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The ambiguous nature of the 5 Star movement

30 September 2016, by **Franco Turigliatto**

The founders and the electoral dynamics

The early stages of construction of the “Friends of Beppe Grillo” date from 2005-2006, but it was the two days of mobilisation of the “Vaffanculo Day” in 2007 and 2008 against the political caste which created the conditions for the foundation in September 2009 of the 5 Star Movement. The first tests of voting in local elections were modest and it was not until 2012 that the M5S obtained its first significant results in some cities, including Genoa and in particular Parma, where the M5S elected a mayor. This was the point of departure for great success in the general elections of 2013, at which the M5S became the biggest party with 8,691,106 votes, 25.56%, against

25.42% for the Democratic Party (PD). However, the latter won 29.18% of the votes with its allies, which allowed it to claim the majority premium in the Chamber of Deputies.

In the European elections of 2014, the M5S achieved a result of 21.16 % compared to the exceptional result of PD (40.81%), with Berlusconi's Forza Italia Berlusconi in sharp decline (16.81%). In 2016 there were the victories in Rome and Turin, although the M5S was defeated in Milan and Bologna, and especially Naples where the outgoing mayor, Luigi De Magistris, was re-elected as the head of a coalition of citizens and of the left. Ahead of the parliamentary elections, recent surveys show more or less similar voting intentions (around 30 %) for the PD and the M5S, as well as for a unitary list on the right.

Two men have built and defined the

political project of the M5S. In the first place there is the showman Beppe Grillo, known for his invocations against the political caste, corruption and the destruction of the environment, and with a great influence on a wide audience. Then there was the head of the undertaking, Gianroberto Casaleggio, owner of a large corporation, Casaleggio Associati, specializing in communication and marketing, which has allowed the formation of a centralized and controlled organization thanks to an internet network.

The M5S is a very vertical political force, with the two leaders playing a very dominant role. The recent death of Casaleggio has not changed this setting because the role of the father has been occupied by his son, who manages the company now. However, the development of the movement and

its presence in the institutions have increased the weight of the leaders of the parliamentary groups in the House and the Senate. At the national level, a steering committee of five persons has been formed, but Grillo still has the last word.

Nature and characteristics of the M5S

What are the characteristics of this movement? Using old Marxist terminology, we would say that it is a petty bourgeois movement by the composition of its leadership, its political program and its objectives: to democratize and rationalize the society and the functioning of the institutions, punishing corruption and privileges, imposing transparency in public actions and citizen's control via the internet. The capitalist system is not put in question at all, only its excesses and the corruption of its policymakers are denounced. Therefore, the M5S does not develop real campaigns against the dominant neoliberal economic policies or against capitalist austerity. Its main slogan is the demand for honesty and its central political theme is the struggle against the privileges of the political class; the movement is presented as "purifying" and the "saviour" of society.

Thus, the M5S aims to be neither right nor left-wing, not only because it thinks so, but also because it consciously uses a mixture of languages, messages and concrete proposals that allow it to attract support from both right and left. In certain areas, such as the environment, transport, civil rights or energy, it defends a left discourse and M5S activists are actively involved in mobilizations on these topics. In other areas, such as migrants, the rights of public sector employees or the role of trade unions, it generally defends right positions. There is a long list of statements with a clearly xenophobic tone by some of their leaders or activists, designed to gather support of depoliticized or right wing popular sectors.

The ability of the leading group is precisely to have succeeded in building an ambiguous but credible image. The operation has been possible because it corresponds to a large drop in the class consciousness of workers, as well as in the average level of political awareness of the masses who can no longer bear their situation and want change. The latter, lacking a class organization and collective responses, think they can find an answer in the "anti-caste" positions of M5S. The rapid growth of this movement can only be explained if one takes into account what happened in the first decade of this century: the big struggles of workers and the social movements, their disastrous defeats, the failure of the Prodi government of the centre-left (2006-2008) and of the Party of Communist Refoundation. All these developments have led to a profound disillusionment and demoralization of broad sectors of the working class, with a collapse of class consciousness even in its most elementary forms. The economic crisis of 2008 and the destructive austerity policies have led these phenomena to their end: the working class is no longer a political subject.

The program of the Grillo movement

The M5S has criticized certain decisions on foreign policy and military intervention by successive governments, but does not question the role of Italy as a capitalist and imperialist power. With regard to the European Union, it has taken contradictory positions depending on the circumstances, ranging between exit from the euro and other much more moderate proposals. The accession of the M5S members of the European Parliament to the same group as Nigel Farage's UKIP expresses all the ambiguities of Grillo, although this does not mean an adoption of the political choices of the British far right party.

