point in Mexican history, leading to a series of democracy movements through the following decades.

The New Left Goes to the People

The PRI's violent repression of the democracy movement led tens of thousands of young Mexicans to turn to the Left.

The pro-Soviet Mexican Communist Party (PCM) grew some in this period, but it was the far left "followers of Fidel Castro and Ernesto "Che" Guevara, Mao Tse-Tung, and Leon Trotsky" which had the greatest impact.

The Fidelistas, Maoistas, Trotskyistas, and some neo-Cardenistas went to the people: to poor urban neighborhoods, to rural villages, to factories in industrial areas. Soon they had recruited followers among peasants, autoworkers, steel workers, and teachers.

Simultaneous with the new democracy movement, a worker insurgency lasted from 1968 into the mid-1970s had developed among industrial workers and some public employees. The insurgency became a laboratory where leftist activists could test out their ideas about organizing a revolution.

The Left debated strategies for changing Mexico's bureaucratic, corrupt, and violent state-party controlled labor unions. Some left groups opted for creating new independent unions, while others decided that they should struggle within the existing structure, fighting to build movements for democracy that could take control of local unions and eventually of the national union.

A group of leftist teachers decided on the latter strategy.

The Founding of the CNTE

Today's dissident teacher movement began in the mid-1960s among mostly women, indigenous teachers in the state of Chiapas.

These bilingual or multilingual teachers, teaching in Spanish and one or more of the Mayan languages of the region, began to organize to win higher wages. Though women formed a majority of the rank-and-file, virtually all of the movement's leaders were men.

Several things created the context for their early efforts for an organization among these teachers. First, [President Luis Echeverr  ](#) (1970-76) ended the old system of "Hispanicization of the Indians" and made the SEP responsible for indigenous education in their own languages and Spanish.

The result was the training in the rural normal schools of thousands of indigenous bilingual educators who

found a new, significant, and dignified role in their communities. These teachers became over time a counterweight to the PRI's cacique and clientelistic system of patronage in the village as well as a challenge to the SEP's bureaucratically controlled union delegates.

Second, while most teachers received their basic teacher education in the rural normal schools, many later went on to study at the National Teachers College and the Superior Normal School in Mexico City. Their professors in the 1970s, many of them part of the New Left made up of Maoists and Trotskyists, taught the new teachers the elements of Marxism.

Thus a grassroots indigenous movement became connected to national leftist organizations, including the Maoist Proletarian Line (LP) and the Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT).

While the Maoists, the dominant tendency, focused on building local bases in schools and communities, the Trotskyists emphasized the importance of a struggle against the state and for socialism. Both of these currents would have an important influence on the CNTE, their politics tempered over time by their involvement in the indigenous communities.

The new teachers' movement of the 1970s began with a struggle to raise workers' wages but soon became a struggle focused against the SNTE's bureaucracy. But the struggle was a multifaceted one against the PRI, against the SEP, against the officials of the SNTE, but perhaps most important against the local cacique, the political boss at the intersection of those three organizations.

The bilingual teachers, a majority of them women, used their biweekly meetings with their students' parents to explain their movement and its goals and gradually [built an alliance](#) with many of the parents and the communities.

The Revolutionary Vanguard

From 1949 to 1972 the SNTE had been dominated by Jes  s Robles Mart  nez, the eminence grise of the union. But when it became clear that he was unable to maintain control of the restive teachers, he was ousted and replaced by Carlos Jonguitud Barrios, as Joe Foweraker [recounts](#) in *Popular Mobilization in Mexico: The Teachers' Movement 1977-87*.

Jonguitud was an official of Local 9 in Mexico City, the head of the National Vigilance Committee (responsible for union discipline), and the leader of a powerful caucus called Revolutionary Vanguard. He also served as a PRI congressman, senator, and state governor, as well as head of the Congress of Labor (CT).

With the blessing of President Echeverr  , in 1972 Jonguitud and his Revolutionary Vanguard took charge of the union while at the same time the government increased education spending, a development which made available more funds for the SEP and so for the SNTE's patronage machine.

Where financial favors failed to win over local leaders, Jonguitud Barrios collaborated with the SEP to fire union leaders, and if necessary he had his opponents threatened, beaten, and in a few cases killed.

The CNTE Drives out Barrios

Still, the dissidents in Chiapas continued their fight for higher wages and for the democratic control of their local union, and succeeded. In 1979 the teachers from Chiapas and other states created the CNTE as a caucus within the SNTE.

While neither the Trotskyists nor the Maoists in the CNTE's leadership "nor for that matter the indigenous communities that formed its base" were models of democracy, coming together they engendered a movement that focused on building democratic schools and local unions as well as engaging in campaigns of direct action

to pressure the caciques, the SNTE, the SEP, and the PRI. The Chiapas activists fought to hold a democratic state union convention and to elect their own union leaders, a task they accomplished in 1981.

Within a few years teachers in Oaxaca had also succeeded in winning control of their local union while at the same time the reform movement was growing in Mexico City, though in all of these areas maintaining the union's autonomy was a constant struggle. The CNTE carried out a number of strikes, some successful and some failures, but continued the fight year after year.

In 1989 CNTE led a national strike, strongest in the South and Southeast, but with tremendous support as well in Mexico City. CNTE mobilized over three hundred thousand teachers in huge demonstrations, demanding the removal of Carlos Jonguitud Barrios and the calling of a democratic national convention of the union.

With Mexico City paralyzed by striking and protesting teachers, in April 1989 [President Carlos Salinas de Gortari](#) of the PRI called Jonguitud to his office and fired him, ending his eighteen-year dictatorship over the teachers.

The teachers, however, did not win the right to hold a democratic national convention; rather, Salinas then put Elba Esther Gordillo, also an official from Local 9, into power as the first woman head of the SNTE. She in turn ratified the election victory of the democratic opposition in Local 9 in Mexico City, which succeeded in calming the dissidents.

Gordillo was no reformer. She had been a loyal, hardline member of Jongitud's Revolutionary Vanguard and that remained her base in the union, though she also worked to win over leaders of the CNTE and collaborated with the SEP's education reformers.

Out of a series of political struggles and negotiations within the union she soon constructed a new bureaucratic machine run from above, though the state of Chiapas and Oaxaca [continued](#) to stand in opposition.

Loyalty and Dissent

Gordillo maintained political control over the union in the same fashion as her predecessors: through a combination of rewards for loyalty and punishment for opposition.

The education system had grown tremendously, with more students going on from grammar to high school. The budget had grown along with it. In the prebendalist corporative system, the SEP continued to provide the SNTE with funds that in addition to the union's dues money, sustained a vast bureaucracy with many sinecures and no-show jobs.

Her administration was also repressive, and she has been [accused](#) of responsibility for the murder of teacher Misael Nuñez Acosta in January 1981. He was, according to the CNTE, only one of 151 teachers [murdered](#) in the preceding decades.

Several other teachers have been murdered since then. With the exception of Chiapas and Oaxaca, Gordillo's hold on the union remained secure.

With a firm grip on the SNTE, Gordillo also became a major political figure, attempting to use the union to gain political power.

Like other union officials she served as a congressperson and also as a senator, but she also rose through the party ranks to the top echelons, eventually becoming general secretary of the executive committee of the PRI, the party's top office, in 2002.

All of this was traditional and typical, but in 2000 everything suddenly changed with the election to the presidency of [Vicente Fox=><https://www.britannica.com/biography/Vicente-Fox>] of the National Action Party (PAN).

Fox and the PAN did not dismantle the corporative system, as some had hoped. The conservatives used it for their own purposes, forming political relationships with top union leaders. Fox and Gordillo became friends, providing her with influence in the

SEP, a continuing source of money and jobs for the union staff.

In part because of her alliance with Fox, in 2005 Gordillo found herself losing a fight with Roberto Madrazo, another PRI leader. She resigned her office as head of the PRI and in 2005 formed her own New Alliance Party based on the SNTE. At the same time she supported the PAN's candidate [Felipe Calderón](#).

Her New Alliance Party won a remarkable 14 percent of vote in 2006, making her a significant force in the congress. That same year she tried to regain her position as head of the PRI, but the PRI leadership expelled her from the organization because she had supported the candidate of another party.

Since the presidency of Carlos Salinas (1988-1994), Mexico had adopted a neoliberal economic model "open markets, foreign investment, cuts in social services, attacks on labor unions" and now the government began to impose that model on education. In 2008, president Calderón and Gordillo reached an agreement called The Alliance for Quality Education (ACE).

ACE required that teachers take an exam before being hired by the SEP and that the union end the sale of teaching positions. While both of those principal provisions might seem reasonable, it was widely understood that the long-term goal was greater government control over the union and the teachers and an end to the nationalist and popular educational model handed down since the revolution.

The CNTE rejected the ACE agreement, arguing that it was an attack on the union and on public education.

The Education Reform Law

The presidencies of Vicente Fox and Felipe Calderón had both proven to be failures from the point of view of the Mexican capitalist class as well as of the nation's working people.

Calderón's [war on drugs](#) led to the death of sixty thousand people and the forced disappearance of another twenty thousand as well as the displacement of tens of thousands more. And the economy was stagnant.

With the PAN utterly discredited, and the left-of-center Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) denied election victories through fraud, Mexico's citizens returned to the PRI, electing Enrique Peñ̄a Nieto president.

In December 2012, Peñ̄a Nieto brought the leaders of the PRI, the PAN, and the PRD to Chapultepec Castle where they signed the "Pact for Mexico," an agreement calling for reforms of the tax structure, of the banking system, of energy, of telecommunications, and of education. The education reform law won support from all three major parties, though it was opposed by the Gordillo and the SNTE, and was adopted by Congress in December 2012.

At the center of the education reform was the establishment of a national teacher evaluation. Peñ̄a Nieto's first secretary of public education, Emilio Chuayffet, explained that the test would be obligatory and that failure to administer or take the exam would result in "legal consequences."

The [new law](#) affected hiring, job security, wages, and opportunities for promotion. It also broke the link between the normal schools by allowing all teaching jobs to be open to competition from any college graduate, no matter what they had studied. And teachers would not be able to pass on their jobs to family members or sell the on the market.

Gordillo and the SNTE opposed the reform, saying that the union and teachers had not been consulted in the drafting of it. She would not, however, be allowed to continue to oppose it or to lead a movement against it.

On February 26, 2013, the Peñ̄a Nieto administration had Gordillo arrested on the charge of embezzling millions of dollars in union funds that she reportedly deposited in banks in Europe and spent on real estate.

Mexican Attorney General Jes̄s Murillo Karam [charged](#) Gordillo with money laundering, saying she had used the union funds to pay for airplanes, pilot training, her plastic surgeries, and purchases of luxury items in the United States. Juan D̄az de la Torre, who was a loyal member of her union caucus, became head of the union.

While Gordillo was very likely guilty of the embezzlement of which she was accused, such practices are common in the Mexican labor bureaucracy. The motive for jailing her was political: first she had betrayed the PRI, and then she had opposed Peñ̄a Nieto.

She had to go. Arrested, she was imprisoned awaiting trial, her reputation destroyed, and removed from office she had no political power anymore.

The CNTE took the new education reform law as a declaration of war against the SNTE and especially their dissident movement, beginning a [mobilization](#) of the union's rank-and-file. Just like ACE, the CNTE saw the education reform law as an attack on public education, the union, and themselves as teachers.

The teachers began to protest, but soon found themselves involved in a broader struggle. When on September 26, 2014 police and gang members in Iguala, Guerrero killed six people, wounded twenty-five, and kidnapped forty-three students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Normal School, the CNTE [joined](#) with their protests, which became national in scope.

Challenges Facing the CNTE

Mexico's teachers continue to face the system that has confronted them since the late 1940s: the Institutional Revolutionary Party in power, the powerful secretary of education, the bureaucratic SNTE, and the local caciques.

While the teachers of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Michoac̄n have built powerful movements and won power in their states, the

teachers remain in a constant state of mobilization to defend themselves. Despite almost forty years of struggle, the democratic movement has failed, despite occasional outbursts of activity in some other region, to win power any of the other twenty-eight states.

Constantly criticized in the corporate media, the CNTE struggles to explain its issues to the media and to the public, arguing that it is defending public education, teachers' working conditions, and students' best interests.

The CNTE also continues to work to maintain its relationship with parents and students at the local level, a difficult challenge when the union frequently goes on strike for weeks and even months at a time.

The dissident teachers work to win the support of the public, a part of which is critical of practices such as passing jobs on to family members or selling jobs. The CNTE has also worked recently to develop its own program for education reform.

The CNTE has from the beginning struggled with the question of electoral politics. Since its founding in 1989, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) has been most sympathetic to the dissident teachers and been willing to serve as its political vehicle. But the PRD's factionalism, corruption, and opportunism made it a less than satisfactory political ally.

The fact that the PRD headed both the Guerrero state government and the Iguala city government at the time of the time of the killing of six people and the disappearance of the forty-three [Ayotzinapa Rural Normal School students](#) severely damaged the party's reputation among the teachers.

In June 2015, the CNTE called for a boycott of the elections, but in Oaxaca and Guerrero teachers enforced the boycott by destroying polling places and ballot boxes and burning ballots, leading to some conflicts with local communities.

More recently some CNTE leaders have collaborated with Andr̄s Manuel L̄pez Obrador (popularly called

AMLO) of the Movement for National Regeneration Party (Morena), though many fear that AMLO only uses the union for his own political interests.

So far the dissident teachers have failed to find a political vehicle for their movement.

The epic battle of the CNTE against a series of Mexican governments has taken place during a period in which much of the labor movement has been defeated or demoralized by the

Mexican government.

Gordillo's ally Felipe Calderón destroyed the Mexican Electrical Workers Union and drove Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, leader of the Mexican Miners and Metal Workers Union into exile in Vancouver.

Political parties, government agencies, private employers, crooked lawyers, and gangsters [controlled](#) most labor unions in Mexico. The economy remains stagnant and emigration to the United States has become more

difficult and less rewarding since the Great Recession of 2008.

All of this makes the CNTE's struggle even more remarkable. Despite the murder of several of its activists, the arrest of some of its leaders, and the violent attacks by the police on its demonstrations, the struggle continues.

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[Jacobin](#)

Turkey's Disaster

16 August 2016, by [Cihan Tu?al](#)

But the situation was quickly turned around. The putschists had [acted prematurely](#), and failed to gain key military or popular support. By the end of the weekend, Erdo?an's counter coup was in full swing. In addition to a three-month state of emergency, the president suspended the European Convention on Human Rights and began conducting sweeping purges of the military "which included high-ranking officers key to the war in Kurdistan" and public offices. Erdo?an is riding his newfound veneer of democratic legitimacy and the lack of clarity around who, exactly, planned the coup to consolidate power and isolate his enemies.

Who were the rebels, and what were their motivations? Why has Turkey mutated from the West's model Middle East state into one ruled by an increasingly unstable and illiberal party? Did the United States know about the coup? What will Erdo?an do next?

To understand these questions and more [Jacobin's](#) Duncan Thomas spoke to Cihan Tu?al, who has studied the "Islamic liberalism" of Erdo?an and his Justice and Development Party (AKP). We speak about the AKP's relationship to the military, the nature of the anti-coup popular mobilization,

and the future of Turkish democracy.

The coup seems to have been decisively defeated. Who would the leaders of the coup have been hoping to gain support from, and why did it fail to receive this? Who were their potential allies within the political establishment? Did they have any plan for securing this support other than trying to strike a swift knockout blow?

There was at best a loose [Kemalist "sentiment"](#) in favor of the coup in its first few hours, but as the attempt came to be associated with [Fethullah Gülen](#), the sentiment died away. And that loose sentiment never bordered on street action in favor of the coup, as the latter's nature was unclear from the beginning.

One telling indicator of this lack of enthusiasm was the coverage of (Kemalist stronghold) Halk TV during the coup's first half hour, between around 11 and 11:30 PM. One could perhaps read glimmers of hope on the faces of the TV personnel, but the retired soldiers they contacted for commentary all spoke fiercely against the coup attempt.

In the following hours, the (Kemalist) Republican People's Party (CHP) leader, [Kemal Kılıçdaro?lu](#), also

condemned the coup. In short, there was no elite or popular, military or civilian action, even among most Kemalists. This suggests that the generals acted with great panic and did not have a solid, well-thought-out plan.

We should also note a generational divide in the Kemalist camp. I personally observed that some of Halk TV's older audience members were surprised to see the channel's ambivalence. They were sure this was another "progressive" coup in the mold of May 27, 1960.

Their children and grandchildren, by contrast, either shared the ambivalence of mainstream Kemalist outlets or were outright hostile to the coup. These are the people who participated en masse in the [Gezi Revolt](#). Their lack of enthusiasm for a coup that initially presented itself as Kemalist is a good sign for the future.

Erdo?an has accused the exiled cleric Fethullah Gülen, who you have already mentioned, of being behind the coup; Gülen, meanwhile, claims (perhaps rather improbably) that Erdo?an himself may have staged the whole thing.

Can you tell us something of the history between Erdo?an and Gülen,

and hazard a guess as to who really directed the coup, and why they chose this moment to act? Had there been any indication that such a plot was underway, and why do you think a section of the military chose to move against the government?

The relations between Erdoğan and Gülen have a dramatic history. The mixture of hostility and cooperation, clash and merger, is baffling. Gülen's origins are in the [Nur movement](#), an important modernizing Islamist strand inspired by the cleric-activist Said-i Nursi's writings.

Nur communities are known for their proximity to the established center-right. Gülen's following is one among many such communities, but is distinguished by its emphasis on nationalism, science, and integration with the Western world.

Just as the Gülen community did in its initial years, the National Outlook movement [a religiously conservative group which formed a base among pious provincial businessmen and farmers, and to which Erdoğan previously belonged] definitively broke off from the center-right and founded Turkey's first major Islamist party, the [National Order Party](#) (MNP). In its first two decades, the MNP perceived Gülen and his followers to be dangerous pawns of secular forces.

Hostilities reached a climax in the mid-1990s, when Gülen resisted the rise of the Islamist movement in general and the Welfare Party (RP) in particular [another offshoot of the National Outlook movement, the RP combined a contradictory openness to a free-market economy with an "Owenite" collectivism articulated through Islamic language and morals]. A hot-button issue back then was Islamic covering. Gülen attempted to take the steam off the mobilization against the [veiling ban](#) in universities by issuing a religious decree to the effect that covering one's head is a marginal detail (teferruat) in Islam. Gülenists later sided with the hodgepodge coalition government created by the anti-Islamist coup of 1997.