The M5S is very much an institutional force. It has waged democratic battles in Parliament and currently opposes

the draft Renzi reform of the Italian Constitution of 1948. But it does not try to converge this action with a democratic mobilization of masses, and even less with the initiatives of the workers' movement. Nor is it concerned with developing a real program on issues of employment and precarity to cope with the dramatic conditions in which the popular classes live after years of austerity.

The Grillo movement proposes as a central objective the introduction of additional tax reductions for small and medium-sized enterprises, considered as key to development, and an uncertain citizen's income for those who remain without work (in fact, a form of charity). Its programme does not question the dogmas of neoliberal capitalism, or advance the need for a new and strong public intervention in the economy, or the general reduction of working time, or the defence of collective labour agreements. Nothing strange about that, given its interclass nature.

Its leaders originate from the petty bourgeoisie and have different types of employment background including the liberal professions. The rank and file activists come from different employment backgrounds, self-employed or employees, rather of an intellectual nature, but not only that. Some of them are in precarious work. Much less present are activists from industry and the "traditional" working class. On the contrary, there are many in the private and public sectors (including trade union rank and file delegates) who have voted for M5S candidates. The recent municipal elections have shown the ability of Grillo's movement to capture a significant number of votes among the poor and marginalized, desperate to find an alternative to the situation in which they find themselves.

Internal structure and relations with other forces

The internal structure has been built to ensure full control by the two principal leaders over the whole of the organization. Decisions are taken in

line, quickly, by a vote of the members - perhaps directed - and without real public debate. And this occurs in the same way when members who are considered not in accordance with the foundations of the organization or simply not in line with the official positions are expelled. The base structure of the M5S is the "meet-up" (electronic meetings, initiated from above by the network of the movement); direct face-to-face meetings are rare. These, however, have shown their importance in periods of electoral campaign.

The internal operation of the M5S is therefore very questionable from a democratic point of view. On the other hand, there is evidence of a

fundamentally sectarian behaviour towards other political forces. For the members of the M5S, there is only their movement: all the other forces are part of the old system that is to be regenerated and belong to an outside world which is "impure". The M5S advocates the participation of citizens, but only in the framework of its methods and if they assimilate the forms under which the movement exercises its activities.

Governing cities such as Rome and Turin today exposes M5S to a strong offensive from its political adversaries, as well as enormous political and administrative problems. It will be important to follow these dynamics. The success of the Grillo movement, which leads certain sectors to have

illusions in him, highlights the defeat and the crisis of the left in our country. But it is not in the nature of the M5S work to build the mass social movement which is essential in order to deal with the policies of the employers and the governments that represent them. As they have done up to now, the "Grillistas" will attempt to reap the electoral benefits of discontent among the population, denouncing some, but only a few of the ravages of the government without putting into question the market and the rule of capital. There are no shortcuts in the task of building a movement of the masses of workers and an anti-capitalist class organization. The M5S phenomenon does nothing but confirm this.

Detroit's Tax Foreclosure Crisis

29 September 2016, by Dianne Feeley

This year the Wayne County Treasurer's office sent out 38,000 foreclosure notices to homeowners who were three years behind in their property taxes. Half of these were for tax bills of \$3,000. Another 5,500 homeowners owe less than \$2,000 and 650 less than \$500. Some have been able to scrape up the funds and pay at least 2013 taxes.

Homeowners with three years of back taxes face foreclosure, so this year those who have not paid their 2013 taxes or signed up for a payment plan will have their homes auctioned off in September and October. But just as in the case of those who are in payment plans for their water bill, the vast majority are unable to pay and the city will foreclose on their property the following year.

But approximately 15,000 owner-occupied homes are still facing auction via the internet this fall. The lawsuit charges that these foreclosure notices are illegal and racially discriminatory. Filing a class-action lawsuit against the Wayne County Treasurer, the ACLU and NAACP

Legal Defense and Educational Fund demands a moratorium against tax foreclosures for homeowners.

While city officials practically gave away land for Michael Ilitch's new "Hockeytown" Red Wings Stadium complex and developer Dan Gilbert's midtown Brush Park development, Detroit has failed to reassess residential property taxes for decades. Yet Michigan law requires a yearly reassessment, with taxes calculated at half the market value; Detroit's tax rate is one of the state's highest.

The failure to reassess "on top of the disproportionate percentage of subprime mortgages foisted upon African Americans in Metro Detroit" resulted in a 36% foreclosure rate for Detroit homeowners once the economic crisis hit (2006-2014). Black homeowners are especially victimized by the distorted tax rates, as the real (not paper) values of their homes took the worst tumble during the financial meltdown.

Although officials now acknowledge the failure to reassess, homeowners

are still taxed at values many times their real value. A Detroit News (12/19/13) study by Christine MacDonald revealed a 65% overassessment. Yet the 12-step appeal of an assessment is difficult and time consuming with the burden of proof on the homeowner.

If homeowners fail to pay, they are slapped with 18% interest. Until last year overdue water bills, running an average of \$70 a month, were tacked on to property taxes. Business owners, however, are more able to thread through the paperwork and appeal their assessments.

As Christine MacDonald pointed out, Mike Ilitch's companies were able to obtain a 40% reduction, saving \$1.8 million for 2010-13 alone. Ambassador Bridge owner Matty Moroun reduced his property taxes by 57%, saving \$970,000 during that same period.

Michigan provides a poverty tax exemption but the process for Detroiters, according to the ACLU/NAACP lawsuit, is "so convoluted and difficult, and in some

cases impossible, that it has violated the due process rights of qualifying individuals.”

Prior to 2016 applicants were required to appear in person at the city office downtown and request that the exemption be mailed to them. Since the new county treasurer Eric Sabree took office one can phone to have the application mailed. It is still not available on line and is only valid for the current year.

Although 43% of Detroit residents live below the poverty line, the exemption is not well advertised or available on line. But those who are able to obtain the multipage form, collect the required supporting materials and mail the application back in time might still find they were denied for “arbitrary and capricious” reasons.

Grounds for Lawsuit

Given the history of housing discrimination in Metro Detroit over the last 100 years,* it is hardly surprising that the illegal over-assessments of property values has a greater impact on African-American homeowners.

Yet the Fair Housing Act bars not only intentional housing discrimination, “but also unjustified neutral practices that have an adverse disparate impact.” The ACLU/NAACP brief compares majority Black and non-Black census blocks within the county and finds tax foreclosure rates 10 to 15 times higher in the African-American areas.

The lawsuit represents several homeowners who were denied the poverty tax exemption and are currently facing foreclosure and eviction, as well as four homeowner associations. It asks that all current and future African-American homeowners of owner-occupied homes within Wayne County facing the tax foreclosure sale be considered as a class, that the county’s actions be recognized as a violation of the Fair Housing Act and that the court order a halt to foreclosures until a lawful reassessment is put into place.

Additionally the lawsuit demands that the poverty exemption process needs to be simplified, with all Detroit homeowners in the affected class eligible to apply for retroactive poverty exemptions (for years 2013-2016).

Cases that the lawsuit cites include:

¶ Walter Hicks, a 57-year-old African American, was denied a poverty exemption because a person with the same name owned another property. Although Hicks offered proof that the second property did not belong to him, the treasurer’s office refused to reconsider its ruling. While the city claims the fair-market value of his home is \$40,156, the ACLU-sponsored appraisal put it at \$9,000. He is in a payment plan that requires his 2013 taxes, fees and interest is be paid by the middle of December. His yearly disability income is \$15,300 so he can’t meet the monthly \$339 payment; consequently he faces foreclosure.

¶ Spirlin Moore, a 77-year-old African American, has a number of health problems and requires a caregiver. While the treasurer’s office maintains the market value of his house is \$22,932, a 2013 appraisal found it was worth \$2,000. His 2013 tax bill was \$2,023. When an outstanding water bill of \$700 was added to his 2011-13 taxes he was billed a total of \$5,705. He is in a \$144 payment plan that he cannot afford.

¶ DeAunna Black, a 32-year-old African American who has three young children. She works in cleaning services and purchased her home in 2013 for \$3,500. At that time it was appraised at \$5,000. However the treasurer’s office’s assessment is \$36,902. She owes \$1,136.50 in taxes. Unable to pay, she faces foreclosure.

Wayne County Treasurer Sabree has worked hard to get homeowners facing eviction on payment plans. Yet the reality is that homeowners can’t maintain their agreement to pay the monthly amount.