However, the same coup ultimately cracked down so heavily on Gülenists

that, around the year 2000, they decided to side with the Islamists. Meanwhile, after the debacle of the [1997 coup](#) (which led to the closure of the Welfare Party), Islamists had started to think that Gülen's project of infiltrating the secular state worked much better than confronting it.

This response to the 1997 coup resulted in disturbances in the Virtue Party (FP, which had replaced the Welfare Party after the latter was shut down). Erdoğan's followers disowned the National Outlook movement, split from old-style Islamists, and co-established the AKP with Gülenists.

The AKP was a curious creature from the beginning. Due to its previously confrontational cadres, it carried the credibility of Islamism's anti-elitist, anti-establishment message. Yet at least on the surface, it subscribed to Gülenism: just like the latter, it only put an Islamic veneer on a standard center-rightist package.

During the 2000s, the alliance went so deep that it resembled a merger. It had become difficult to tell who in the ranks of the AKP was an ex-Islamist and who a Gülenist. It appeared, quite deceptively, that as their strategies and ideologies merged, so did their cadres. However, the two groups were simultaneously fighting a bitter war over the spoils of power (cadres, public bids, etc.). Ultimately, tensions surfaced over the Kurdish and Palestinian issues.

The fight became explicit as the Gülen community capitalized on the anti-government sentiment during and after the Gezi Revolt. The clearest example of this was when, using its power in the media and the judiciary, it attempted to file [high-profile corruption cases](#) that could bring down the government. Erdoğan declared war, and he has been cleansing the country of Gülenists ever since.

We should be very cautious about guessing the actors of the recent coup, as there is a lot of misinformation in circulation. Nonetheless, given what we suspect, the coup attempt seems to be a rash move on the part of Gülenists, as a last-minute preemptive attack to stop

the largest purge so far. Rumor has it that this was scheduled for 4 AM on July 16; the coup was launched at 10 PM on July 15.

Relations between the military as a whole and AKP also seem have swung back and forth since the latter came to government. We've seen attempts to curb the military's power "with arrests of many senior commanders from 2007 on, as well as the removal of legal protections for coup leaders in the 2010 constitutional changes, for example.

But more recently, some of those commanders have been released, and the military have been given more leeway to conduct the war in Kurdistan as they see fit "the implication being that the army was regaining its prestige and power within the state. What accounts for these sharp shifts?

It is true that the AKP has carried out [great purges](#) (of alleged Kemalist-putschists) in the military, but this should not lead us to the impression that it is anti-militarist. Since Islamists do not have many military cadres, the party staffed the vacant positions with Gülenists. Erdoğan did not necessarily trust these people, but still resorted to them heavily in his fight against the Kurds.

There has also been another (equally deceptive) peace agreement of sorts between the party and the military in the last year or so. The arrested Kemalist generals were released; and the party glorified the generals fighting on the Kurdish front.

Despite this rapprochement, there was and still is discontent among the military elite and the rank-and-file. Yet most of the military did not join the putschists; some generals and divisions reputed to be strongly Kemalist and generally pro-coup went further and publicly criticized the coup as it was unfolding. This strongly suggests that such figures had indications of a coming action and did not want to be associated with it. They possibly felt that neither the timing nor the leadership was right.

But would their natural inclination

be to support a coup in different circumstances? Do you think the AKP might overreach itself in response to the coup and provoke another down the line?

Can we expect Erdoğan to prepare for this eventuality by, for example, building up the capabilities of paramilitary forces and militant groups within society more loyal to him?

Yes, another coup might occur, but it is impossible to predict when. It might be in a few months, years, or decades. AKP representatives are already calling people to arm themselves.

I am sure there will be some serious paramilitary preparation on their part; police forces are also bound to expand further. Through such calls they want to spread militarization deeper, suggesting that what they anticipate (perhaps even desire) is not just another coup, but outright [civil war](#).

[[A major factor in the defeat of the coup appears to have been popular mobilization. Clearly, this was a mixture of actual AKP supporters, and people wanting to defend the principle of electoral democracy more generally, no matter how distorted that has become under Erdoğan. Every major political party, including those on the Left like the [Peoples' Democratic Party](#) (HDP), have also condemned the coup.

Yet this temporary alliance against the coup is clearly riddled with tensions. Erdoğan and the AKP are already using the coup to cement their position and further attack civil liberties, all while presenting themselves as the embodiment of democracy. The popular mobilizations which took place have also seen clashes between militant Islamists, fascist groups, and the police on one hand, and residents of neighborhoods known as leftist and minority strongholds on the other.

Do you think Erdoğan will succeed in his crackdown?

The AKP's police forces fought the decisive battles, but the mass action seems to have demoralized especially the lower-rank soldiers. It appears

that the putschists did not have the time to convince the foot soldiers. They just told them that the military's occupation of bridges and government buildings was due to a terrorist threat or a routine drill. When these rank-and-file soldiers encountered civilian resistance, they were disoriented. The first series of surrenders initiated with them.

However, the impact of civilian resistance should not be exaggerated. One [thoughtful report](#) by a political journalist suggests that civilians mattered to the degree that the clashes between the two armed sides allowed them to.

Except a few staunchly anti-Islamist outlets, the media initially presented anti-coup protesters as defenders of democracy. However, it soon turned out that Islamist slogans outweighed democratic slogans throughout the mass action. This dimension of the protests finally became clearer during the third day after the attempted coup.

And it goes much further than slogans. The same masses have attacked Kurds, Alevis, and alcohol-consumers, as you have pointed out. Of course, these people had nothing to do with the coup attempt. The pro-government mobs knew this, but deliberately used the opportunity to attack all of their enemies.

The government is now poised to follow the lead of the mobs. Close to [fifty thousand public personnel](#) are to be purged and the number might grow. The chance that even a fraction of these people are seriously linked to a coup that was so poorly organized is, to say the least, extremely low. In all likelihood, many of them are not even [Gülenists](#).

Erdoğan's reaction to the coup is just the latest manifestation of his increasingly authoritarian rule. You cover this in your book, which describes the breakdown of the "liberal-conservative" Islamism once celebrated for its commitment to neoliberal economics and an apparent willingness to operate within formal bourgeois democracy. You theorize the rise of this model

through the Gramscian concept of a "passive revolution."

Can you explain the logic behind this process, how the AKP came to lead it, and why it seems to be degenerating into a more brazen authoritarianism?

The groundwork for the passive revolution was laid by a military regime in 1980. The junta crushed the Left and built a new official ideology based on free markets, conservative Islam, and nationalism. [Turgut Âzal's](#) new center-right popularized and democratized the military's package.

By the 1990s, however, free-market economics had proven ineffective; simultaneously, [Kurdish resistance](#) destabilized the country. Islamist opposition emerged as a strong voice and promised a just economy and the peaceful resolution of the Kurdish question.

After an Islamist coalition was overthrown by the military, the neoliberal wing of the Islamist party split from the main body. It combined forces with the center-right and [Gülenists](#) against the military (and whatever remained of the Left), and this resulted in the formation of the AKP.

Business and other liberal circles believed this could usher in an even more popularly supported version of the Âzal years, which had benefited them immensely. Western powers shared the same belief.

At this point, the [Gülenists](#) joined the former Islamists, believing that the latter ultimately came to adopt their ideology and strategy. All of these actors wholeheartedly supported the AKP for around ten years, during which neoliberalism seemed to work miracles.

However, as [the economy](#) started to slow after the global financial crisis, the AKP embarked on re-Islamizing its base (which itself had liberalized and partially de-Islamized). The regime also sharpened its Islamic and nationalist credentials as it became frustrated with its faltering negotiations with the Kurdish resistance.

After 2011, the [Arab Spring](#) further

boosted its hopes that Islamism (rather than liberal-conservatism) would be a better foreign policy orientation too. The Gezi Revolt then sealed the fate of Islamic liberalism: Erdoğan and his circle decided, given the disorder in the region and the strengthening opposition at home, that they could no longer play the democracy game.

Passive revolutions are essentially “revolution-restorations.” The AKP had restored the 1980 package (neoliberal, nationalist conservatism) through absorbing revolutionary Islamist cadres and discourses.

However, as interwar Italy “the classical case” demonstrates, passive revolutions are extremely unstable, as combining revolution and restoration is explosive by nature. They are full of (structured) surprises. Italy’s passive revolution was one of the factors that led to the most destructive war in history. Turkey’s has so far [destroyed Syria](#), but more is in stock.

Can you expand a little? Do you see the potential for direct confrontations between Turkey and other states in the region?

The Turkish stance on Syria was extremely militaristic. The regime wanted to push the West into a total war, but it failed. I don’t think it will embark on such adventures alone (and a possible war partnership with Gulf states is not reassuring enough, obviously). Hence the comparison to [Mussolini’s Italy](#): Mussolini also scrambled around for coalition partners before he decisively sided with Germany. He would have been happy to share the spoils of British imperialism rather than attack the latter head-on.

In much the same way, the AKP sought integration with the Western world for a long time, though we seem to have reached the point of no return this week. Despite their ideological compatibility, Germany and Italy were not “destined” to be partners. Along the same lines, Turkey is more likely to foment a major war than to lead one.

We’ve seen US secretary of state

John Kerry, as well as EU spokespeople, make statements aimed at restraining the AKP’s repressive counter coup. Assuming that they are not overly concerned with democracy per se, can we infer from this that they are worried about Turkey’s stability? If so, how right are they to be concerned?

Among the government’s supporters, there is a sincere belief that this coup was organized by the United States. This might be a stretch, but Gülen is so tightly integrated into the American establishment that it is difficult to believe all official agencies in the United States were completely ignorant of the coup plan (but then, the same is as true of the Turkish intelligence services “did they know nothing about what was going on, given that AKP has been publicly obsessed with Gülenist conspiracies? Weren’t these soldiers under tight surveillance?).

The United States and the European Union could have lived with a Gülen coup; equally, they can now live with the AKP’s counter coup just as well. However, the latter has the potential to get out of (Western) control. [They are right to be concerned.](#)

It is in this way that we have another interwar Italy in the making. At present, just like its interwar predecessor, Turkey cannot sever all ties with the hegemonic world powers without finding a patron more powerful than itself. Perhaps that’s the real reason it is courting Putin.

Another prominent issue in Turkey has been the renewal of the Turkish state’s brutal war against the Kurds. How significant is it that a large proportion of the coup’s backers (or at least, of those detained by Erdoğan on the basis of such an accusation) were on the front lines of this war? Many leading officers of the war in Kurdistan have been detained; the air force was also involved in the coup, as were many of the ordinary soldiers involved in the war.

What does this tell us about support for the conflict within the military, and what does it mean for the state’s

ability to continue to wage the war at such an intensity?

Initial reports indicate that many names implicated in the anti-Kurdish military operations of the last few years are now in custody. At this point, it is not clear how Erdoğan will sustain his [war against the Kurds](#), as the military will inevitably be weakened and demoralized after this failed coup.

The government is not trying to appease their worries: even generals who have criticized the coup are under suspicion and attack, with many interrogated. It is most likely that the party will use this as an opportunity to marginalize all of its opponents in the military. How can such an emaciated military fight a seasoned guerrilla movement?

The chances are that Turkey will have to depend increasingly on [Ahrar al-Sham](#) and other jihadi groups to act as substitutes for the Turkish military. These tendencies could result in the further Salafi-jihadization of the Middle East.

Such a turn towards paramilitary forces, together with the mobilization of the masses, sounds very much like a step towards something representing classical fascism “and you frequently make comparisons between Turkey and interwar Italy. Notwithstanding the fact that phenomena like fascism never repeat themselves in precisely the same historical form, do you think this is a real danger in Turkey?

There are bound to be differences. Most obviously, Turkey is very unlikely to become as corporatist as Italy. The last decade’s enthusiasm for the market economy is not sustainable, but it is not just going to evaporate. [Turkish neo-fascism](#), if ever there is one, is going to be much more “chic” and much less “anticapitalist” than its forefather.

Likewise, the role of religion is going to be much more central, but the regime has been increasing the weight of nationalism (with racist overtones) in its interpretation of Islam for a while now. Indeed, the fascist [cults of violence](#) and “the leader” are not at all

incompatible with a comparatively more religious nationalism.

Finally, the rhetorical commitment to democracy is likely to last much longer, now further entrenched by “anti-coup” discourse and action. Still, we should never think of fascism and certain forms of democracy as antithetical.

Unlike Spain (which never became truly fascist), democratic mass action

and fascistization were embedded in each other from the get-go in Italy and Germany: fascism was a popular movement, at least in part built up within formal democratic norms, even though fascists deeply distrusted (and ultimately undermined) democracy.

Both domestically and in relation to regional politics, the coup and the AKP’s reaction signal extremely worrying times ahead. At least in the

short term, it is difficult to see a positive outcome.

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Jacobin

Cihan Tu?al

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The Olympic Calamity

15 August 2016, by Jules Boykoff

This was obvious as the [Olympic torch](#) made its way toward the ceremony. In Angra dos Reis, protesters even managed to extinguish the flame, forcing torchbearers to scurry to safer havens in a nearby van. In Duque de Caixas, just north of Rio, [demonstrators pelted torchbearers](#) with stones before cops responded with rubber bullets and pepper spray.

Once the torch arrived in Rio, protesters came out in droves. So did the police, who used tear gas and stun grenades to slice a route for it to pass. When the torch whisked past me at Praça Mauá, I could barely see it behind a wall of military police.

One torchbearer, Tarcisio Carlo Rodrigues Gomes, even used his moment in the spotlight [to protest](#). After finishing his shift, he yanked down his shorts, revealing leopard-print underwear and the words “Fora Temer” (“Temer Out”) scrawled on his butt cheeks in bright white paint.

“Fora Temer” was the [rallying cry](#) of an enormous mobilization along Copacabana Beach on August 5, the morning of the opening ceremony. Brazil’s president is extremely unpopular in Brazil, with one recent poll putting his approval rating at 11 percent.

As Glenn Greenwald and Eric Lau recently pointed out in the [Intercept](#),

Temer is accused of a staggering array of bribery schemes — he couldn’t run for president even if he wanted to, thanks to the recent ban he received for violating campaign finance laws.

Protesters along Copacabana highlighted all this and more. Unions, workers, students, pensioners, feminist organizations, housing activists, indigenous peoples, and anti-Olympics stalwarts joined forces to create a massive throng that pulsed with creativity. The protest, which drew fifteen thousand people, was [coordinated](#) by worker and leftist groups, including Brasil Popular, Esquerda Socialista, and Povo Sem Medo.

The mood was festive. A small orchestra played a version of “Carmina Burana” with uproarious “Fora Temer” lyrics. Activists from the Comitê Popular da Copa e das Olimpíadas (The Popular Committee of the World Cup and Olympics), who have long been protesting against the mega-event machine, carried a banner reading “#CalamidadeOlímpica” (“#OlympicCalamity”). The Corrente Socialista dos Trabalhadores, a socialist workers’ group, wielded a sign that read, “Não é a Olimpíadas” (“No to the Olympics”).

Many activists connected the Olympic dots between the wider political crisis

and the Olympic Games. Some wore t-shirts bearing the Olympic rings filled in by the letters G-O-L-P-E (C-O-U-P). Numerous flags read “Fora Temer” with the Olympic rings standing in for the “o” on “Fora.”

One man held a cardboard sign with the handwritten phrases “Rio2016 Coup / We’re Not Happy / Fora Temer” written on it. Another activist walked around with homemade Olympic rings connected with metal wiring featuring a photo of Temer and the moniker “golpista.” At one point protesters took over the site of the official Olympic rings on Copacabana Beach, snapping photographs with their “Fora Temer” signs in hand while Olympic tourists stood by in bewilderment.

Other activists seized the Olympic moment, writing signs in English for the global media to read. One said, “We don’t want a torch / We want out homes!”

The lack of housing in Rio, as well as the brass-knuckle evictions that the Games galvanized, were major themes. On the beach, protesters from Jogos da Exclusão (Exclusion Games) set up a shrine highlighting displacement, with messaging in both Portuguese and English.

Standing nearby, one demonstrator told me it was ironic that while the

team of Olympic refugee athletes was being widely celebrated, the Rio Games had created numerous internal refugees, displaced in the name of five-ring profit-making.

Later, as the opening ceremony unfolded, Bloomberg journalist [Tariq Panja](#) put a fine point on it, tweeting: "Perhaps the former residents of Vila Autódromo will be invited to join the Olympic Refugee Team at Tokyo 2020." Vila Autódromo is one favela community that found itself in front of the Olympic steamroller.

The afternoon brought another sizable mobilization, this one more focused on the Olympics under the banner Jogos da Exclusão. Around a thousand activists gathered at Praça Sáenz Peña, located close to the Maracanã. During the 2014 World Cup final, the same square was the site of brutal police repression of protesters who raised questions about hosting the world's soccer jamboree on the public dime.

Urban geographer [Chris Gaffney](#) attended both mobilizations. Crystallizing a critique bubbling through the afternoon protest, he told me, "As Rio is glittering before the world, it has handed over the city to the International Olympic Committee [IOC] and private interests at the expense of taking care of the basic needs of the population." He added, "The Exclusion Games protest was a

clear note in a cacophonous symphony of destruction that has defined Rio's mega-event preparations over the past decade."

Whereas the police presence at the Fora Temer protest was relatively light, it was unmistakably intense in the afternoon event. Emerging from the metro station and into the praça, I was met with a wall of police decked out in riot gear. Periodically they would move about in lockstep formation, an arm latched to the shoulder of the cop in front of them. Other security officials encircled the square. Later, busloads of additional riot police arrived. At one point a police helicopter circled overhead.

When the protest transformed into a street march, cops created a tight envelope around the marchers, keeping a special eye on activists using black-bloc tactics, who at one point burned a flag bearing the Olympic rings. Halfway through the march, a squadron appeared on horses, channeling the flow of the protest march.

Police presence in Brazil is no trivial matter. [Amnesty International](#) recently reported that in the months leading up to the Games, Rio de Janeiro has seen a 103 percent increase in police killings. Since Rio was awarded the Games back in 2009, security officials have killed more than 2,600 people. Ahead of the

Games, activists [delivered a strong message](#) to Rio organizers, placing forty body bags on their front stoop, reflecting the number of people killed by police in May alone.