Officials proudly announce incentives such as lowering the interest to six percent when payment is on time so they are disappointed by the

percentage of failures and chalk it up to the homeowner’s irresponsibility. Obviously they never considered what it must be like not to have enough money for the essentials, constantly juggling to stay afloat!

Eviction Defense

Detroit Eviction Defense (detroitevictiondefense.org) is still defending people who lost their homes in last year’s auction, when 8,000 homes were sold. One case we were able to resolve is that of Mary Sanders, an 80-year-old African American living on a fixed income. She might have been eligible for a poverty tax exemption but no one told her about it. Eventually she got enough money together to pay her 2013 taxes ¶ but didn’t realize she had a balance due of \$600 in fees. Her home was sold to a California investor for \$2,300.

Detroit Eviction Defense went with her to the management office where she offered to pay the investor what he’d put up for the house ¶ which is all that can be done after an auction. However he demanded \$15,000 cash! We went to the media with her story, and the next day he agreed to sell her back her home at a price she could manage.

Ms. Sanders was able to get a no-interest loan through the United Community Housing Coalition; DED hosted a fundraising event to help her with the payments. Just imagine the stress that the city and county, and investor, caused Mary Sanders and her extended family!

Between 2005-15 one in three Detroit residents ¶ 139,699 homes ¶ went through foreclosure. In the beginning the majority were mortgage foreclosures, but by 2015 the majority were for back taxes. As Joel Kurth and Christine MacDonald summarized in “Volume of abandoned homes ¶ absolutely terrifying,” those “lost to foreclosure are often never re-occupied. 76 percent of the 84,000 properties on the city’s blight list are foreclosures...” (5/15/15 Detroit News)

Foreclosures are not only destructive for the family involved, but destabilize

neighborhoods and suck up millions of dollars in demolition costs. Local reporting has uncovered costs much higher than original estimates and the FBI is investigating. It costs an average of \$13,600 to tear down a residential property, spending far

more tax money than the illegal taxes "owed." However the Wayne County Treasurer and Detroit Mayor claim there is nothing they can do.

In fact, after the ACLU/NAACP lawsuit was filed, Detroit Corporation Counsel Melvin Butch Hollowell called it

"meritless" and "recklessly irresponsible," claiming it would violate compliance with Detroit's post-bankruptcy plan. For city officials, the renaissance isn't for everyone.

[Against the Current](#)

Western Sahara: recent developments in the light of the Security Council decision

27 September 2016, by **Hassan Abenay**

Since the cease fire in 1991 and as a result of the stalled preparations for the referendum in Western Sahara, efforts have been focused on finding an alternative formula adapting the "methodology of political negotiation" to reach an "agreed solution acceptable to both parties". Since that time, the two parties have focused their tactics and their instruments of pressure with the date of the April hearing and its decisions in mind.

The case of Western Sahara: the true balance of forces today

The balance of power in the Western Sahara is currently in favour of the Moroccan regime both in terms of the internal situation in the region and in terms of the level of international support. A bourgeois class has been created in the region which dominates significant activities in the region, within and outside of Morocco, and invests in various sectors including agriculture, the agro-food industry, urban transport, fuels, livestock, fishing and real estate activities. At the head of this bourgeoisie are traditional families which have increased their economic power thanks to the support of the Moroccan regime in exchange for their political loyalty.

A working class has also formed, mostly of Moroccans working in fisheries, freezing of fish, phosphate, cafes and small shops, bakeries, and in construction. There are also public sector officers, some who carry out work effectively while others are being paid without working. This leads to a situation where an important part of the population is dependent on payment by the Moroccan state which creates a material relationship of interest that does not generate a progressive enmity. The protests in the region are marginal and mobilize categories of young people who do not have a great weight in relation to the population.

The Moroccan regime realized that a large part of the Saharawi opposition has the objective of obtaining of concessions and material gains; the case of the camp at "Ggdim Izik" is a great example of this approach. [1] Opposition to expatriates created a tension between the minority of the Saharawi population of the region and most of the expatriate workers, which turns any mobilization into a minority rage and facilitates its containment.

Morocco has also contained the protests that began in the region in 2004 to improve social conditions, which evolved to demand human rights and self-determination. The regime was able to absorb the particularities of these mobilizations and their methods of work, identify their leaders and points of strength,

infiltrate and erode them - now they seem exhausted and their slogans are those an aggressive political conflict, and more than that, reactionary tribal character.

A speech by the King of Morocco, Mohammed VI, on November 6, 2014 was expressive of the degree to which the regime has benefited, repeating the vocabulary of the era of his predecessor Hassan II, who reigned from 1961 to 1999: negotiations will not affect the sovereignty of Morocco over its Sahara, the maximum we can give is "autonomy" - the case has no relationship to decolonization - the Sahara is a case of existence and not of borders - Morocco was left with its Sahara and the Sahara will remain Moroccan until the end of the world.

This revived discourse represents the end of a tactic followed by the Moroccan state since its initiative to make autonomy the basis for negotiation. Now the regime has dealt a hard blow to any hope that the autonomy initiative was the beginning of another approach for the system, based on the international situation and appropriate regional and local incentives.

The only window the regime has left open is negotiations based on its conditions: "Morocco has no complex about negotiating directly or through the mediation of the United Nations with anyone, but we insist that Moroccan sovereignty over all its land

is non-negotiable”.

The leadership of the Polisario Front: the pursuit of illusion as an alternative to weakness

Polisario has lost all its instruments of pressure; guerrilla warfare to grab acquisitions is now a thing of the past. Militarily the Moroccan regime has renewed and strengthened its military arsenal and built three defensive walls. But what has weakened Polisario more is its reliance since 1991 on negotiations and campaigns of international public opinion centred on human rights and the exploitation of resources. The campaigns have gone past their peak.

The Polisario Front is in deep crisis: increased protests in the camps reflect desperation at the political impotence of the Front and its loss of initiative. Complaints of corruption of the leaders of the front, doubts that have begun to spread as to whether the goal of independence will be achieved - all those things warn us that we are facing developments that will affect the Front. Polisario is unable to turn the tables against the United Nations and its inability to impose the referendum or even enter the case under Chapter VII. [2]

The Moroccan regime imposes a policy of *fait accompli*, which increases the anger of the refugees in the camps against the leaders of the Front. To get rid of the pressure the Polisario promotes the illusion of a solution through the United Nations and bets on the blackmail exerted by some Western forces against Morocco with regard to the Sahara. This promotion of illusions can only increase the complaints and discredit Polisario.

After the US representative at the UN presented a draft resolution to the Security Council, which requested the broadening of the tasks of the UN's Mission in the Western Sahara,

“Minurso”, to include the monitoring of the human rights situation in the region, the Polisario Front prematurely declared victory, claiming the recommendation was sure to be passed because it came from the USA. They were shocked when the proposal was withdrawn.

The report of the UN Secretary General last year, including ideas of creating a new independent and credible instrument to monitor the human rights situation in the area, confirmed that the stalemate could not last and suggested that 2015 would be a year of decision for the case.

The Moroccan regime responded with unusual force, suspending any form of cooperation with the UN envoy Christopher Ross and with the president of the MINURSO mission, demanding clarification of the internationalist mission and its tasks. Because for Morocco its role is simply to control the cease fire and submit reports that are not going to bother anyone.

That crisis lasted 8 months and when the date of the April meeting approached, Ban Ki-moon made a phone call to the king, and Morocco declared the resumption of its cooperation with the UN functionaries after receiving guarantees from the Secretary General.

The policy of the regime with respect to Western Sahara was hypocritical and two faced: an external discourse using the language of the UN and the agreements that have been signed, and a different discourse addressed to the people (mercenaries, the affirmative referendum, detainees and so on) The first time the two discourses came together was during the crisis when cooperation was suspended.

The last report of the UN secretary general and the Security Council decision of April 2015 represented a submission to the Moroccan regime, a qualitative victory for its diplomacy, and a collapse of the illusions of the Polisario leadership.

The Moroccan regime has in its hands means of pressure created by the unstable regional situation (the

situation in the north of Africa and the Middle East), which make the Moroccan monarchy a factor of stability in a part of the world that extends from the north of Africa, the Middle East and the area of the Sahel and the Sahara. The Moroccan regime reminds the imperialists of its usefulness in the struggle with terrorism and in stopping the migrants who are waiting to enter Europe through Morocco.

The Algerian regime: unable to impose its choices and struggling to maintain the current situation

Polisario cannot exist without the help of the Algerian regime; the cause of Western Sahara will not exist without the financial, diplomatic and military support of Algeria. The fall of the Berlin Wall deprived the Front of the political and military support of several states, and the fall of the Qaddafi regime worsened its situation. The Algerian regime is in a deep and many-faceted crisis; the fall in oil prices (which represent almost 97% of the country's monetary resources) worsens the economic, social and political situation in the country, Bouteflika's ill health has generated an internal conflict in the regime, there is a rise of popular struggles because of austerity.