A majority of the victims of police violence are young cariocas of color. Amnesty International [found that](#) between 2010 and 2013, 79 percent of those killed by on-duty police officers in Rio were black and 75 percent were young, between fifteen and twenty-nine years old.

Activists taking to the streets during the opening ceremony were fully aware of this history. Numerous chants alluded to police violence. One massive banner read, "Abaixo o massacre olímpico!" and then in English, "No to the Olympic massacre!" Although some minor skirmishes emerged, and cops used pepper spray and tear gas on protesters at Praça Afonso Pena, the march went relatively smoothly.

At the protest Brazilian human rights lawyer Andrea Florence told me, "The Olympic Games promised to promote a peaceful society, social inclusion, and human dignity. What we have seen in Rio is the complete opposite . . . The protest highlights what happens when the Olympics come to town."

8 August 2016

[Jacobin](#)

Political and Economic situation in Sri Lanka

13 August 2016, by [Vame Handa \(Left Voice\)](#)

The electoral front against Mahinda Rajapaksa included the UNP, a section of the SLFP, TULF, Jathika Hela Urumaya and several civil society organizations. While it got the support from outside of the JVP, its formation was blessed and supported by the West and India. It promised restoration of democracy, and rule of law, establishment of "good governance", elimination of corruption, abolition of executive

presidency, and easing economic hardships by ensuring fast economic development. Although it did not have specific reference to national question, there was an agreement with the TULF that it would be addressed after the election. The previous government's pro-Chinese policies antagonized India as well as the imperialist countries of the West.

There was a very brief "honeymoon"

period not uncommon in Sri Lanka in the past after a governmental change in an election. Hence, many civil society activists and some Leftists saw the "change" as a democratic revolution that would open new horizons and generate immense possibilities. This over-inflated portrayal of the new government was in fact part of the propaganda initiated by the NGOs funded by the Western nations. Nonetheless, after a year the

true and real nature of the new government became crystal clear even for its ardent supporters like Rev. Maduluwawe Sobhitha who played an important role bringing in the change. The new government has miserably failed to keep any of the promises that was listed in the pre-election. It brutally suppressed student protests against many burning issues including privatization and commodification of education. The employers initiated a campaign to toughen the labor laws making hiring and firing easier. National question was once again put into the back burner.

Most important change has been that the new government began to implement neoliberal economic package in its most rigorous and fundamentalist form. As a result the structural crisis is manifested in the economic sphere by sluggish economic growth, increasing unemployment and inflation, depletion of foreign exchange reserves, worsening balance of trade and payment crisis, and growing fiscal deficit. The Prime minister warned that the people should take "bitter medicine" in order to have better future. He meant the same neoliberal austerity program. The only remedy to the economic crisis that the government and the IMF can propose is limited to one choice: making Sri Lanka favorable for direct foreign investment.

IMF has promised \$ 1.6 billion EFF to Sri Lanka spreading in 36 months on four conditionalities that includes common D-L-P formula:

1. increasing tax revenues; (government responded by increasing taxable income and VAT befitting high income earners and increasing prices);
2. privatization of public and state-owned enterprises;

3. liberalizing trade and investment regime more;

4. reducing fiscal deficit to 3.5% of the GDP.

As one Sri Lankan economist has pointed out the neoliberal economic fundamentalism can be put into practice only by reactivating archaic mode of production that would place heavy burden and suffering on the lower strata of the society. It is evident that the economic hardships the new government has brought in will create political and social turmoil. The reduction of real wage rate, suppression of trade union rights, planned revision to social security system, encouragement of temporary and contract form of employment and similar anti-worker measures have already led to the creation of incipient unity of independent trade unions. Non-academic staff of the university system had two day strike and have threatened that they would go for continuous trade union action if their demands are not met. The proposed amendments to custom laws and EPF system have ignited trade union propaganda among custom employees and "divineguma" department workers. Parallel to these developments, Inter University Student Federation continues to carry on their struggle against privatization of education. Seed Act and proposed water privatization bill and the fertilizer subsidy revision would ignite the peasant struggles. And similar development would happen among fishing community against poaching, and depletion of fishing resources due to heavy investments like Port City Project.

Most important development would be the rupture that would take place within the upper layer of the society and among the ruling political class. The VAT issue has generated protests of shop keepers in all big cities. Some

members of the government have already informed that they would vote against VAT bill. All these are manifestation of the crisis that is looming large underneath.

It is interesting and sad to not[e] that some of the left groupings have been openly or tacitly backing the new government and its policies. They seem to justify their defense on the ground that the government would resolve the protracted national question and it would stand against Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinist forces. This is an illusion. There was no sign that this government would take bold action needed to resolve the national question. This is evident in their proposal on new constitution. It should be noted that the ways in which the national question including other unresolved democratic tasks can be resolved "from the above" are extremely limited. One may even argue that 2009 military solution was the only method that the bourgeoisie can and wish to implement in resolving the national question. So wittingly or unwittingly, these left and democratic groups who back the government are supporting the neoliberal fundamentalist economic program of the government and the IMF.

At the moment the forces that oppose the neoliberal fundamentalist economic program of the government and the IMF include the FLSP, Independent Trade Union Unity, Inter-University Student Federation and similar mass organizations. It is worthwhile to note that these groupings are essentially working on outside the parliamentary arena. However, the success of the left and democratic forces depends on how they could unite all these dispersed and scattered struggles and new institutional structures they can form in the process of fighting.

Their Security, Our Poverty: Militarization

and the New Code of Labour in Lithuania

12 August 2016

All are familiar with the New Labour Code being pushed through in France and the massive uprisings unfolding against it. Not so many heard about the new labor code and cross-sector restructuring that was pushed through in Bosnia last year and the massive, yet “sadly” short lived expression of rage that followed. [11] Very few heard anything about the new Labour Code that is simultaneously being pushed through in Lithuania and the not so massive opposition to it “as of yet.”

Is there a broader tendency to be recognized here? My hypothesis would be that there is. These three instances seem to appear within a much broader and deeper constellation of assaults on our working class life, our ecology, our existence. I will argue that this deeper constellation is essentially characterized by a dual movement of the devastating liberalization of economic interest and the explosive expansion of national security budgets to regulate it; an expansion that has taken tangible form in border fortification, militarization of internal policing, prison & military expansion, and so on. The global crisis of economic governance has given way to what many have been calling the turn toward an “authoritarian neoliberalism” or, in some cases, ala Latin America, a “turn back.”

What is the relation between militarism and economic deregulation, and on what basis do I have to believe these movements are converging in “authoritarian-neoliberalism”?

The violent process of the privation of our social-securities (labour rights, housing, unemployment benefits, education) has necessarily been backed by explicit authoritarian might and fantastically delusional nationalist appeals which have been relatively successful in constructing the “enemy from outside” narrative. Fear-mongering militaristic

nationalism that establishes and “us v.s. them” mythology inside and outside the state combined with draconian social policy is what authoritarian-neoliberalism is all about.

In the following article you will find my attempt at a more or less thorough analysis of this tendency from the standpoint of Lithuania. I will begin with a basic historical overview on the origins of neo-liberal restructuring in 1970’s, their effects during the independence period (91’-03’) and their current manifestations in the post-EU accession (04-16’). Going from this starting point I will then address how the particularities of the Lithuanian context fit within a much broader policy direction in the EU. I will argue this point through an analysis of the labor code reforms affecting France, Bosnia, and Lithuania simultaneously. Following this tendency analysis I will turn toward militarism. How and why the militaristic thrust in Lithuania is directly connected with broader social policy direction in the EU and beyond.

A starting point

The former Soviet Republic of Lithuania went into a deep economic crisis by the 70’s. This crisis was shared by the entire Soviet Union. Industry was going stagnant and the Baltic States were up to their chins in debt. By 1972 political agreements were made with the West to bail the Soviet Union out in return for economic reforms and civil rights amendments. It is commonly called the “soft period.” By the 80’s these loans had accumulated into massive debts. Although there were certainly variations from country to country, the general approach of the “nomenklatura” class (as advised by International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization) was to strategically shed some of the

responsibility onto the workers through controlled privatizations which took the forms of cooperatives. By the late 80’s, the Glasnost period, independence movements popped off which demanded full transference of property and the Western civil privacies that would accompany them. Some have called the chain of revolutions that followed the “eggshell” revolution; the narrative being that the capitalist nomenklatura broke the egg from the outside to provide a controlled liberation of the bird who would soon find the outside to be another cage.

The Lithuanian capitalist and political class received helpful information from Swedish and American free Market economists for the restructuring policy to be implemented. It is rather humorous that the first mass produced popular economics book From Planned to Market Economy published by well established Libertarian Institute, politely suggested the need for the birth of a new subject, “homo economicus.” The Baltic States, as you may imagine, went with an iron fist liquidation approach, privatizing the entirety of the housing stock within a few years and the entirety of industry in a few more.

This gave way to a cycle of brute primitive accumulation. A telling example is the police. The police and military budgets were heavily cut. The withdrawal of the security budget coinciding with the newly forged market economy provided ideal conditions for large networks of informally organized Private Protection Organizations (PPOs) which nicely combined security force with economic interest. By 1993 the informal economy made up 48.5% of the whole national economy—the PPOs created their own taxation systems for enterprises. They went so far as training a whole labour force of accountants to watch internal

company bookkeeping as to ensure they were receiving their full dividends on profits. This changed drastically during the Rouble Crisis, which gave Western markets an opportunity to take over exports. With Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) capital pouring in, new financial and security regulations were enforced to secure the Western market interest. How this whole story unfolds would be a separate text.

The situation vastly mirrors that of Greece—on the books [12] To the delight of the new political-employer class, however, working people in the former Soviet States went along with the radical restructuring methods with open eyes to a better future in the mythologized market economies of the West. And that's of course not to view the Soviet State through the rosy-red looking glass in return. Various aspects of the Soviet era social policy—such as yearly paid vacation to a resort in Nida, free education and housing, cultural centers in remote countryside—were arguably worth defending regardless of their “economic efficiency” and contradictory social status. The point concerns throwing out the baby with the bathwater—the fight for social rights is in no way equivocal with the fight for an authoritarian socialist state, no?

Lithuania and its Baltic neighbors have since been viewed as the model examples of neo-liberal austerity. The country was labelled as the “Tiger economy” for its (nominal) fast recovery from a hard line austerity policy following the 2009 crisis and internationally applauded for its “open border” policy for FDI. As my comrade recently remarked, “There is no need to analyze FEZ's (Free Economic Zones) in Lithuania because Lithuania is a Free Economic Zone.”

To give one example of the deployment of this mythological Baltic Tiger economy, I share a statement from a Bosnian economist who refers to the Baltics as a triumphant model of neoliberal austerity against the backdrop of mass opposition to the new labor codes in BiH:

[Working-people] defended the country [i.e. their social rights], while

others carried out comprehensive economic reforms, such as Estonia, whose former Prime Minister Mart Laar, later admitted that the only book he read on the economy was “Freedom of Choice”, by the Nobel Prize winner Milton Friedman and champion of economic liberalism of the twentieth century. [13]

The reality is, of course, a tad bit more grim.

The new codes of labour in local and global contexts

The Labour Code reform in Lithuania and elsewhere has unfolded within these broader tendencies of neoliberal restructuring that began in the 80's. [14] The aim of these reforms being labour flexibilisation. The progressive push toward labor flexibilization over the years is attractive to capital. This is valid insofar as the insecurity of labor is generally mirrored in the security of profit margins for enterprise, and also given that other factors such as the policing of property relations are to be thought in the equation. In “criminalizing” working people's resistance to employer exploitation through measures such as the banning of collective bargaining, capital is given the power to direct social relations towards its own interests. Weak labor is cheap labor.

On June 16th 2016, Lithuanian Parliament should vote through the New Labour Code reforms. The reforms, like those of Bosnia, France, and Spain, have been drafted under the advisory of the EU commission and IMF. The narratives around these reforms have all been the same, basically. Flexibility of labour—the offering of greater choice to enterprise—will relieve an “unnecessary administrative burden” [15] on employers and in doing so will offer better conditions for “job creation” and “GDP growth” [16]

The Lithuanian narrative of the reforms are particular insofar as targeting the demographic crisis,

which is not such a concern in France, for example. In the “2016 EU Commission Report of Lithuania,” the demographic crisis is given a central position. Half of the total population of the country has migrated in the past two decades. By 2030 “a cumulative loss of 35 % of the working age population is estimated”. Between the 2008 financial crisis and 2012 there was a 9.8% increase, the highest in the EU. Last year alone 25,000 youth left the country (a 20% increase). [17] The problem of employment ‘possibilities’ is being surpassed by the problem of employment desires; it does not so much seem to be the problem of the creation of more jobs but the problem of who will take the jobs created.

According to the EU Commission, the goal of the New Labor Code is job growth. Job growth at what cost? The cost of a total assault on job security—a thorough-going privation of almost every right. Total flexibilisation of labor via the offering of “choice” to the employer via zero-hour contracts and liberalization of dismissal regulation. [18] A choice to do what they please with us and with little to no consequence. These reductions to “administrative burdens” are projected to “encourage the creation of approximately 85,000 new jobs.” [19] This fantastical statement on job growth conveniently leaves out a description of what these jobs will be. We can only imagine more shitty jobs with the added bonus of extra-precarity—“democracy is full of choices.

The situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina vastly mirrors that of Lithuania. In July 2015 the BiH government agreed to a set of reforms “advised” by the EU and IMF for labor code liberalization in return for the “prize” of taking out more loans for a collapsing and indebted economy, as well as possible entrance into the holy EU. The labor code reforms were part of a broader “Compact for Growth and Jobs” the EU developed as a guideline for entrance. [20] Cuts across the public sector were demanded with the following efficiency improvements being suggested: “cuts in the health and pensions systems; increase in sales taxes; elimination of seniority in labor contracts; “harmonizing”

labour legislation; ‘reforming’ collective bargaining; improving the business climate by ‘streamlining tax procedures;’ ‘stronger insolvency framework to make resolution faster and restructuring easier,’ i.e., allow for even faster criminal privatisations; and raising the effective retirement age.” [21]

The argument boils down to a simple formula: union power, social rights, and all those “artificial barriers” [22] for hiring and firing employees are the cause of economic stagnation. The real consequences of these reforms is simple: more money for the politicians and companies, worsening of the conditions for working people, and yes, the old promise, a.k.a. “in the future there will be more shitty jobs for you.” In reaction, thousands of people took the streets in BiH in an attempt to halt the reform and they were even joined by workers from a Republika Srpska (that would not be directly affected) in solidarity. [23]

Is this a familiar story?

The Lithuanian employer-politician class seem to be playing the same games with our lives. They believe the new Labour Code will make Lithuania more attractive for foreign capital (FDI) as well as for the expansion of local enterprise. This will all be done on our backs. The logic is quite simple: employers are always looking for the cheapest and most insecure workforce, this is how they beat their competition. Lithuanian employers may hire Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Russians; while German, American, Norwegian, etc., employers may set up their companies in Lithuania (or BiH) in order to take advantage of the legendary small salaries. Lithuanian employers and politicians “like their friends in BiH” stick to the simple formula: our lives, their profits. The unfettered pursuit of profitability over human well being reigns.

The French reforms connect with the problematics of FDI in this broader context insofar as a central amendment concerns the removal of French regulation on multinational corporations outside of France. However, this removal of regulations will equally affect French working

people. As one Lithuanian-born comrade in Paris explained to me,

The relationship between the patron and the worker will no longer be directly mediated by the labor code “the later will almost be directly exposed to the will of the former. The goal, once again, is flexibility of the market so that it would move freely between and through the exploited bodies.” [24]

Militarization: “It’s not just a job, it’s a calling”

To provide a proper standpoint on how Lithuanian militarism is connected with a broader political and economic tendency of global governance I will need to share a brief history of its development in Lithuania. My essential argument is that the particularities of Lithuanian militarism in what we call “the post-euro Maidan” era are linked to much deeper tendencies in the policy directions of EU, NATO, and IMF.

In the early 90’s there was a process of military and state security withdrawal. This process was in part mobilized by the practical reality of a decimated state budget and on other hand out of a politically principled reaction against the heavily centralized security and military apparatus of the Soviet States. Lithuanian independence movements targeted the centralized State as its primary object of fear and hatred. “Civil society (a.k.a. civil property) against the state” was a popular banner.

This regime of security and capital accumulation was active until the Rouble Crisis of 1998. In consequence Russia lost its hold as the primary export market and within 2 years the EU became the dominant market force. The 2004 membership to NATO and EU partner status consummated these shifts. Following the market dominance of the West, the mode of regulation is re-institutionalized under the protocols of EU/US regulations. This regime of regulation corresponds with the rise of “neo-liberal

authoritarianism” [25] a mode of capital accumulation characterized by the dual movement of a new cycle of the withdrawal of social infrastructure and the rapid expansion of military and policing budgets. In 2016 the national defense budget was increased by 35% while the promised budget for education fell 90 million short of expectations. [26] The priorities are clear. [27]

The recent surge in militaristic activity has definite economic motive: war is a politics by other means. In what way does the expansion of militarism confront the social-economic contradictions I have pointed to? The state, having lost its capacity to make a class deal on the basis of material resources turns in confident desperation toward the nation. “It’s not just a job, it’s a calling” one military recruitment billboard proclaims on my way to Vilnius. The return of military conscription (as but one example) is suggestive of a broader attempt, by the political-employer class, to maintain a docile and loyal labouring class in the absence of real material incentives in return. The conscripted citizen is called upon to defend the country against an imaginary Other. An Other of which they are the true living embodiment “insofar as their greatest threats to wellbeing are the state, the boss and the politicians that they are now heroically defending in the phantom unity of nation.” [28] Conscription, as a mechanism, presents itself as the fantastical embodiment of nationalist ideology – everyone is equally obliged to sacrifice themselves, their labor, for the common good of the nation. Yet, as it goes, it’s not the children of politicians you find dying on the infantry lines. The youth holding professional prospects are spared from good old military disciplining. The ones with prospects are valuable resources for a growing economy, of course. Second and third rate human-resources are what you more or less find joining the ranks.