The situation on the borders of Algeria is very unstable; Mali and the Sahelian zone are a huge area where armed groups coexist and where there is an international mafia market, Libya and its open supplies of weapons with the dangers presented, what remains of the Algerian terrorist groups who await an opportunity to return.

These are the challenges facing the Algerian regime and explain its withdrawal, which Morocco attempts to take advantage of, infiltrating the African zone economically and diplomatically and competing with Algeria in its role as the resolver of crisis (in Libya - Central Africa-Mali

and so on).

Algeria is incapable of imposing its options on the UN or the Moroccan regime. All they can hope is that things stay as they are and do not worsen, but what is certain is that we are on the verge of new developments in the whole case.

The effect of the resolution and its potential impact

The shock is profound, discontent is generated, and the leadership is uncomfortable and nervous as a result of the last resolution of the Security Council. They waited too long. The masses, leaders and activists need at

least a tiny victory to reduce the pressure of defeat, but the blow has been very hard, and the credibility of the leaders is questioned.

The leaders need an event to get out of this jam, and therefore will affect a firm attitude to the UN to deflect the anger of the population. The Moroccan regime welcomed its victory with politically drugged masses with speeches on the defence of national unity against enemies.

What horizons?

Neither imperialism nor the authoritarian regimes nor the UN have any reason to resolve the case of Western Sahara, because they want to impose the submission of regimes. As the revolutionary left we have to tell

the truth even if it is bitter and realize the manipulation made against the oppressed and differentiate between their interests and between the interests of those who govern or of the bureaucrats who benefit.

We must defend the democratic solution to the case of Western Sahara in the context of the Democratic Union of the Maghreb, which will be only realized through a tidal wave of struggles and a programme of democratic emancipation, supporting each mobilization and each popular movement in the cities of the Western Sahara for democratic freedoms that would improve the situation of the workers.

This article was initially published in Arabic on November 5, 2015 on [Al Mounadil](#). The footnotes are by IVP.

Things fall apart - again

26 September 2016, by [Amandla!](#)

The undeclared war between President Jacob Zuma and his finance minister, Pravin Gordhan, goes well beyond conflict between different agencies of government. It stretches into the heart and soul of the ruling ANC.

ANC at war with itself

The outcome of the local government election has deepened the crisis in the ANC and has put the dominant Zuma faction on the defensive. So deep is the crisis that the sycophantic SACP has finally broken ranks with Zuma and is organising against him. Several veterans of the movement have suddenly found their voice and are calling for the renewal of the ANC. Former Zuma loyalist, Mathole Motshekga, wrote recently:

"The greatest threat to the ANC and the country is factionalism. The party has been captured by a faction that

has no capacity to lead government and society - and has no respect for internal democracy."

For different reasons and from different motivations, a number of bigwigs in the ANC oppose Zuma and his "Premier League", the main faction backing Zuma. Cyril Ramaphosa, Gwede Mantashe, Blade Nzimande and of course Pravin Gordhan are increasingly concerned that Gupta-style state capture can lead to a credit rating downgrade and further weaken the economy.

The immediate source of the political crisis is the attempt by the Zuma-led predatory elite to gain control over the Treasury and various state owned enterprises. They have their eyes on several major prizes. These include the nuclear power build programme and the uranium mining that will supply the new nuclear plants; coal mining and various lucrative contracts with ESKOM; and the massive infrastructure build programme, including Transnet, SAA, etc.

It is likely that this crisis will drag on.

Firstly, it has not been easy for Zuma to dismiss Gordhan and the other Treasury officials who oppose the continued looting of state resources. Gordhan is highly respected, not just in the business community but within the ANC alliance and civil society more broadly. He is seen as a person of integrity and as someone who is opposed to corruption, cronyism and clientelism. He is also well respected within the circles of the liberation movement for the role that he played during the struggle against apartheid and in the underground.

Secondly, every move Zuma now makes to remove those in government he no longer trusts, deepens conflicts and polarises the factions inside the ANC as they vie for influence. The ANC's elective conference fast approaches. The Zuma-supporting factions do not yet have a clear candidate. This further weakens their position. Nksozana Zuma may be too independent for the Zuptas.

Thirdly, and most importantly, every move Zuma makes highlights the structural weaknesses and contradictions of South Africa's economy. It is on the brink of recession. Several industrial sectors are in crisis, including mining and steel. With public debt growing alarmingly, the state is very vulnerable to the whims and fancies of international capital in the form of the credit rating agencies, institutional investors and the so-called "markets".

Why is it our concern?

For those of us who staunchly oppose the neoliberal economic policies that the South African Treasury doggedly pursues, it might seem strange and contradictory to enter the Gupta - Gordhan fray. Why not just say a plague on both their houses?

The disaster of unchecked corruption under late capitalism, involving left wing governments such as in Brazil, Bolivia and Venezuela, warns us that corruption is a fundamental issue for the left. If we ignore it, we will create a space for populist and demagogic forces, such as the Philippines' new President, who believes in extra-judicial killings as a means of dealing with criminals and corrupt officials.

We therefore add our voice to those of other organisations in civil society to express our condemnation of this abuse of power and we warn of the danger of a creeping autocracy.

Defend against autocracy

But here is where we depart from the position taken by many others. Our concern is not with threat of the credit rating agencies and a possible downgrade of South Africa's sovereign debt. We have been consistent in our critique of the economic policy and strategies of the Treasury and we do not retreat from that. We would support any attempt to unseat Gordhan and all his neoliberal friends

from their occupation of the Treasury, if it was in the service of a rupture with the neo-colonial, dependent economy which they have given us. We would be quite prepared to take on the ratings agencies in the interests of building an economy which served the working class and the poor. We would celebrate if Gordhan and all he stands for was toppled by a popular movement that demanded beneficiation of our minerals and the creation of jobs through massive investment in renewable energy and public transport.

But this is not the force that is intent on removing the Minister of Finance. On the contrary, it is a layer of predators intent on licking clean the carcass of the South African economy in order to enrich themselves. In order to be able to do so, they are willing to attack the institutions of a democratic state which were built from the struggles of the decades before 1994. They will destroy the criminal justice system. They will undermine parliament. They will use the security apparatus against anyone who stands in their way. They will create an environment in which it will be far harder for the forces of progress to operate freely.

That is what we mean by an autocracy, and that is what we must oppose. So we oppose these attacks on Gordhan because of where they come from and what they intend to do. And we will continue to condemn Gordhan ourselves for the ruthless war he is waging against the majority of South Africans.

Why this predatory elite?

But condemnation is not sufficient without understanding. We need to understand where this predatory elite comes from and how it was formed. Otherwise we will be in danger of simply replacing it with another, equally bad.

A recent article by Roger Southall, published in the *Mail & Guardian*, points out that we shouldn't swallow the story that the good ANC of Mandela (and even the relatively good one of Mbeki) is being destroyed by the bad, corrupt Zuma and his friends. It is a nice, simple fairy story, worthy

of the full Hollywood treatment. But it does not accord with the facts. In reality, it is the relationship with capital, constructed both before and after 1994, which has created the predatory elite that we love to hate now.

We have written before in *Amandla!* about Black Economic Empowerment. We have written of the National Democratic Revolution and its requirement to "deracialise" capital and create a black middle class. Southall points out that the parastatals (as they were then), the State Owned Enterprises (as they are now) were key to this project. "Parastatals accounted for around 15% of GDP". Control over that 15% through the state became a lever. Through the preferential procurement provisions of BEE legislation it was a lever over the other 85%, which was out of their direct reach. The tenderpreneurs who we all complain about so loudly are a structural consequence of this arrangement.

And Southall reminds us of a secondary requirement. The ANC needs funding for itself as a political party. We have all heard of the R1 billion that the party spent on the last election - Nomvula Mokonyane let that slip in an unguarded moment. How many of us have wondered where that came from?

As Southall puts it: "One of the key challenges is that the South African political economy continues to revolve around an odd combination of new (political) power without money and old money without power'. Each needs the other to advance its interests. This is structurally disposed to favour corruption."

So the crisis that is both an economic crisis and a political crisis cannot be solved by changing the personnel in the leadership of the state. Nor, as the citizens of Tshwane, Johannesburg and Nelson Mandela Bay will discover, will it be solved by changing the party. The DA, interestingly, is just as opposed to revealing where it gets its money from as the ANC. It will only be resolved by structural change.

Editorial of *Amandla!*

? The Syrian Truce and Obama's Exit Strategy

24 September 2016, by **Gilbert Achcar**

As almost everybody can now tell, the new cease-fire agreement on Syria is doomed to break down, as would any such agreement that does not settle the core political problem of the crisis. Of course, even a respite that doesn't last is better than nothing at all (although the truce has so far been very disappointing with regard to humanitarian relief).