Militaristic nationalism is in this sense reproduced by a complex matrix of varying social institutions, varying engines of hegemony. The repressive imposition of unity on blazing social contradictions also shows its face in

the workplace, as just another example. The now ubiquitous managerial politics of the “family business” is a case in point. From small to large companies employers deploy the rhetorics of the “family”, the “team”, and the ‘common’ good. Workplace conflicts are conveniently neutralized by such appeals. As my boss so well said after I started a workplace struggle over my wage: “we are a family here. We all need to do our part and make sacrifices for the common future of the company. But you come in here and make these demands. We no longer consider you a part of our family culture.” [29]

This appeal to a common good is in direct contradiction with the reality of the class division, of course. The boss speaks of the common, of the sacrifice we must all make for the good of the company, but who is it that takes the profits and controls our futures? What is this common sacrifice our bosses and our masters call upon us to serve in the name of? Nationalist ideology essentially involves the repressive imposition of unity on irreconcilable class contradictions. We sacrifice ourselves to an institution controlled only by the rulers. In reality I have more in common with a worker in a Indian textile company than I could ever have “in common” with some boss of the same citizenship.

To summarize the crystal clear direction of militarism in Lithuania I conclude this section with a chronology of developments: the formation of a para-military riot control squad (2008), a mandatory nation-wide training day for all low level managers to respond to an “invasion situation” (2014); NATO brings standing army four hangars, aircraft shelters, emergency arrestor gear on the main runway, and auxiliary runways stretching to the

main landing strip have been built to ensure the infrastructure necessary for conducting NATO’s Air Policing mission; the part of financing covered from the Government Budget amounted to 3,7 million and from the NATO funds “3 million respectively (2013); the arming of police with assault rifles (2015); the re-introduction of mandatory conscription (2015; previously abolished in 2008); the theatrical public performance of military interventions in public spaces occupied by armed “dissenters” (2015); acquisition of water cannons to control future protests (2016). The continuous deployment of “the russian scare” to crush all forms of “destabilizing” opposition to state policy, e.g. teachers strike being repressed by the state because of its possibly destabilizing capacity for national security. [30] The military took their “concerns” with the teachers a step further; choosing the strikers as targets in a simulated riot control drill for the cadets. [31]

Conclusion: a refusal to serve

The ambition of my article was to develop clear theoretical contours for the concept of Authoritarian-neoliberalism. I pursued this task through a somewhat thorough analysis of its development in Lithuania. In connecting this particular history with broader geo-political movements of capital I showed how local context unfolds within global process.

If this analysis has merit, the question would be how to oppose the situation presented and for what ends. In some sense, I believe the rank-n-file strikers from the national teachers mobilizations provided a quite clear answer in taking their luggage to the protests. [32] Their statement was

simple: “We will leave the country (the enterprise) if you don’t give us what we want.’ Here the state is nothing more than a boss of a higher order. The national protest in Vilnius featured the slogan “we will not serve’ simultaneously meaning we will not serve the state, the military, and we will not serve our employers. There was also the direct attack of the expansion of the military budget as central to our participation in the strikes. “Your Security (with image of tank) “our poverty”(with image of a destroyed house).

I propose to search out the common struggles against these bonds of tutelage—an uprising beyond and against borders because poverty does not know them.

While it’s not so simple, or so useful, to make simplified generalizations about “what working-people think” of the new labor codes and “how they will react,” you can see the beginnings of something I would hesitantly call “a movement” forming in Kaunas. This movement (as I will semi-wishfully call it) started in May with national supermarket boycotts against price-hikes and made its first collective appearance, in the streets, on May 14th. In Kaunas assemblies were formed by a diverse spectrum of people, students, pensioners, activists, service-workers, etc.—a clear departure from the close-knit activist circles of the past. The assemblies are now the collective organs for future demonstrations and media. Having made my attempt locating common threads that link our conditions internationally, I propose to search out the common struggles against these bonds of tutelage—an uprising beyond and against borders because poverty does not know them.

June 17 2016

[LeftEast](#)

The Gypsies’ Tortuous Journey

11 August 2016, by Philippe Alcoy

"Well, Hitler may have not killed enough [Roma]." That's what Gilles Bourdouleix, a member of the Union of Democrats and Independents Party, mayor of the French city of Cholet, said in the summer of 2013 to a group of Roma who were expelled from the land they occupied. This is perhaps the most radicalized example of a deeply reactionary tendency—"anti-Roma racism"—growing in France and other European countries.

These speeches and racist acts against the Roma population are far from new—they have a long history. However, since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the deterioration of mass living conditions in Central and Eastern Europe, the Roma population has again become a scapegoat. With the deepening international economic crisis, the anti-Roma discourse is being promoted by a large group of political parties ranging from the extreme right to reformist sectors. Various political leaders seek to cynically channel frustration and discontent against the Roma and other exploited and oppressed sectors of the society.

These leaders and the media promote tropes that are very old, but still ubiquitous, including the idea that the Roma do not want to work and do not want to fit in; that they are profiteers who live off of swindling and theft beginning at an early age; that they live off of taxpayers' contributions through state benefits; and that they are the "dangerous poor" who have nothing to lose and thus are a threat to the entire society. While these characterizations may appear cartoonish, they serve as the basis of a discourse that, first, normalizes the misery in which the Roma are currently living and, second, criminalizes poverty. To counter these stereotypes, it is necessary to examine the evolution of the social and economic conditions of the Roma people in Europe. These conditions explain the extreme poverty of the Romani people, especially after the fall of the Stalinist regimes in Central

and Eastern Europe.

Slavery and Serfdom

Although it is very difficult to determine the exact number, it is estimated that there are about 12 to 15 million Roma people in the world. Most live in Central and Eastern Europe, though they also live in Western European countries like Spain, Italy and France. Romania has the highest Roma population (between 800,000 and 1 million, nearly 10 percent of the total population). They comprise a significant portion of the population in Bulgaria (8 percent of the total population) and Hungary (5 percent of the total and the largest national minority).

According to some researchers the Roma are native to the Indian subcontinent. For unknown reasons they began migrating to the West in successive waves beginning in the 10th century through the 17th century. It is believed that in the beginning of the 14th century, they arrived in Europe through the Balkans and spread throughout Eastern and Central Europe. In the 15th century, they traveled as far as Britain, the Nordic countries and Russia. This geographical dispersion partly explains the cultural diversity of the Roma people.

This same period was also marked by the enslavement of the Roma people, especially in the territories of Moldavia and Wallachia (south of modern Romania). The exploitation of Roma slaves in these countries became central to the economy of Moldavia and Wallachia. Romanian author Gabriel Troc writes that the value of Roma slaves "increased when they were 'imported' from the neighboring regions. This could be an explanation for the large number of Roma in present Romania. As Isabel Fonseca has shown, from the moment they were imported en masse, the prejudice against them was sealed.

"The term Gypsy no longer signified a broad ethnic group or race... For the first time it referred collectively to a social class: the slave cast. This study also indicates that the term 'Gypsies' may have grouped together other people who were also enslaved." This situation pushed Roma families to flee to less hostile regions. Many groups went to Transylvania, while others went even further west.

In Transylvania, although the Roma occupied the most marginalized positions in society, they were not formally slaves. However, they did not own land and were completely dependent on local aristocrats who hired them temporarily and treated them as if they were slaves. The rest of the time, they had to stay on the move to work as migrant agricultural laborers, to trade artisanal goods they manufactured and to sell a few specialized services. All of this enabled them to survive. The "nomadism" of the Roma first resulted from conditions of escaping slavery and second, became the means of survival for a landless and excluded people. In this sense, we can characterize the Roma as being in forced nomadism.

Between Precarious Proletarianization and Forced Assimilation

The Roma were a marginalized group who at every turn were discriminated against and persecuted. Many were reduced to slavery or serfdom. However, in some areas and at specific times, the Roma groups managed to obtain relative social recognition. This was the case of those living in Hungary between the 15th and 17th centuries.

As the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs states,

"During the wars fought against the Turkish conquerors, Gypsies played a considerable role in Hungarian society. Constant military preparation and the lack of craftsmen provided opportunity to work. Offering cheaper rates than the craftsmen in guilds ensured them jobs in fortification and construction work, metalwork, weapons production and maintenance, horse trading, postal services, wood carving and blacksmithing. This enabled them to make a living and engage in important activities for the country. Some Gypsy groups were even granted privileges, first under King Sigismund (1387-1437) and King Matthias (1458-1490) (...) However, at the end of the 17th century when the Turks were driven out of Hungary, most activities carried out by the Gypsy population were rendered unnecessary by farmers, animal breeders, craftsmen and traders, who had begun to settle in Hungary."

This integration into the country's economic structure was accompanied by a policy that forced Roma people to assimilate into Hungarian society. The term "Gypsy" was forbidden and replaced with the term, "new Hungarian." It was forbidden to speak the language of the Gypsies. Roma marriages were very limited and Romani children were taken from their parents to be raised in Hungarian families. In the second half of the 19th century, the arrival of new Roma groups from neighboring countries not only fueled prejudices held by the majority Magyar population, but also among Hungarian Roma who had been "assimilated."

There was a high level of diversity within the Romani population, even if one solely considered Hungary. According to Troc, "The divisions in Hungary's Gypsy population developed in the early 20th century. The largest group, who arrived earlier and lost their language and culture, are known as the 'Romungro' or Hungarian (Gypsy) people. They themselves form the rest of the Gypsy population today. The vast majority of the second group arrived from Romanian land in the second half of the 19th century. They speak the Gypsy language, and are called 'Vlach Gypsies' by virtue of their origin. There is also a third, smaller

group, the 'Beas' Gypsies, who mainly settled in South-West Hungary and speak archaic Romanian-language dialects."

With the development of capitalism in Central and Eastern Europe in the late 19th and early 20th century, the Roma people began to form part of the proletariat in some countries. The opening of new industries, construction of new infrastructure (roads, railways) and the expansion of agriculture allowed a part of the Roma people to become integrated into the economic process.

However, this "integration" was done at the lowest levels of the economy. Analyzing the example of a village in Transylvania, Gabriel Troc writes, "‘Opportunities’ should be read here only as ‘opportunities for survival’ (...) The Roma were considered cheap labor that did not have the right to wages, like a gadzo worker did. Accordingly, before WWII, a significant number of Roma were ‘employed’ by Hungarians in return for food and clothes (...) Some of them, especially women, were ‘hired’ for domestic work in Hungarian households. Because the Gypsy had no land, they were constrained to do whatever labor was offered to them by the majority population (...) When employed in agricultural or domestic work the great majority of Roms had a de-facto serf status."

A "Forgotten" Genocide?

In the 1930s, the worldwide capitalist economic crisis and the rise of fascism had terrible consequences for the Roma population. The stigma against them grew and racist acts perpetrated by far-right gangs and the state increased.

The Roma were the first to lose their jobs. They were often run off the land or homes they occupied to make room for the nationals. Furthermore, the Roma were increasingly perceived as a burden to the State. Gabriel Troc states, "In Romania the taxonomy was aimed to separate the 'useful' Roma (a small group of metalworkers in the

countryside craftsmen in the cities and some musicians) from the 'beggars,' 'vagrants,' and 'primitive' Roma who, by their high rate of reproduction, would alter the 'pure' composition of the Romanian population. The consequence of this classification was the massive deportation of Roma populations in Transnistria (eastern Basarabia, now part of Republic of Moldova) during the war."

Indeed, in 1942, Ion Antonescu's pro-Nazi regime in Romania sent 25,000 Roma people (12 percent of the total 210,000 living in the country) into concentration camps, 11,000 of whom never returned. An estimated 230,000 to 500,000 Roma people died in concentration camps during World War II. They not only came from Eastern Europe, but also Western European countries (over 30,000 Roma people were kept in concentration camps in France).

The silence about the genocide of Roma people (Germany—the former FRG—did not formally recognize this historical fact until 1979) cannot be understood without recognizing the continuity of discrimination and racism against the Roma in Europe today. This racism is expressed through discriminatory policies in various countries. In *The Forgotten Holocaust* (L'Holocauste Oublié, 1979), Christian Bernadac states that "prejudice, maintained by constant 'state sanctioned' repression, led to this disturbing paradox: to be against Gypsies is to be with the law. The breeding ground for the 'Final Solution' was perfectly clear when National Socialism seized power in 1933. All the imaginable abuses—with the exception of gas chambers—were anticipated, described and implemented by other governments: mass deportation (France, 1802), removal of Roma children from their parents (Germany 1830), armed evictions (Britain, 1912), the prohibition of gypsy language and clothes (several regions of France, Spain, Portugal), the prohibition of marriage between Gypsies and of nomadism; serfdom (Romania), the dissolution of marriages between Gypsies and non-Gypsies (Hungary), the confiscation of property, the prohibition of owning a horse trailer,

the prohibition of exercising certain professions, the prohibition of buying a house (Portugal). (...) Branding projects (Hungary, 1909) or sterilization (Norway, 1930)" (pages 33-34). To complete the picture of widespread anti-Roma racism, Bernadac provides the testimony of Jewish Holocaust survivors on the Gypsies:

"Professor Hagenmuller: 'Gypsies appeared to us having basically two characteristics: the passion for stealing and the music.' Professor Charles Richet: 'concerning Gypsies, their total disappearance would have affected in the camp only a small number of committed philanthropists...' If we can find such judgments in testimonials meant to denounce Nazi barbarism in the concentration camps, it is not surprising that these genocidal acts against the Roma continue to be obscured and misunderstood.

Stalinist Regimes: Between Reform and Repression

At the end of World War II, the western march of the Red Army established deformed and bureaucratised workers' states in a number of Central and Eastern European countries. The policies of the Stalinist regimes toward the Roma people were those that sought settlement and assimilation, thus denying cultural or national specificity. Policies of industrialization, however, did allow the Roma to gain employment in national enterprises and collective farms.

In Hungary, the employment rate among working Roma men in 1971 was 85 percent—perhaps the highest in the Roma people's entire history in Hungary. Nevertheless, they continued to occupy the "unskilled" positions with the most menial tasks, as was the case throughout the region. Regardless, the newfound ability to earn relatively stable incomes enabled the Roma to access social benefits, education for children and vocational training. However, as

the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs explained, "Gypsy children were often taught in separate classes, or subjected to special education due to their 'handicap.'"

The Roma children attended schools in which classes were taught in the majority language; no subjects were taught in their native language, which was not the case for other national minorities, such as the Hungarians and Germans in Romania).

When it comes to housing, the policies of various governments helped build homes and buildings where the Roma families could live. Within a few years, Roma slums disappeared. However, these homes were rudimentary and remained segregated from the rest of the population. In some cases, as in Romania, the Roma were housed in "the newly-built socialist group of apartment districts, which were full of police and army personnel, in an attempt to control and 'civilize' them" (Gabriel Troc).

During the Stalinist period, the living conditions of the Roma population of Eastern Europe generally improved, despite the bureaucratic and reactionary political regimes of the communist parties. These experiments gave a glimpse of the potential of a real workers' state, and what could be achieved. However the Stalinist bureaucracies failed to end the rampant anti-Roma prejudice. On the contrary, these prejudices were often stoked by state institutions themselves.

The Restoration of Capitalism: A Major Setback

In the late 1980s the process of capitalist restoration began in the former "Soviet bloc" and millions of workers found themselves unemployed.

The decline for Roma workers was even worse. The jobs held by the Roma were the first to disappear, especially for Roma women. In Hungary for example, the government study we cited earlier stated that "this

progress... collapsed during the social and political changes of 1990. The construction industry and mining, which provided employment for most of the Gypsies, fell into crisis. Gypsies, who were largely employed as unskilled workers and carried out tasks requiring the lowest level of expertise were the first to be made redundant at privatized companies. Within a short period of time the majority of Gypsy families had fallen back to the level of previous decades".

In Romania, the industrial situation is virtually the same as the one described in Hungary. There during the re-privatization, or the "redistribution process" of land in 1995, the Roma were excluded. Thus, a survey conducted in early 1990 showed that "[About Eighty-seven percent] of [Roma] women and 58% of men had no diplomas; only 1.8% of all Roma achieved a medium or high level of qualification. 27% of young people were illiterate and 40% of 8 year old children never attended school or stopped going... The rising poverty was especially catastrophic for the Roma : 87.5% did not have enough to survive (40.6%) or had barely enough (46.9%)."

Landless and jobless in a context of mass unemployment and increasing discrimination, the Roma population of Central and Eastern Europe were reduced to extreme poverty. For many (about 70 percent), the only stable income was the meager family allowance, retirement, and disability pensions granted by the state. Others had to struggle to survive by collecting scrap metal and recyclable materials. Many were forced to beg or engage in illegal activities.

Forced evictions, spawned by rapid gentrification, has left a lot of Roma homeless. Here, some of the results of this violent dispossession process; Roma houses demolished after the forced eviction (Bucharest 2015) Forced evictions, spawned by rapid gentrification, has left a lot of Roma homeless. Here, some of the results of this violent dispossession process (Bucharest 2015)

The widespread economic crisis and the already precarious conditions of the Roma set the stage for a surge in

anti-Roma discourse and racist attacks. The same study on the Romanian case after the fall of the former regime states, "Between 1990 and 1991 houses were burned and people were beaten and expelled from their villages. The most violent incident occurred in Hadareni in September 1993, which ended with the death of four men, three Gypsies. In total, there were about thirty local clashes the cause of which are disputed but which always lead to the eviction of Gypsies."

Economic Crisis and Racism

In times of crisis, the ruling classes seek scapegoats to divert the attention of the masses from the true cause of their suffering. The scapegoats are the

most exploited and oppressed sectors of society—often those seen as "foreign" or "other." The racism and nationalism are a logical consequence of bourgeois politics.

In Europe, where an economic crisis of historic proportions has been brewing for the past several years, there has also been a rise in the populist political tendencies of the extreme right. Some obvious examples include the French National Front and the Greek Golden Dawn, but there are other lesser-known far-right groups, like the Bulgarian Ataka and the Hungarian Jobbik. These two parties have grown on a platform of violent anti-Roma discourse.

It is clear that this discourse serves the capitalists—contributing to the divisions within the working class and the oppressed in general. In this

sense, it is not surprising that governments and politicians are introducing blatantly discriminatory policies targeting Roma people, such as compulsory work for the Roma in Hungary. In France, the "Roma problem" is discussed with no mention of the mass expulsions of Roma from their homes by city and state governments.

But the workers should not be misled. The measures that governments take today against the Roma are linked to and may soon broaden into attacks against the whole of the proletariat and the masses. Passivity and inaction in the face of anti-Roma speech and laws will only make it easier for capitalists to attack all the exploited.

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‘A is for Corruption’: The Rio Olympics from A to Z

10 August 2016, by [Adam Talbot](#)

A is for [Anti-terrorism laws](#) that were implemented prior to the Games. This means that political protest against the Olympics (and protest more generally) can be classified as an act of terrorism.

B is for [Barra da Tijuca](#), which has been developed into a city of the noble elite with no space for the poor by real estate tycoon Carlos Carvalho.

C is for [Corruption](#), with an inquiry in Rio investigating construction contracts for the Games, particularly the metro line extension.

D is for the [Drugged-up athletes](#) who will be competing in the Games, particularly from Russia, where allegations of state-sponsored doping nearly led to the country being banned from the Games.

E is for [Education cuts](#), which have massively affected students in Rio

with around 75 schools occupied in protest at underfunding, while Olympic budgets balloon.

F is for the [Fiscal emergency](#) that the State of Rio triggered in order to ensure the Olympics would be delivered — while healthcare, education and other public services are eroded.

G is for [Guanabara Bay](#), which will host sailing events, despite being full of crap. Literally.

H is for [Health cuts](#) which mean that Rio will be officially in a healthcare emergency during the Games. In December 2015 hospitals were forced to close their doors due to insufficient funds.

I is for the [Impeachment](#) proceedings against President Dilma Rousseff, as a result of which the Olympics will be opened by a man who is seen by many

in Brazil as poorly disguised coup leader.

J is for the [Jacarepaguá lagoon](#), once a source of commerce for nearby fishing communities, but now heavily polluted by development, including the main Olympic park.

K is for police [Killings](#) in Rio. Since the city won the right to host the Games, some 2,500 people have been killed by police violence — accounting for around 16% of all homicides in the city, including children as young as ten.

L is for [Line 4](#) of the metro, which has had its opening date repeatedly delayed, and now faces a race against the clock to be operational in time to carry spectators to events.

M is for [Morar Carioca](#) the city's program to upgrade favelas, which hasn't been implemented — it has

been promised to residents around election time as a means of gaining support, but has since been withdrawn.

N is for a [Nature reserve](#) that has been utterly destroyed in order to build a new golf course for the Games, despite Rio already having golf courses.

O is for [Operation Lava Jato](#), the nationwide corruption probe, which continues to tear through Brazil's elite causing political and economic instability.

P is for [Pacification](#) of Rio's favelas, which, while successful in some places, has been disastrous in others. Some favelas are likely to be occupied by the army during the Games.

Q is for [Quilombos](#) (communities started by escaped slaves), which have lost their legal rights. The Olympic journalists' village has been built on a slave burial site in one Quilombo.

R is for the [Removals](#) that have blighted preparations, with over 22,000 families evicted since Rio won the right to host the Games, 4,000 of which were directly caused by the Games.

S is for the [Stigma](#) with which people view favela communities, which continues to inform policymaking, leading to issues such as gentrification and police violence not being addressed.

T is for [Tokyo](#), host of the next summer Olympics, which is already experiencing its share of these issues – this isn't just a problem with Rio and its not going away.

U is for [Urban mobility-https://www.ciltuk.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Focus/FocusJuly2016_Rio.pdf], which has been eroded for the majority of Rio's population despite investment in transport

infrastructure.

V is for [Vila Autódromo](#), a favela next to the Olympic park which has suffered from intense evictions and a climate of "psychological warfare" by the City.

W is for the [Wasteland](#) where Favela do Metro stood before it was cleared for the World Cup – still nothing has been done with the land.

X is for [X-rated tourism](#), with spectators coming to Rio to have sex, which may involve child prostitutes as it did during Brazil's World Cup in 2014.

Y is for [Young people](#) who live on the streets who are being bussed out of the city for the Olympics, despite the IOC's insistence that it values youth.

Z is for [Zika](#), which may spread with the travelers who come for the Games, leading to a global healthcare catastrophe.

Notes on the NATO summit and the antiwar counter-summit in Warsaw

8 August 2016, by **Ilya Budraitskis**

The concept of "hybridity" is central in today's confrontation between Russia and NATO. Back in January 2013, General [Valery] Gerasimov, the Chief of Russia's General Staff, wrote his famous doctrine, which pronounced the onset of a "revolution in military affairs." In urging that the Kremlin needed to learn from the "Arab Spring," Gerasimov argued that today "A focus on applied methods of conflict has moved toward the widespread use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other nonmilitary measures applied in coordination with the protest potential of the population".

It appears that in an age where open war between sovereign states is impossible, hidden war permeates

society. Any internal conflict turns into a main battlefield, and to which the only option is military intervention. Hybrid militarization captures the public sphere so that every internal action can become a weapon of the enemy.

Adopted by governments as an explanatory picture of the world, the idea of hybrid war is made real as it acquires the traits of state policy. Therefore, the classic laws of war are no longer valid, and the confrontation unfolds as a series of tacit, ever morphing signs to be deciphered not so much by politicians as by the military. Every sign gets a sign from the opposite side in response, which in turn receives a sign in response. Since the expansion of NATO into Eastern

Europe and the Russian-Georgian war in the mid-2000s, the conflict has spun through a series of reciprocal phantasmal signs that gradually subsumes all varieties of societal manifestations – from the struggle over the public disclosure of information (the activities of Assange and Snowden) to mass social movements (the Syrian revolution, protests in Moscow or the Maidan in Kiev). Any independent political movement or any individual desire to change their country or the world for the better has been drawn into hybridity's turbid logic.

The state response to the hybrid threat also doesn't have clear boundaries: it's not just an increasing arms race, but also a thorough

strengthening of societal control. Countering hybrid war is the best justification concocted since the end of the Cold War for virtually all of the elite's actions.

Resistance to this devastating, paralyzing logic on society should be the main task of today's left on both sides of the new "containment" line. Nevertheless, we see that a large part of the left, often in spite of their best intentions, are actually included in the hybrid game as part of an attempt to "understand" or justify one of the players' increased militarization. For example, on the eve of the Warsaw summit, the leading journal of the Polish left Political Critique called for strengthening support for NATO troops as a "realistic" solution to Russian aggression in Ukraine. The largest Polish left party, Razom (Together), took a similar position (albeit more cautiously). On the other hand, it's no secret that many prominent members of the Germany's Die Linke limit their anti-militarist position to practically repeating Kremlin propaganda by denying Russia's military presence in Eastern Ukraine and justifying Crimea's annexation as a legitimate response to NATO expansion.

2This splintering of the left across different sides of the geopolitical confrontation is constantly provoked by mutual accusations of "hybridity" as "useful idiots" or as

paid agents in service of the Kremlin or the West. The only way to counter this (as well as reveal the level of sincerity in their "understanding" of Putin and NATO) is through consistent criticism of imperialism and militarism as global phenomena, and as part and parcel to really existing capitalism's logic (this is the main thesis of Lenin's classical works).

These difficult and, likely, the central questions for the European left were discussed at the antiwar counter-summit held in Warsaw on 8 July. Its participants' antiwar activists from Germany, Poland, Sweden, Finland, the USA, Portugal, France, the Czech Republic and Austria presented different positions within the European left that sometimes came dangerously close the usual "understanding" of Putin. But instead of throwing accusations of "useful idiocy", it is worth considering why, for example, American leftists consider their government responsible for virtually all military conflicts, and in connection with this, the German left's historical concern about the constant expansion of the German army's presence outside their country. In my short address, I tried to explain how you can only be true socialist and anti-militarist in Russia when you explicitly oppose aggression against Ukraine, against military support to Assad, and against pressuring post-Soviet countries. And I must say that

the majority of participants accepted this position positively.

The next day, on July 9, only a few hundred people attended an antiwar demonstration held in the center of Warsaw. This modest figure the result of an aggressive media campaign by the Polish media and political mainstream, almost directly declared anyone opposing the need for rapidly increasing the military budget as a Kremlin agent (Poland's military budget increased by 20 percent in the last year alone). The small demonstration in Warsaw, of course, was also included in the information war. The Polish media almost completely ignored it (except perhaps only Gazeta Wyborcza), but RT, NTV and LifeNews all flocked to it like bees to honey.

Such a situation is not the first time nor will it be the last time the anti-militarist movement risks manipulation by elites and states in a procession of infinite hybrid signs. The only way to avoid this is to constantly and persistently deny the logic of the confrontation in which common people on both sides of the front always become the victims. And the rally's Polish organizers' main slogan, "Neither Moscow nor Washington," precisely harmonizes with this task.

July 15 2016

[LeftEast](#)

The UKIPisation of the Tory Party -The Brexit left in denial

7 August 2016, by **Alan Thornett**

And now we have it. The Theresa May government, established within a remarkable few frenzied days, is the most right wing in modern times, not just in terms of Brexit but across the board and she is playing all this to the full. Osborne is gone (replaced by Phillip Hammond), Nikki Morgan gone (replaced by Justine Greening),

Michael Gove gone (replaced by Liz Truss), Amber Rudd is home secretary, Jeremy Hunt remains at Health for confronting the doctors no doubt.

Possibly the most frightening, hard line Brexiteer, Andrea Leadsom goes to the environment (DEFRA). She is

not just a climate denier, and in favour of bringing back fox hunting, but she has close links to the Tea Party movement in the USA.

Leadsom would have been to the right of May had she been elected to the Tory leadership which she might well have been had the vote gone to

the Tory "rank and file" and the way she was removed from the race in advance of this might well reflect divisions in the ruling class over how far Brexit should go.

The change of leadership to May, however, is still a big shift to the right and has left the Tories in a stronger, more united, and ideological coherent position, that they were under Cameron"despite the problems they face in implementing Brexit. UKIP has been sidelined, at the moment, by what is in effect, the partial UKIPisation of the Tory Party.

Most significantly, the key positions in terms of Brexit"the issue that will define her administration"go to hard-line right-wing Brexiteers: David Davies as minister for Brexit, Liam Fox as the newly created Minister of foreign trade and Boris Johnson as Foreign Secretary. It means that these people have been handed the power to reshape Britain's place in the world for the next generation if they get their way.

There are big changes in the structure of government as well. Most significantly, the Department for Energy and Climate Change has been abolished and merged with Industry"which is a disaster for the environment and the struggle against climate change.

The Tory right, who have been skulking in the background and sniping about the EU since Cameron won the Tory Leadership from David Davis (and also Liam Fox) in 2005, are back with a vengeance. They are now in charge and are running the show.

It is these people who have now been handed the opportunity, by this referendum vote, to reshape British politics (and Britain's place in the world) on the scale that Thatcher was able to reshape British politics after the defeat of the miners in the 1980s"and they intend to grasp it with both hands. It is not going to be easy and there are many pit-falls in the Brexit process, but unless the May leadership is stopped at next election (and only Corbyn can do it), this is the very dangerous direction of travel.

Even if May is inclined at any point to

make concession on Brexit, there will be plenty on the right ready to step in and stop her. UKIP will be waiting to capitalise on any back sliding and there are plenty on the Tory back benches ready to rise up against it.

This whole situation is not just a blow to the left in Britain, but it is serving as an inspiration to right-wing forces right across Europe. Le Pen is already welcoming it with both hands and promising a similar referendum in France if she wins the Presidency next year.

Young people in Britain, who have lost the most under recent governments and who, for the first time, face a reduced standard of living in comparison with the previous generation are the most hostile to all this, and were the most pro-remain section of society, and once again have the most to lose.

Three million EU citizens in Britain, who were denied a vote in the referendum, are left wondering what their status in Britain is likely to be after they have been used by May as a bargaining chip in the negotiations with the EU elites.

This was reflected in the 100,000 strong demonstration of mostly young people that took place in London immediately after the vote"organised through social media. It was not a demonstration organised by the left or of the labour movement but it was organised on a progressive basis and was strongly pro-immigration.

The situation of the left

Socialist Resistance argued for a remain vote on the basis that the referendum would be a carnival of reaction leading to a major shift to the right in British politics, and we have been right on both counts.

Those far-left organisations"the SWP, the Socialist Party, and Counterfire, along with the CPB"that argued for exit from the EU on the basis that such a vote would bring down Cameron, push the

political situation to the left, and open up new opportunities for radical politics, even increase the chances of a Labour government, got it dramatically wrong. In fact, some are still arguing that there has not been a shift to the right a week after the formation of the May government.

A Brexit vote was always going to bring down the Cameron government, but its replacement, as Socialist Resistance argued throughout, was always going to be well to its right. It was always likely to open the way for dangerous realignment of the hard right"either within the Tory Party or as a part of a wider realignment. In the event it has been the former, and even worse and quicker than most of us predicted.

Those taking SR's position in the referendum"of a critical remain vote to fight xenophobia"were accused by the Lexiteers of being "liberal leftists" or of departing from basic principles on the class nature of the EU. John Rees accused us (on the Counterfire website) of practising what he called "the linear school of historical analysis":

"There will not be an automatic lurch to the right even with a figure like Johnson or May as Tory leader. The Tories will just have suffered their biggest reverse since the defeat of Thatcher. Their backbenchers are split down the middle. They only have a 17-seat working majority. They are under investigation for electoral fraud in more seats than that. They have just had to make a series of policy reverses... Only someone entirely wedded to the linear school of historical analysis could fail to see an opportunity for the left in this situation."

Alex Callinicos was in a similar mode in International Socialism just before the vote. He argued"whilst accusing the "Another Europe is Possible" campaign of "a slide into class collaboration"that a Brexit vote would shatter the Cameron government just a year after winning a general election. Yes indeed! But what comes next?

In the event they were both wrong. The Brexit vote has not brought about

a shift to the left, but the biggest shift to the right in British politics since Thatcher took office in 1979—and, unless it is reversed, it could have equally disastrous long-term consequences.

The Lexiteers, however, were still defending the same position three weeks after the vote. This was the position argued by Peter Taaffe three weeks after the vote in *Socialism Today*: “The vote to leave the EU has rocked capitalist institutions—in Britain and internationally. It is yet another reflection of the anger at mass poverty and savage austerity—and of the growing anti-establishment mood... It is totally false to draw the utterly pessimistic conclusions which some small left groups have done that this result could lead to a ‘carnival of reaction’ in Britain and encourage right-wing forces in Europe and elsewhere.”

Playing the race card

It should be clear now, if it was not clear before, that this referendum was not, at the end of the day, a referendum on the EU but on immigration: i.e. ‘are you in favour of the free movement of people?’ ‘yes or no?’ This scenario was played out in interview after interview, on the streets, the response was overwhelmingly: too much immigration—end free movement. And the uncomfortable fact is that, given Britain’s imperialist and colonialist history, decades of bipartisan institutionalised racism practiced by both Tories and Labour, and the disgusting xenophobia of the tabloids—the Sun, the Mail and the Express in particular—over many years, it was always going to be thus.

Since the vote racism has been strengthened, the number of racist hate crimes has doubled, the political situation has moved to the right. The Tory Party has also moved to the right, and we are heading for an exit process from the EU that will be shaped by the xenophobic right in which ending free movement of people and cutting immigration to the bone will be the order of the day.

Not that the referendum can be reduced to immigration. There were other important factors involved—not least poverty, alienation and an anti-establishment backlash. In the end, however, it was racism that put the energy (or the venom) into the Brexit campaign. It was the driving force of the Brexit turnout.

Richard Seymour puts it this way: “It was the question of the free movement of labour within the European Union that that harnessed the energies for Leave”. He continues: “Not that most of those who voted Leave had much experience of migration—the areas with the highest numbers of EU nationals living in them were also those with the strongest Remain votes. But that is how it usually works with race politics in the UK.” There are exceptions to this but it is broadly true.

The racist dynamic, however, could not have been clearer. Immediately the mainstream Brexit campaigns took the decision to concentrate almost exclusively on immigration the Brexit vote went into the lead in the polls. There was indeed an anti-establishment backlash. The problem with this is that such backlashes are not necessarily progressive. In fact much of UKIP’s support has been based on it.

In fact the mainstream Brexit campaigns ran the most openly racist campaign in modern times, and they were very effective. What used to be known as playing the race card now passes for ‘normal’ politics. Unless this is reversed quickly they will have done serious damage to British society. The most damaging long-term damage that the referendum campaign has done in Britain has been to make racism ‘respectable’.

The answer of the Lexiteers to the dispossessed and the alienated was that immigrants were taking British jobs, driving down wages and living on benefits. Their campaign broadcast featured a map of Europe with arrows streaming towards Britain from across Europe—representing a flood of immigrants on the move, mostly from the East. During the campaign a Labour pro-remain MP Jo Cox was

assassinated by a fascist shouting ‘put Britain first’. It is hard to separate his actions, at least at that moment, from the politics of the mainstream Lexiteers. It was a warning that some very unpleasant forces were at work.

Worse than that, the findings of the Ashcroft poll immediately taken immediately after the vote found that by big majorities, voters who saw multiculturalism, feminism, the Green movement, and immigration, as forces for good voted to remain in the EU, whilst those who saw these things as forces for ill voted, by even larger majorities to leave. It is a frightening picture.

There has been another remarkable development as well. Lexit organisations with long histories of anti-racism have been talking down and seeking to minimise the racism and xenophobia involved in this referendum both before the vote and after. The same has been the case with the situation of the 2.4 million EU citizens living in this country who are set to be used as a bargaining chip in the Brexit negotiations with the EU.

The Lexit campaign refused to regard the fate of these people as any kind of problem right through the campaign and has said nothing about it since. When I raised this issue at the launch meeting of the campaign earlier in the year I was told that ‘it was very unlikely to be a problem’.

General election

The possibility of an early general election is very dangerous for Labour because the Brexit vote has pushed the situation to the right. One of the reasons that May stresses ‘Brexit means Brexit’ and that a big reduction in immigration is her red line in the negotiations with the EU, is in order to claim to speak for the Brexit vote for the next general election whenever it comes.

She will only go for an early election if she has a big lead in the polls and feels confident that she can tap into the Brexit vote effectively. Labour needs time to tackle the Brexit effect and start to turn the situation back

towards the left before it can be sure of winning an election.

Those in the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) who are ganging up with the Tories to remove Jeremy Corbyn on the basis that his departure is essential to winning the next election could hardly be more wrong. The key to defeating the kind of government that May is constructing is precisely the kind of radical anti-austerity and anti-racist alternative that Corbyn represents. It is only this approach which has a chance of cutting through the xenophobic fog of the referendum, give real hope to the dispossessed and the marginalised, and build the kind of movement necessary.

The argument of the PLP plotters that the best way to win the next election is to go back to the politics that lost the last two elections makes no sense. It is a complete misunderstanding of the dynamic of politics in Britain today.

Winning the next election for Labour will require, not a reversion to past failed policies, but a radical programme of austerity busting measures that can mobilise the deprived the alienated and the forgotten. Another thin gruel of Tory policies will not mobilise the movement necessary.

A majority Labour government could become increasingly difficult to

achieve, particularly if, as is likely, the boundary commission proposals to reduce the number of seats at Westminster goes through by 2018. Labour needs to call for a progressive anti-austerity alliance in Parliament with the SNP and the Greens now and in the run up to the next general election, whenever that comes.

One way that Labour can boost its chances at the next election is a pledge for radical electoral reform. First and foremost getting rid of the notorious first-past-the-post (FPTP) voting system. This would not only win votes in the election itself but would reshape the system for the new realities of British politics. It would also increase the turnout in elections since every vote would count – which was a factor in the high turnout in the referendum.

The political structure in Britain that prevailed throughout the 20th century has fallen apart with the rise of multiple parties. The voting system that sustained it has become a byword for everything undemocratic and corrupt. Smaller parties (of both right and left) have been emerging with substantial votes – the Green Party and Ukip in England and the SNP in Scotland in particular. We now have what is effectively a six-party system. Under these conditions the FPTP system has gone from the undemocratic to the outrageous.

In the last election we had parties of both the left and the right winning millions of votes but getting minimal representation. Scotland, quite rightly, is heading for independence – though whether the May administration will agree to it as Cameron did is an open question. In any event Scotland will still be not be independent in 2020, but after that who knows.

Jeremy Corbyn has to grasp the nettle over this and come out strongly in favour of electoral reform. John McDonnell, Clive Lewis and others have already called for it along with Caroline Lucas and Owen Jones. It would be a big mistake for Labour to go into the next election whenever it comes without radical proposals for a proportional voting system that would ensure that every vote counts and not just a few marginal constituencies. PR is not just a vote winner in itself but it is crucial with the situation so volatile and the old consensus breaking up. To this should be added the proposal to give the vote to 16 and 17 year olds.

This as part of a manifesto that deals with the housing crisis, the decimation of our NHS, with the growth of zero hours contracts and food banks, the rise of racism and other forms of inequality is the path that we need to go down – a path that will inspire even greater numbers than Jeremy Corbyn has already done over the remarkable last year.

International Solidarity with the migrants of the world!

6 August 2016

For some years, the capitalist system has been going through one of the most important economic and political crises of its history.

In this crisis, the EU bourgeoisies are applying austerity measures to stay competitive. Throughout Europe in order to avoid social conflicts, they are

encouraging racism by using it as a tactic to divide the working class, and distracting people away from their own policies of destroying social welfare.

The crisis has permitted reactionary ideas and forces to grow, and the far right movements have managed to dominate public debate. The liberal

right parties as well as Social Democrats react to this by integrating the demands and themes of the far right into their own programmes, which only seems to legitimize the positions of the far right in the consciousness of large parts of the population.

In order to stay in power during the crisis, imperialist countries are fighting increasingly destructive battles for control of resources, and existing and new markets to ensure and increase their profits. This creates regional instabilities, especially in the Middle East. On an international scale, this deeply changes the balance of forces between countries.

At the same time, this has caused an increase of military interventions in the area leading to a humanitarian crisis and the flight of millions of people. This is accompanied by an increase in the number of other migrants that are escaping everyday from all sorts of different oppressions.

The first type of oppression is the domination of the Global South by the Global North, creating abundant poverty and misery.

As a historical product of colonialism, a lot of countries are governed by dictators and violent regimes that persecute their people and force them to flee. As always, women and LGBTIQ* people live the greatest oppression. In some countries, the fact of being an LGBTIQ* person can be enough to be condemned to death. Around the world, women are threatened on a daily basis by assault, rape and murder; furthermore, in many areas the states do not offer any protective measures against these threats. This is why refugees are ready to risk their lives in hope of a better life. But upon arrival in the European countries, they are put into camps, harassed and persecuted. Furthermore, their situation and presence are used to justify military interventions.

On a European level, the EU institutions are being used to coordinate the different countries policies on immigration. In order to not destabilize the labour market, the EU institutions try to control immigration into the European countries. Immigrant workers have always been used as a cheap work force and an excuse to lower the salaries and attack working conditions of all workers. The creation of Frontex and the massive increase of its budget in the last years show that the refugee question has become one of their

priorities: they militarize the borders, and try to criminalize the migrants especially in the border countries through which they enter the EU, like Greece, Hungary or Italy.

What to do

In some countries, despite the reactionary offensive, we have seen an important support from the population. Demonstrations have been organized and a lot of people have participated in charity movements.

The challenge is now to give a political dimension and go a step further than the humanitarian aspects. However, this is made difficult because of a paternal form of racism – seen by the treatment of migrants as inferiors in need of help – that is very widely spread in the support movement. This purely humanitarian vision leads to an economic advantage for the states as it gives them the opportunity to have people voluntarily do the states tasks for free.

On the contrary to this, we need to defend the space for migrants' self-organization and self determination because it is the only way to allow them to emancipate themselves. This is even more important for women and LGBTIQ* people whose situation is made invisible in the consciousness of people, and within the debates and discourse. They are subjected to a segregation and isolation from the rest of the population. Often migrants are separately housed depending on their gender, creating a real problem for trans-people.

We need to spread our analysis and our answers to these problems. We need to convince people of the necessity to fight the right wing and all racist attacks. We need to fight against our own governments and their imperialism. We need to fight the state's structural racism. These are our priorities.

Our demands

In this situation there are some urgent demands that revolutionaries need to fight for:

- We refuse the distinction between political and economic refugees. We have to affirm that migration is often the result of the catastrophic effects of the capitalist system.

- The immediate regularization of all undocumented people.

- The closure of all inhuman refugee camps, the disbandment of FrontEx, and the stop of all discriminating and violent policies against migrants. For example, the Dublin system.

- The right for anyone, and especially migrants, to have access to decent housing, education, health care and a general satisfaction of basic needs.

- A stop to all police violence and deportations.

- The right to regroup all families.

- The organization of an economic, medical and psychological support for all women.

- All specific reasons that lead to women and LGBTIQ* people fleeing have to be accepted as reasons for receiving asylum.

These demands are a necessity, but they can't really be effective if they are not part of a perspective to break with the capitalist system, and the building of an alternative society without exploitation and oppression. With this in mind we demand:

- Open borders and self-determination for everyone on where and how to live and work. We demand humanitarian corridors to Europe, because not a single death in the Mediterranean Sea can be justified.

- Increase the social rights and the working conditions of all workers. For example, by a massive reduction of daily working hours, and to allow everyone to work and live in better conditions without having to create a competition between migrants and locals.

- We defend an ecological and social planning of the production system to be put under the control of workers, in order to stop the wars driven by the ever increasing need of resources by the capitalist productive system.

The 33rd Youth Camp of the Fourth International reaffirms our international solidarity with all

migrants and our will to together destroy this racist, unfair and violent

system to create a new alternative society without exploitation and oppression.

Stop the bombings and the sieges in Syria, support the Syrian people!

5 August 2016

It has been 5 years since the beginning of the Syrian popular uprising that demanded freedom, social justice and dignity against the ruthless regime of the Assad family. This uprising was part of the broader regional revolutionary process started in Tunisia, igniting North Africa and the Middle East, in an exemplary struggle for the popular classes of all the world. Again this year in March, during the ceasefire, hundreds of demonstrations supporting the same demands took place across free Syria every Friday. A good example of the survival of democratic forces in the country is the recent demonstrations in Maarat Al Naaman, against Assad, Al Nusra and Daesh. The same can be said for Kafranbel, or the White Helmets, who risk their lives every day to save people from the bombings.

The people of Syria rapidly faced the most violent counter-revolution for decades. The Assad regime and its allies, namely the Iranian Pasdaran, Russian jets, Hezbollah and other sectarian militias from Iraq and Afghanistan, used all types of weapons to punish the democratic uprising, from barrel bombs to snipers, mass torture, sieges, sectarian massacres and chemical weapons. More than 500.000 people were killed by the Assad regime and its allies, who are responsible for 95% of the civilian deaths. More than 10 million people, half of the population, were displaced or fled Syria to neighbouring countries. Assad released jihadists from his prisons in 2011 and later on left the growing cancer of Daesh untouched, with the clear goal of destroying the spirit of the revolution that chanted "the Syrian people are

one" and the Free Syrian Army, and to spread sectarianism in the country. Assad and Daesh need each other for propaganda but also military reasons. They both dream of being the last two options in Syria. Despite the myths, Assad has allowed Israel to strike many times inside Syria without moving a finger. His regime also violently repressed the Kurds in 2004 and is not a genuine friend of any liberation struggle. There is no excuse for Assad's crimes against humanity.

This multi-sided and extremely violent counter-revolution concerns us all. Every global and regional power is in one way or another opposed to a genuinely democratic and non-sectarian Syria, including the USA who only focuses on Daesh and wants to broker a deal with Russia; the reactionary regimes of Saudi Arabia and Qatar who supported the confessionalisation of the revolution; or Turkey who is opposed to Kurdish autonomy in the North, made an infamous deal with the EU to stop the refugees, and allowed Daesh supporters to go to Syria. Human solidarity and internationalism makes us understand how that counter-revolution pushes thousands of refugees to die on the road to Europe, how it feeds the criminal gangs of Daesh and the rise of acts of mass violence, and most of all the police state and the far right in many of our countries. As young internationalists, we refuse to choose between imperialist rivals and the reactionary alternatives of Assad and Daesh, and we reassert our support for the people in struggle in Syria, for the remaining self-organised structures to ensure the survival and the freedoms of hundreds

of thousands of Syrians, and for the democratic brigades who survived despite the very unequal military balance of forces.

Today, 114 million people are living under siege in Syria. They lack food, medical care, clean water, and other basic needs. They are also cut off from the outside world. Since mid-July, the last supply road from the eastern part of Aleppo has been cut by the pro-Assad forces, which puts 300,000 people under imminent threat of starvation and their lives at risk. At the same time, the city of Daraya faces the invasion of the pro-Assad forces and is at risk of a massacre. The UN itself shamefully cooperates with the Assad regime in its politics of "kneel or starve" in the way it delivers or not humanitarian relief.

The only way forward means getting rid of the Assad regime and supporting a secular and democratic regime ensuring social justice for the people, and self-determination for the Kurdish people. The 33rd International Revolutionary Youth Camp, gathered in Catalunya, answers the call of the Syrian people for solidarity :

- End all the bombings now, especially of the medical facilities
- End the sieges/besieging now
- Open the borders and concrete support for the refugees
- Immediate access to humanitarian aid to the areas now under siege : drop aid, not bombs
- All the needed material help for the

democratic structures and forces of Syria

Long live the permanent revolution !

OKDE Spartakos Youth Commission

Dear Comrades

We send you greetings from the 33rd youth camp of the Fourth International in Catalonia.

We very much regret you were not able to be present at the camp. As you know we had hoped you would be able to send at least some representatives and had scheduled your presence in talking about the fightback against austerity imposed by the European Union, the crucial question of solidarity with migrants and fighting back against the rise of the far right. We know that you are very active on these questions and were looking forward to hearing your contributions on these and all topics.

We are finishing the camp today after a successful week of discussion and

exchange, and partying. We hope we will meet some of you at the 34th camp next year, possibly in Italy. In the meantime we offer our solidarity to all victims of state repression of the social movement, members of the FI or not.

Our warmest revolutionary greetings

The participants at the 33rd camp from Belgium Brazil Britain Denmark France Germany Italy Netherlands Mexico Portugal Spanish Switzerland USA Western Sahara

Statement of support for self- determination of the Saharawi people

From the 33rd International Conference of Revolutionary Youth, organized in CÀ noves (Catalonia) from

24 to 30 July 2016 we want to give visibility to the struggle of the Saharawi people from a younger and newer perspective.

The Saharawi people is suffering a political, illegal military and territorial occupation by Morocco for over 40 years. We want to take the opportunity of the participation of a Saharawi delegation at this camp to express our support for self-determination of the Saharawi people.

The Collective Lefrig constantly working to politicize the Saharawi youth so that it continues to claim its rights through new forms of struggle, such as the inclusion of Saharawi feminist collective in motion.

The Sahara is not a desert, it is also a democratic republic fighting for its independence from European and Moroccan imperialist powers.

And they are not alone in their struggle.

Long live the struggle of the Saharawi people!

30 July 2016

Cà noves, Catalonia, Spanish state

The Unitary Chavista Socialist League (LUCHAS) is born

4 August 2016, by Stalin Pérez Borges

From now, we want to build this organization with other groups, currents, left-wing personalities and intellectuals and hundreds of revolutionary militants who belong to no organization, with trade union, social movement and gender activists, said Stalin Pérez Borges, one of its founders. "We invite all of them, in a spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood, camaraderie and respect, to try to build together this new political instrument of revolutionaries, with equal duties and rights for all."

Pérez said one of their greatest wishes is to ensure that the working class and working people in general play a major part in the leadership and composition of this organization, without of course excluding students, academics, peasants and other popular sectors. We want no personality cults, however important a role any particular leader may have played, nor will we make any fetish of workerism, much less trade unionism.

He added, "we know that the revolution we dream of and want to

make a reality will be fundamentally popular in character. This Unitary League will operate horizontally. Every one of its members will have all the rights and democratic guarantees to express their opinions, make their proposals and take part in concrete struggles against capital. All our leaders will be elected and recallable when a majority of the members so decides."

If there is one lesson we have learned from this experience of the Bolivarian process in Venezuela and the

emergence of the left as a government in several Latin American countries, it is the need to recover the class orientation of revolutionary organization, he continued.

"However, that cannot be decreed. The fact that most of the leadership of a political organization is composed of men and women who live from their work, does not in itself guarantee that the organization will become immediately or in the longer term a mass movement or party. But history has shown that an organization will be more reliable and loyal to the interests of the people if it is made up of men, women and those of diverse gender who live from their daily work."

He stressed that the aim of this new political organization, LUCHAS, is to push this revolutionary process towards a real socialist revolution, to seize power and make the Socialist Venezuela that so many of us have dreamed of throughout our lives.

"These tasks present us with the permanent challenge of pointing out the political and administrative errors, or counter-revolutionary decisions, of senior state officials and the nefarious role of the bureaucracy that does not like being criticized or questioned when it claims to represent this government, as the heir to the Chavista Bolivarian revolution. We will raise the banners that Chavez raised in his "Change of Course" (Golpe de Timon) speech. In the streets and in our workplaces we will defend the content of the socialist proposal, the meaning of love of country and the need to develop the communal state."

LUCHAS, a new political organization of revolutionaries

The following are key aspects of its founding statement:

- It is imperative then, that before or in parallel with building this organization, we strive harder than ever to help the working class to take a leap forward in its consciousness, which remains essentially trade unionist, focussed on making demands. We need to help the class take its own steps and move from "a consciousness in itself, to a consciousness for itself", as Lenin

liked to say. To do this, it has to be the working class that is the main protagonist, along with the other oppressed social sectors that are part of the leadership and membership of the organization, projecting their aspirations far beyond mere economism. Working people have to become fully aware of the contradiction with capital, which implies a commitment which cannot for any reason or under any circumstances, allow to pass the policies, with their different tactics and strategic objectives, that represent capital, which here and now are epitomized by the MUD opposition.

- LUCHAS aims to be an organization of all the oppressed. We want to mobilize with them to achieve our liberation. We have an internationalist perspective, as did the anti-colonial and independence fighters like Bolivar; as did the best Marxists past and present, and as did the great revolutionaries of Latin America like Che and Chávez. As workers, men and women, as intellectuals, students, popular sectors, farmers and fishermen, we will give our body and soul to build this organization, as well as to elaborate its political program and develop the revolutionary theory of this new organization: LUCHAS.

- We will be a tree with multiple roots, not an abstraction or a ready-made compendium where everything is already done and dusted and whose truths are set in stone. We see this Unitarian League as a collective project. We want to develop, with all oppressed sectors, proposals for concrete realities. We will confront whatever tests we are subjected to in the contradictions and ups and downs of the class struggle. We will confront them alongside the working people. For now, to all socialist Chavistas, men and women, we want to make a sincere appeal for revolutionary UNITY.

Reinventing the space for revolutionary unity

In this historic impasse of the Bolivarian process, two of the most important crises are those of leadership and of the lack of solid proposals to return to the road of

revolutionary transformation. We lack initiatives that lead to a solution to this problem, which is about survival in both the immediate and in the historical sense.

If the government does not listen to the slightest criticism from leaders or organizations of the social movements, the unions or left intellectuals, the strategic direction may be lost. Sectarianism is a bad counselor in times of crisis.

This is also an appeal to members of the political leaderships of the parties that make up the GPP (the coalition of pro-government parties). For the most part they have been incapable of raising their voices, but recently Juan Barreto of REDES and Oscar Figuera of the PCV (Venezuelan Communist Party), made critical remarks to the government. Before, with few exceptions and only then in private talks, dissent was absent. This can not continue.

For these reasons, whatever doubts we Chavista and socialist revolutionaries may have, we can not waver regarding the immediate and lasting need for a space where we can build unity among the majority of revolutionaries.

This should be an open space, including both these GPP parties which have now been forced by popular pressure to call on the government to listen to criticism and constructive proposals, as well as the millions of activists of social struggles and small political organizations, currents and movements, among which we count ourselves.

We can have no doubts about building together this space for revolutionary unity, both with comrades who are members of these GPP organizations as well as those outside them. We have no preconceptions about the form this forum or roundtable should take, nor whether it should be only civilian or include military personnel.

All those questions and many more are up for discussion, but we must take now clear and decisive steps to reinvent such a space for revolutionary unity. Otherwise, we will not restore hope in the profound

transformation of Venezuela and our continent.

Just by being able to organize in this way, we can help to rediscover the paths of dignity and of the transition to socialism that we have so long written and spoken about. And just as there are no established blueprints for how to build socialism, so there is no magic formula or prescribed manual that tells us how to create this space of revolutionary unity. It will be either trial or error.

However, if we are convinced of the need for this unity and if we are immersed in the struggles of working people, in the campaigns against attacks on decent wages and working conditions for those who live by their labour, for the democratization of

trade union and student organizations, for democratic freedoms or in defence of the environmental and sexual diversity, as well as all the gains of the Bolivarian revolution, together we can create this unitary space.

For our part, as members of this new organizational project called LUCHAS, we put ourselves at the disposal of all those organizations and individuals who are aware of the need to create this space for revolutionary unity.

LUCHAS closes ranks against the unpatriotic right, against imperialism and transnational capital. We support the government in whatever actions and initiatives it takes that aim to deepen in a socialist direction the Bolivarian process, without this preventing us from raising our voice

against anything we see as a capitulation to capital.

'Let everyday LUCHAS (struggles) bring us together' !!!

'The destiny of the Venezuelan and continental socialist revolution will be marked by LUCHAS (struggles). Let's join the struggle and work for the unity of revolutionaries, men and women !!

For the Unitary Chavista Socialist League (LUCHAS):

Stalin Pérez Borges, Christian Pereira, Vilma Vivas, Norman Antonio Boscan, Jesus Borges, Ismael Hernandez, Jesus Vargas, Osman Cañizales, Henry and Williams Ospina Ruiz.

Venezuela, July 28, 2016

Pakistan's history of rape impunity

4 August 2016, by Maham Javaid

The Friday Times, one of the more prominent English language weeklies, covered the rape in its gossip column, dismissing the charges as a fabrication by the victim's family. The column, which [claimed](#) DNA tests could prove sexual contact between the victim and the main perpetrator was consensual rather than forced, was received poorly on Pakistani social media and was later deleted from the newspaper's website. It was then reported that the victim, feeling pressure amid the police probe, attempted suicide by jumping off a balcony at her house.

In an editorial, Pakistan's Dawn newspaper [wrote](#) that "the rape has drawn the usual reactions." And to a large extent, this is true. There are countless cases of rape victims committing suicide after losing hope for justice in Pakistan; there are just as many cases of people, mostly men, in positions of religious or political privilege indulging in victim blaming. In 2005, Pakistan's then-President Pervez Musharraf told [The](#)

[Washington Post](#), "If you want to go abroad and get a visa for Canada or citizenship and be a millionaire, get yourself raped," implying that Pakistani women were using being sexually assaulted as a means to get rich and obtain asylum in a Western country.

Rape is a violent act used to exert power and control, and it occurs everywhere. However, there are certain environments where this form of violence thrives: patriarchal societies with flawed justice systems that have set precedents of brushing sexual violence under the rug. What's more, the notion of personal and family honor, which is fastidiously attached to the female body, is stronger in Pakistan than in some other parts of the world. This urges victims and their families to cover up sexual assaults and creates an incentive to use rape as revenge and punishment.

Pakistan is choosing to protect a politician over a 15-year-old rape

victim.

Pakistan's political history is full of unpunished sexual violence. During the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, [approximately](#) 100,000 women were raped. Pakistani history books erased the fact that Hindu and Sikh women were raped, and Indian history books ignored that Muslim women were raped. In 1971 scores of war crimes were committed in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) by members of the Pakistani army and pro-Pakistani militias. Thousands of Bengali women were abducted, kept in barracks described as [rape camps](#) and repeatedly assaulted. By choosing not to acknowledge that hordes of Pakistanis committed sexual crimes against women and by leaving them unpunished, Pakistan set a destructive precedent.

These sexual assault atrocities are often waved off by journalists and government officials with the strange explanation that rape was not the only crime that occurred in 1971. After 45

years, [a tribunal to prosecute those responsible for these war crimes](#) has been assembled in Bangladesh. But there are serious problems with the manner in which the tribunals are being run, one of which is that the tribunal has no power to prosecute Pakistani soldiers. In 1971 and in the 1974 Delhi Tripartite Agreement, the Pakistani government chose its soldiers and commanders over the thousands of rape victims, and today Pakistan is choosing to protect a politician over the 15-year-old rape victim. Decisions that were made in the 1970s on the level of the state are reflected in the way Pakistani society has [trivialized justice](#).

In November [the Pakistani Foreign Affairs Ministry](#) wrote that the 1974 agreement “calls for a forward-looking approach in matters relating to 1971” to foster better relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh. This outlook implies that Bengali rape victims should just let bygones be bygones for the sake of regional peace. Perhaps Pakistan thought 45 years is long enough and wounds have healed themselves.

Pakistan has only to glance at the recent talks between South Korea and Japan to realize that the mere passage of time does not erase the scars of sexual violence. Last month the Korean “comfort women” [â€”](#) a euphemism for women whom the

Japanese used as sex slaves during World War II [â€”](#) received [an apology and a financial compensation of \\$8.3 million](#), more than 70 years after the crimes were committed. In all probability, it was not historical guilt that caused Japan’s Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to offer the apology but his desire to improve ties with South Korea and soften his nationalist image. Realpolitik aside, Japan has set an example that should affect the way Pakistan thinks about 1971 as well as every other rape in the country that goes unpunished.

January 28, 2016

[Al-Jazeera America](#)

Feminisms of the Left

3 August 2016, by [Nancy Holmstrom](#)

They supported abortion rights of course, and equal pay for equal work, as do all feminists, but they also supported public child care and welfare. Gloria Steinem and Ms. magazine are examples. But the movement declined just as so many activists were moving into careers and families; American politics was moving rightward, into neoliberalism, and this general trend took mainstream feminism with it. So instead of collective social provision, we heard about individual responsibility and self-sufficiency. The Clintons’ welfare “reform” exemplifies this change^{â€”}and Gloria Steinem’s support for Hillary Clinton, despite all that Clinton has done against the interests of the majority of women in the world, is a sad example of the rightward evolution of mainstream feminists.

There are still social-welfare feminists, of course, who should be included on the continuum of “feminists of the left,” though they are less explicitly anti-capitalist than the rest. Personally, though I am a Marxist, I usually choose the label “socialist

feminist” to describe myself just because it is the most inclusive and is less likely to be misunderstood. As I define the term, all socialist feminists (whether they would identify with the label or not) see class as central to women’s lives, yet at the same time none would reduce sex or race oppression to economic exploitation. All socialist-feminist politics have an anti-capitalist edge, not merely anti-neoliberal capitalism. Parenthetically, as with any continuum, it is not always clear how to draw the lines. For example, Iris Young, whom I knew for decades, saw herself as a socialist feminist, as do I, but is included as a liberal feminist in an encyclopedia entry

Which word we choose to identify ourselves largely depends I think on the political context we’re in, and the debates in which we’re involved, as well as how we understand these categories. So the same label may not mean the same analysis, and different labels may not mean different analyses. For example, Margaret Benston was one of the first Marxists to analyze women’s domestic labor,

back in 1969. She considered herself a Marxist, used Marxist categories, wrote in *Monthly Review*, and is described as a Marxist feminist, but in fact her analysis was more like that of feminists who were calling themselves “socialist feminist” in order to distinguish themselves from Marxists. Hilary Wainwright calls herself a feminist socialist rather than a socialist feminist to signal her interest in bringing insights from feminism into the socialist movement and into visions of socialism. She’s been arguing this since the 1970s and recently expressed her frustration that she still has to make the same argument.

Sometimes these different labels do signal different theoretical analyses of women’s oppression and capitalism^{â€”}in particular, whether you believe that capitalism and patriarchy are two distinct, though intersecting, systems^{â€”}or three, to accommodate racism as well. Or, alternatively, if you believe that we live in one system, capitalism, that has various kinds of oppression, including sexism and racism, as constituent

aspects of that system. But I have found over the years that these abstract differences don't necessarily entail political differences, which are most important for social transformation.

Feminists of the left are involved in all kinds of struggles, not only those that are explicitly gendered. In some contexts one sort of issue may predominate, and rightly so, in others a different one. For example, women involved in Black Lives Matter organized Black Women's Lives Matter because women had been left out of the picture. Given the realities of black women's lives, black feminist theory is less likely to omit class issues than white feminist theory.

What defines socialist feminists is both the politics they articulate and the way they organize themselves and articulate those politics. It goes without saying that we support all struggles for women's legal rights, but that is far from enough. Gender inequalities today are significantly less than class inequalities, as two recent sex-discrimination lawsuits reveal. In one, a woman who sold bonds at Morgan Stanley sued because her salary of over a million dollars a year was much lower than her male colleagues'; women at Walmart sued because their annual salary was \$1,100 lower than the men's, but the average pay for all Walmart employees is only \$10 an hour. So the men's salaries are pretty damned low too! And non-union Walmart is now the largest private employer in the United States—versus unionized General Motors not so long ago. It's the struggles of working class women that socialist feminists focus on, whether the struggles are on the job, in the community, or wherever. Working class women's struggles around the world exemplify certain core principles of socialist feminism, as Johanna Brenner and I discussed in the Socialist Register of 2012.

A core principle of socialist feminism is self-organization, the idea that, in Eleanor Marx's words, women's emancipation must come from themselves. But at the same time, they can't do it alone, but only in coalition with others, so socialist feminists work to build inclusive movements,

connecting workplace and community, waged and unwaged work, and caring labor recognized as labor. An excellent model of labor-community organizing is the Chicago Teachers Union work uniting the interests of teachers and parents. Public employees combining with those they serve is a huge step forward, something we've never heard from New York teachers. Similarly, I would like to see the transit workers unions reaching out to riders about common interests, like better staffing. Hilary Wainwright has several examples like this in her book *Reclaim the State* (Verso, 2003).

The paradigmatic gendered struggle for legal abortion was won in 1973 with *Roe v. Wade*, but socialist feminists pressed to go beyond an individual right to choose to include the material and social conditions necessary for women to have a genuine choice as to whether or not to have children. The concept of reproductive rights was developed in the late 1970s by socialist feminists with prodding from women of color who wanted protection against sterilization abuse along with the social changes that would support their decision to have children: child care, maternity leave, welfare, decent medical care, housing, and education. Reproductive rights pushes toward an anti-capitalist politics because unlike legal abortion, these challenge capitalist profits. We never won these in the United States, and where they were won, neoliberalism has brought continual attacks on these benefits.

In contrast, environmental struggles do not seem gendered. What could be more universal than the need for clean air and water? But this does not mean it is not a women's issue. Just as women's rights are human rights, as feminists have argued, so are human rights women's rights. Feminists should not confine themselves to issues uniquely or primarily affecting women. Moreover, there is often some gender dimension even if it's not explicit. The UN Population Fund says that women in developing countries are particularly impacted by climate change, directly because of the difficulty of meeting their families' needs and indirectly by the wars engendered by scarce resources. Women are often the leaders of

grassroots environmental movements, which socialist feminists strongly support, as they stress that the roots of the environmental crisis lie in capitalism's inherent drive to expand production.

Sometimes it's important to work with others who do not share all our left feminist values. *La Via Campesina*—the worldwide peasants movement—took a strong position opposing violence against women, which they defined in both interpersonal and structural terms. So that is very progressive and quite different from the conservative "law and order" approach of much anti-gender-violence work. But *La Via Campesina* at the outset was not comfortable with issues of sexual freedom, abortion, and LGBT rights. Working together, however, with the World March of Women, their position has evolved.

The same conflict can arise in the United States when we are involved in economic struggles with people who are more conservative socially. In Chicago the movement against school closings brought together a diverse group, including gay socialist feminists and black community activists, not all of whom supported gay rights. Rather than tackle their differences directly, they worked in solidarity, recognizing that the parents should be in the leadership of the struggle. Over time, that kind of solidarity is the best way to overcome distrust and change minds.

Another way one can advance struggles from a feminist point of view is to pay attention to the structure and process of the groups in which one works. Differences of power and privilege along sex or gender lines are particularly intimate and subtle. So transforming this power requires the transformation of ourselves and our relationships—an insight associated with the women's liberation movement. One way to address this problem is to allow—or better yet, to encourage—women's caucuses, whether in unions, social movements, or left groups. In Occupy, despite their focus on horizontal process, the idea of separate spaces for women and people of color met some resistance, which is sad. Leftists should note that

more than one hundred years ago, Marx and Luxemburg supported organizing men and women both together and separately. After the Russian Revolution when Alexandra Kollontai was in the government and women were organized independently within the Communist Party, women won all kinds of gains and prevented women's jobs from being given

automatically to returning soldiers rather than allocated according to need.

In the United States today, there is a new openness to socialism. From Occupy to Black Lives Matter to the Sanders campaign, to new labor organizing, we begin to see the possibility of a new radical left. A key

strategic question for that emerging movement is whether the insights of socialist feminism will be brought into the center of its politics.

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[New Politics](#)

The feminist movement

1 August 2016, by Alba Aguinaga, Maria Isabel Altamirano, Tania De La Torre

The two years of the government of Lucio Gutiérrez (January 2003-April 2005) corresponded to a time of crisis in the first current, that of liberal feminism. The latter developed in Ecuador from the 1980s onwards. It won a strong presence in the state institutions during the 1990s. And it succeeded in imposing new rights: in 1993, the code against violence against women; in 1994, the law on free maternity; in 1997, the first law on quotas; and in the Constituent Assembly of 1998 when the collective rights of indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian peoples were integrated into the Constitution, as well as those of LGBT groups.

But at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the country was swept by an institutional and economic crisis under the impact of neoliberalism. This reached its height during the banking crisis of 1999 and the seizure of the savings of thousands of Ecuadorians, causing a wave of emigration to Europe and the United States, including a significant percentage of women.

It is in this context that a popular feminism developed, linked to the struggle of the social movements. Emerged during the 1990s, it grew at the end of the next decade, under the influence of the World Social Forum (WSF) and of the World March of

Women, which situated the struggle of women in a global context and imagined "Another World is Possible". This meant that organizations of women related to the struggles of the indigenous movement and organizations opposed to neoliberalism grew politically stronger in the country.

During the period from 2003 to 2005, three factors weakened institutional feminism: the outright machismo of the government of Lucio Gutiérrez; the crisis of political representation that the country experienced; and the difficulty of institutional feminism in enforcing women's rights of women beyond what the government would accept. For its part, popular feminism experienced a social growth on a country wide scale, but found it difficult to assume the political leadership of the women's movement as well as to generate a program which went beyond the institutions alone.

Since 2007 and under the government of Correa, liberal institutional feminism turned into a progressive liberal feminism. It was partly the result of the presence of popular feminism which questioned some of the policies of the government (like extractivism), but also because of the existence of another progressive sector which supported the government's social policies such as

"good human development", which were of benefit to households headed by women, the elderly and persons with disabilities living in poverty.

In 2008, the various aspirations of the country's women's organizations managed to make themselves heard within the Constituent Assembly, in particular through proposals for additions of economic, political, sexual, social, cultural and environmental rights. It was also the Constitution of 2008 which led to the strengthening of the collective rights of women, with the notable exception, however, of sexual rights where things rather went backwards.

In fact if the Ecuadorian feminism of the 1990s focused on gender, we can say that by 2008 the focus was primarily on economic rights, with sexual and reproductive rights neglected. Not to mention the fact that the progressive provisions of the Constitution of 2008 have lost their radicalism with the development of secondary laws and this has weakened the constitutional progress made around the redistribution of land, the de-privatisation of water, the rights of nature, food sovereignty and the social and solidarity-based economy.

Popular feminism emphasised economic rights and experienced a certain growth, but between 2008 and 2014 it was increasingly difficult for it to reach agreement with the state and

to obtain its support. There was during this entire period not only the growing cooption of popular organizations of women, but also the repression and growing criminalization of social activists. There was also the application of the Integral Organic Penal Code, which did not accept the proposal of the decriminalization of abortion as a result of rape, but penalized it. Which constitutes a setback with respect to sexual and reproductive rights.

The policies of the Correa government

In fact the policies of the Correa government tend increasingly to impose a certain control on the bodies of women and their sexuality. For example, with the Integral Organic Penal Code, women acting as carers who practice abortion may be sentenced to 2 to 6 years in prison, when everyone knows that women put their lives in danger when abortions are carried out in conditions of clandestinity. Another example would be the replacement of the "National Intersectoral Strategy of Family Planning and the Prevention of Teenage Pregnancies (ENIPLA)" by an "Ecuadorian Family Plan", headed by a spokesperson for Opus Dei which popularizes a conservative vision of sexual education.

The policies of the Correa government also tend to make women from the popular sectors bear the major part of the effects of the economic crisis. They are in the front line when faced with the increase in the intensity of work, the growth of poor working conditions as well as the development of informal (precarious and part-time)

jobs not benefiting from social security. If social insurance has been created for unpaid domestic workers, they do not however benefit from all legal rights, and this system is financed by the employed members of the family and not by the state, despite the fact that we know that unpaid work represents 15% of GDP (INEC, 2014).

Similarly, maternity leave has been extended by 3 paid months, taking it to 9 months, but without any payment for the other 6 months. And civil servants are no longer governed by the Employment Code and no longer benefit from collective bargaining. All these measures which appear as being in good faith are in fact indicative of Correa's willingness to establish better conditions for capital, to the detriment of the rights of workers.

The policies of the government Correa tend in addition to the criminalisation of social movements, including imprisonment of young women accused of terrorism for having held political meetings, or judicial proceedings against peasant women protesting against mining or extractivism and defending Pachamama (Mother Earth).

In fact, the state has learned to instrumentalize feminism. It has done so by granting minimum freedoms to women, but at the same time smothering their voices of protest, which is a form of subjugation of women to the dominant social structure. At the same time it is undeniable that there is more than formal equality for women as regards their political representation and some government programs, even if the major part of Ecuadorian women suffer the negative effects of the productivist model of development imposed by the government.

For its part, popular feminism has worked for the rapprochement of Afro-Ecuadorian, indigenous and mestizo women around the development of common demands and aspirations. The emergence of this new political subject, which demands food sovereignty, an economy for life, full women's rights, the right to full participation, the sovereignty of the body and the decriminalization of abortion, allows the feminist revolution to be presented as a societal alternative. But over these years the resistance of the state has been very strong, making the construction of women's organizations both inside and outside the social movements difficult, with another factor being the complexity of the agreements with social bodies that feminist women have difficulty in controlling.

There is therefore a momentary failure of popular feminism which has not managed to give a feminist response going beyond the institutional and governmental framework. Nevertheless organizations of women and feminists continue their critical interventions, notably by denouncing the macho interventions of the state by supporting the struggles of indigenous women, incorporating into their approach ecological struggles, opposing feminicide as well as defending a law against violence against women. It remains the case that the movement of women - like other social groups - is going through a crisis which is expressed both by fragmentation and by the institutionalization of its demands. The result is demobilization and demoralization. However, until we find a way of formulating women's demands which differs from that of institutionalization, we will not advance. This is what a critical and emancipatory feminism must now work towards.

Lessons for the left from Correa's presidency

1 August 2016, by Patrick Guillaudat, Pierre Mouterde

Thus, if the government was able to rapidly mobilise for the organisation of first aid and assistance to the affected population, it has nonetheless been obliged to implement a panoply of tax measures to reinforce those already undertaken to counter the effects of the crisis due to the fall in oil prices [33], with a fall in GDP of more than 4% predicted for 2016. These included increasing VAT from 12% to 14%, the deduction of a day's pay for those earning more than 1,000 dollars per month (and 2 and 3 days for those earning more than 2,000 and more than 3,000 dollars, and so on) as well as a tax of 0.9% for those whose assets exceed a million dollars. Not to mention the much less invoked opening of negotiations with the IMF to obtain new credit lines as well as the possible sale of public assets.

Beyond the real scope of these measures taken in a context of profound recession, many critics have pointed out that they barely affect the wealthiest or the big companies [34] and weigh primarily on intermediary consumers while opening the door to neoliberal measures with serious medium and long term consequences, like indebtedness to the IMF or the sale of state assets. There is then nothing very original in these decisions, whose efficacy can be doubted and which are in strong contrast to the initial aspirations of the "citizen's revolution" proclaimed enthusiastically by Rafael Correa during his first term [See by way of illustration Correa's statement made on September 28, 2008, following the victory of the "yes" camp in the constitutional referendum: "Today Ecuador has decided on a new nation. The old structures are defeated. This confirms the citizen's revolution."]].

How did Correa come to power?

To understand what has happened in Correa's Ecuador, to grasp the nature of the social and economic changes which have taken place as well as the role the left has played or still plays, we must go well beyond these few measures taken in an exceptionally urgent situation. We must review the history of this country and assess the

formidable economic, social and political upheavals which have profoundly transformed this Andean country from the 1990s onwards. It was at this time that the country's indigenous peoples - organised in CONAIE - erupted onto the social and political scene. In alliance with a coordination of urban social movements (CMS), and equipped from 1996 with a political arm, Pachakutik Nuevo Pais [35]. He thus took a path parallel to those of Hugo Chávez and Evo Morales and appeared in Latin America as part of the camp of the most progressive countries. But despite this, his basic project was one of modernisation of the country rather than a project of political and social transformation genuinely oriented to the left. And all the more so in that the political formation on which he based himself, Alianza Pais, while certainly receiving from the beginning the electoral support of the popular and indigenous movement, was not linked to it in an organic manner, remaining outside of it and sometimes in direct opposition to the demands and aspirations of some of its most active sectors. These initial ambiguities could be seen very clearly in terms of the economic model increasingly adopted, as well as the contradictory labels (populist or socialist) which its detractors or defenders bestowed upon it, generally without great rigour.

A "post-neoliberal" economic model?

It should be recognised that after years of neoliberal policies in the 1990s and early 2000s, the Correa government oversaw a genuine economic revival of the country, using massive inflows of foreign currency from higher oil prices for the construction of roads and large scale infrastructural works (motorways, airport, tramway, metro and so on). Also the economic project of "transformation of the productive matrix", above all during Correa's second term, undoubtedly stimulated production in most economic branches of the country, notably agriculture, fishing and tourism. Autonomy in energy was promoted (by the construction of hydroelectric dams),

while an original third way between the private and public sector was sought through the promotion of cooperatives.

But as in Venezuela, the cooperative sector found itself in direct competition with the traditional capitalist sector leading to a paradoxical result: whereas public investment grew constantly from 2007 and even surpassed private investment in 2013 and 2014, there has been a growing concentration of the private sector in the key areas of the economy, like telecoms, supermarkets, cars, drinks and so on. Also, the incomes of the big companies occupy an increasingly significant share of GDP, with the 100 biggest accounting for 57.74% in 2011 and 71.36% in 2014 [36].

This phenomenon is especially evident in agriculture where, although small livestock production has been officially supported, the development of export agriculture has also been pursued (for example flower and broccoli production), favouring the constitution of large scale environmentally unfriendly monocultures (excessive use of water, use of chemical products and so on) and mediaeval working conditions for those employed in the sector, mostly women, who work on a daily basis (which is illegal moreover) and thus do not benefit from social security or trade union protection [37].

This type of development could for some time have enjoyed the illusion of success if oil prices had not collapsed, leading to an anticipated contraction of the economy in 2016, after a growth in GDP of +0.4% in 2015 (but with a fall of 1.1% per inhabitant), as against +7.9% from 2011 [38]. The price of Brent (which represents 2/3 of oil traded in the world) fell from \$110 per barrel in February 2011 in July 2014 to an average of \$50 in 2015 then \$30.69 in January 2016 and \$38.32 in March 2016. With apparently unavoidable consequences for Ecuador [39]; with government income slashed, the extractivist course has been accelerated, with the exploitation of other primary products like mining resources, in particular iron [40]

Without challenging capitalism!

In fact this type of economic development impelled by the state has in no way challenged the inegalitarian and capitalist essence of Ecuadorian society. It is useful to look at the transformation of the living conditions of Ecuador's less privileged layers by comparing them to the rest of the continent. The statistics of the Nation Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INEC) show a significant fall in the rate of poverty, from 35.09% in 2008 to 22.49% in 2014, to rise again to 23.28% in 2015, although there remains a flagrant disparity between the urban and rural world, with rates respectively of 15.7% and 39.3% in 2015.

However, comparison with other Latin American countries does not allow us to state clearly that this fall is due to the social policies of the government alone. Over the period 2000/2014, in all Latin American countries the phenomenon is the same, for both neoliberal and progressive governments. Also, the CEPAL in its social panorama of Latin America of 2013, notes explicitly that this fall in poverty affects all countries [41].

After the dark years of the 1980s and to a lesser extent the 1990s, and after the spectacular fall in living standards, and massive growth of inequality, the rebalancing of social data is completely "normal", especially in the context of a return to growth. The striking difference between the so-called progressive regimes like Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia resides rather in the use of the oil or gas rent. In these three countries, particularly Venezuela, it has been used to develop social policies, notably in the areas of health and education.

But basically these policies of assistance do not break with the capitalist logic of the system. Not only are they content to invest in the existing institutional system without changing its basic structure, but they also remain very largely dependent on the prices of raw materials and above

all they create a clientele dependent on the government's social policy. They do not at all resolve the problem of employment which remains the monopoly of private employers, and to a lesser extent the state.

As to disposable average incomes in Ecuador, the INEC says that between 2000 and 2015, they increased six fold for "capitalists in the productive branches" as against only fourfold for "salaried productive workers" and threefold for "workers in extractivist companies". There is then no real reversal of the trend as to the division of wealth. As for social inequality, the World Bank says that since 2006 all Latin American countries have experienced a fall in inequality due to a strong fall in poverty. The most unequal countries remain those of Central America but also Brazil, governed by the PT, and Colombia. In the Andean zone, Peru and Ecuador are equals in terms of reduction of inequality over this period.

There is finally a last major phenomenon to be observed: the existence of a significant foreign debt, expressing the dependency of the Latin American economies in relation to the great capitalist powers of the North. In Ecuador, the public debt went from 10,235 billion dollars in 2009 to 32,752 in 2015. Yet Correa had from 2007 engaged in a confrontation with the IMF-World Bank alliance. He had succeeded in renegotiating the debt and obtaining repayment on a sum divided by 4. Thus the BCE indicates that if in 2009 the service of the debt (depreciation and interest) was 3.87 billion dollars (of which 0.35 was interest) it was only 0.95 billion in 2010. But it has gone up again to reach 3.16 billion dollars in 2015, of which 1.07 was interest. Because of the exhaustion of banking resources due to the oil crisis, Ecuador no longer has access to international bank loans and only China will lend to it, at interest rates 2 or 3 times higher than the average [42]. However, sensing the fragility of the country's situation, the IMF has now negotiated a loan with Ecuador, a week after the earthquake of April 16, 2016.

New dependencies

Ten years after Correa's first victory in 2006, what remains of the aspirations for change incarnated so strongly in the idea of the citizen's revolution? Undeniably a set of social measures of considerable importance, with a net strengthening of public services, particularly at the level of justice, health and education [43]. For example in the budget programme for 2013-2017, the equivalent of 1.16 billion euros will be spent to create new universities. But the socio-economic structure of the country has not fundamentally changed, and neither have the mechanisms of economic dependency. The private banking sector has seen a strong increase in profits while the industrial and agricultural sectors have continued to be concentrated for the benefit of a handful of big companies. The bourgeoisie of Guayaquil and to a lesser extent Quito continue to hold most of the country's economic levers. And if the first procurer of resources, the oil sector, has undeniably fallen, especially since 2014/2015, the government has done everything to replace it by the extraction of raw materials, extending to the maximum the territory of the oil concessions in Amazonia, with all that implies in terms of environmental damage.

The extractivist policy of the government has not questioned head on the role played by the foreign multinationals. It has contented itself - which, to be sure, is not negligible - with demanding higher royalties than in the past, but has left the field free for them to exploit resources and allowed them to bypass the inherent rights of the peoples (often indigenous) living on the coveted lands, thanks notably to an article in the Constitution evoking "the higher interest of the nation". A Constitution which had yet been written to better protect the rights of the indigenous nations of Ecuador.

Indeed as we know, these multinationals unhesitatingly pollute the environment on a lasting basis to extract precious minerals at minimum cost. This is notably the case with the iron extracted in the south of Ecuador for which cyanide is largely used and

discharged into the water supply or disseminated in phreatic waters. This extractivist model broadly resembles that in vogue at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. The main difference resides in the amount of compensation attributed to the local governments, which is higher than before. But the basis remains the same: dispossession from ancestral lands, systematic contamination, evacuation of resident populations, enriching foreign companies, lasting degradation of the ecosystem, not to mention the appalling working conditions imposed on the workforce.

Dependency thus takes on a double dimension: dependency in relation to international speculation as to the price of raw materials over which Ecuador has no control where it has so much need of regular income to procure essential goods; but also dependency in relation to what should be called the confiscation of the management of the national subsoil by powerful foreign companies [See the exemplary case of Occidental, which, according to the terms of its contract with the Ecuadorian state, could not sell its concession to a third party (Canadian) company. It did so nonetheless with complete impunity at the time of President Palacios (2005-2006) and despite this received full support from the court of arbitration of the World Bank which ruled in its favour. The Ecuadorian state had thus to pay a 1.5 billion dollars fine to Occidental.]].

Beyond the consequences of this double dependency, there is the problem of a group of pawnbrokers, with the IMF and the World Bank at their head, ready to leap on the country when the conjuncture becomes unfavourable, which it currently is with the violent contraction of the economy since 2014/2015. The European Union is preparing to sign a free trade agreement with Ecuador, as an annex to that signed with Colombia and Peru, certain articles of which would allow European multinationals to invest in the country in extremely advantageous conditions and oblige the country to open its public services to the market.

Thus Correa's Ecuador has not

experienced real structural change. Certainly the increase in public investment (notably in the infrastructures of transport and education) and the royalties demanded from the multinationals to exploit the subsoil can temporarily attenuate some of the most serious sources of discontent with the system. They cannot however change its nature, or attack the most tragic forms of dependency from which Ecuador suffers. This note is moreover largely confirmed by Correa himself. "The model of accumulation, we have not been able to change it drastically. We have improved things, with the same model of accumulation, before changing it. Because our goal is not to harm the rich, but to create a more just and equitable society" [44]. It's clear that what we have is neither radical social transformation nor anti-capitalism, but "post-neoliberal" policies in the framework of a capitalism which is still very much present. Nothing more, nothing less! Does this not explain Correa's statement on May 3, 2016 in relation to a list of privatisations of public assets to deal with the disastrous effects of the earthquake: "we must change this wealth into liquidities"?

A tense social situation

Since Correa's last re-election as president, on February 17, 2013, social mobilisations against government policies have become much broader. The "pro-extractivist" orientation of the government has exacerbated the struggles of the indigenous populations concerning the multinationals installed on their territories. And if several indigenous leaders have to various degrees been won over to government policies (Carlos Viteri, Ricardo Ulcuango and so on), this is not the case with the people in villages directly confronted with mining exploitation who are in open conflict with the state. A typical case is that of the violent confrontations in the region of Intag around the project of copper exploitation of Llurimagua in September 2014. Access was blocked by protesters against the concession of a part of the valley to the Chilean

company Codelco, leading the government to send the army to occupy the site then arrest the indigenous activists.

In other layers of society, it is the question of labour regulation which is crystallizing discontent. Since 2012, the division by three of the wages of workplace trainees and the possibility offered to companies of reducing work time while cutting wages in the event of difficulty has mobilised the FUT trade union federation. All the more so since this initial reform has been followed by several others, notably in 2015 with the generalisation of labour flexibility [45], the suppression of 40% of pensions corresponding to the part paid by the state and a restriction of trade union rights and the right to strike.

In August 2015, several trade union, indigenous and student organisations drew up a 13 point platform of demands; Correa refuses to discuss them on the grounds that they were sectional interest demands. Yet, they included the demand for agrarian reform and a law protecting water from privatisation and multinationals, the rejection of an increase in public transport prices and so on. The mobilisations were strong, like the march on August 13, 2015, which brought nearly 100,000 people onto the streets of Quito. There were strikes and demonstrations across the country for more than a week.

And this despite government repression, notably through decree 16 of December 4, 2013, which criminalised actions like workplace occupations and road blockades. This rupture between the social movement and the government is the fruit of a political turn which has sharpened since late 2012, towards economic growth at any price and the reduction of the "citizen's revolution" to an obligatory allegiance to the representative institutions alone, based on the schema of parliamentary democracy that we find in the western countries.

The fragmentation

of the left

Before such a contrasting balance sheet, the Ecuadorian left, which had initially supported the aspirations to social change of the “citizen’s revolution” has little by little gone through a process of distancing and division in relation to the latter. The case of Alberto Acosta is revealing. He was president of the Constituent Assembly and a leader of the left inside Alianza Pais: in 2008 he resigned because of a disagreement with Correa as to the duration of the Constituent Assembly and subsequently tried to establish a genuinely alternative regroupment of the new left forces. But until now without great success, and he remains quite isolated, at least in electoral terms [46].

The same is true of significant sectors of the indigenous movements and the trade union and urban movements who have been very quickly confronted with the limits and diktats of Correa’s governmental style, especially during his second term. Therein lies another problematic dimension of this “citizen’s revolution”, its development in relation to the social movements of ever more invasive forms of control, either by creating pro-government social organisations to rival already existing organisations (such as the CUT created in November 2014), or by developing directly clientelist relations among the poorest sectors [47].

Thus Ecuador now presents a curious political panorama with nothing very clear on the horizon. Whereas the right is recovering its strength and considering the possibility of a unifying candidate for the 2017 presidential elections like the Guayaquil banker, Guillermo Lasso, Alianza Pais is still seeking a galvanising candidate, since the courts have ruled that Correa cannot run again (he can only do so in 2022) [48]. Two candidates appear ready to run: Lenin Moreno, former vice-president from 2009 to 2013, who strikes a more consensual tone, and Jorge Glatz (the current vice-president), who is more linked to Guayaquil business circles, although it is currently difficult to discern who

has the better chance.

For the oppositional and non-governmental left, nothing is yet definitively decided, even if Pachakutik Nuevo Pais has just appointed a new coordinator who is more to the left (Marion Santi) while the names of Enrique Ayala Mora, the former rector of the Andina Simon Bolivar university, and Paco Montoya, former general and ex-mayor of Quito are most often advanced as figures who might do better than Alberto Acosta did in 2013.

All remains uncertain then, with one single assured note – that the left forces remain profoundly divided and fragmented. Some – stimulated in this by an ever more aggressive right wing offensive – to fiercely defend the governmental consequences, without any distancing or criticism worthy of the name. Others – having broken at one point or another with the government – tend to “demonise” its management, reactively and without nuance, showing themselves incapable of offering concrete and constructive proposals for change, still less for long term alternative thinking [Thus in relation to the law on press and media which the Correa government had sought to pass and which attacked the big media monopolies, the left opposed it forcefully in reactive mode, but without taking the trouble to bring out the positive aspects and amender the more dubious articles.]].

Lessons for the left?

What lessons should be drawn for the Ecuadorian left and more generally for the Latin American left facing an offensive on all fronts from an arrogant and vindictive right, in particular in Argentina, Venezuela and Brazil ? To reply to this question, we should remember the context in which, just like the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela and the indigenous revolution in Bolivia, the “citizen’s revolution” in Ecuador began in the midst of the last decade and raised immense hopes of change. It amounted then, in the wake of political experiences (after the fall of the Berlin wall), to giving hope to

collective and innovative experiences of social change capable of transcending the impasses of the so-called socialist experiences of the past, and ending the devastating effects of the neoliberal policies which had been followed in Latin America and which in Ecuador had led to genuine institutional crises. Hence this new attention to the indigenous condition, or experiences of participatory management and its imperative democratic requirements. Hence this undeniable interest in constituent processes bearing new rights (including for nature) and generating a social contract which could be entirely renewed. Hence finally the unexpected roads which each these experiences has concretely taken, following popular mobilisations and unforeseen elections or re-elections, providing signs of hope and of undeniable political renewal in times of a triumphant neoliberalism.

Nonetheless the citizens’ revolution in Ecuador – like the other processes of social transformation in Bolivia and Venezuela – has tended to run into an impasse on certain basic issues which form part of the historic heritage of the left. Among these, the taking into account of the central question of capitalist economic relations of production as well as the type of ownership they imply and the unavoidable conflicts they generate [49]. If we are on the left, we must of course take account of the new realities which emerge in a history subject to perpetual transformation, and if this means being attentive to the new relations of forces and participate in the struggles stimulate by new and dynamic social movement (feminist, ecological, indigenous and so on), we cannot for all that forget the determinant weight of capitalist relations of production which continue to exist and to reshape in a curious maelstrom all the other forms of inequality and domination (colonial, patriarchal and so on) inherited from the past.

Yet forget them is what that Latin American governmental left has tended to do once in power, relegating to the back burner these implacable questions, and finally taking the dead end of the most traditional Latin American “popular nationalism”. Isn’t

this the situation Correa's Ecuador is
now in? And is this not what the left -

when it evokes "the end of a cycle" or
"the exhaustion of a project of social

and economic development" - be
thinking about?