But short of an agenda that includes a comprehensive agreement for Bashar al-Assad to step down and allow a transition toward a pluralist government, no cease-fire stands a chance in that war-torn country. Were the mainstream opposition to accept a diktat for a sellout, it would be rapidly outflanked by the fighters, for whom anything less than the Assad clan's departure from power would be tantamount to accepting that hundreds of thousands of Syrians were killed, and still more maimed, and huge swaths of the country turned to rubble, for nothing.

For a truce to lead to the kind of compromise that underpins a genuine peace, there must be strong incentives among all parties to the conflict. The lack of such incentives is precisely why the Oslo Accords, signed in Washington 23 years ago, failed to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict: Those accords were predicated on the postponement of decisions on all crucial issues, including the fate of Israeli settlements in Palestinian territories occupied in 1967. The result was predictable: Israel actually consolidated its grip over the West Bank in the aftermath of the accords, provoking increased Palestinian resentment and an eventual collapse

of the "peace process."

Without a balance of military forces on the ground in Syria, which would compel the Assad regime and its Iranian backers to seek real compromise, a genuine political settlement is not possible. We have nearly the opposite: A Syrian regime, emboldened by Iranian and Russian support, that boasts about reconquering the whole country. As testified by the key protagonists, the issue of creating such a balance of forces "especially by providing the Syrian opposition with anti-aircraft missiles capable of limiting the Syrian regime's use of air power, its main weapon of large-scale destruction" has been the principal bone of contention on Syria within the Obama administration since 2012. The fact that this issue is still divisive is attested by the Pentagon's reluctance to greenlight the agreement negotiated by Secretary of State John Kerry.

It was reported (leaked, that is) that US military planners had no confidence that the Syrian regime and its Russian and Iranian backers would comply with a cease-fire geared toward compromise. In addition, the Pentagon is unwilling to share military data on the Syrian opposition with its Russian counterpart for fear it might be used to further bombard the former. And they are right to be suspicious. Kerry has already deserved a place in history as an outstanding embodiment of diplomatic naïveté, i.e. his belief in the ability to solve conflicts through negotiations that are not backed by action on the ground (what was aptly described in

the Financial Times as his "boundless confidence in his ability to solve problems if he can only bring the concerned parties together in one room"), and his amazingly wishful thinking with regard to Moscow's willingness to help the United States out of the Syrian predicament.

It is most unlikely, however, that Barack Obama "who can hardly be suspected of ingenuousness" shares his secretary of state's idiosyncrasies. The US president has stubbornly refused to change his attitude on Syria over the past four years despite overwhelming evidence that it was allowing the conflict to degenerate into a catastrophe for the Syrian people and one more major disaster for US foreign policy, after Afghanistan and Iraq. In so doing, Obama has only managed to convince a major part of Arab public opinion that the United States, which invaded Iraq and bombed Libya for incomparably less than what has been unfolding in Syria over the past five years, cares only about oil-rich countries. If anyone in the region had any illusion about the democratic and humanitarian pretexts invoked by Washington in previous wars, they have lost them completely by now. As Anthony Cordesman, one of the most astute observers of the military-political situation in the Middle East, recently observed, the US president is now entirely focused on an "exit strategy" "not an exit from the Syrian crisis, though, but his own exit from office.

19 September

[The Nation](#)

Facing down the oil company dogs

23 September 2016, by **Sara Rougeau**

The growing showdown at the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North Dakota against plans to build a massive pipeline underneath vital water basins and tribal burial grounds reached a new peak of intensity last Saturday when private security forces sicced attack dogs on peaceful protesters, who somehow managed to hold their ground and send the oil company thugs scurrying.

Over 2,000 Native American and non-Native protesters, including many tribal leaders from around the country, have come to the Camp of the Sacred Stones and the Red Warrior Camp at Standing Rock Reservation to protest the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL).

This \$3.8 billion pipeline project is anticipated to daily carry 570,000 barrels of oil extracted through hydraulic fracturing from North Dakota's Bakken oil fields over 1,000 miles to Illinois. Along the way, the DAPL would be buried under the Missouri River and cross 209 rivers and tributaries.

The energy industry claims that pipelines pose no threat to these precious watersheds, but former Scientific America editor Trudy Bell estimates that "the 'average' pipeline...has a 57 percent probability of experiencing a major leak...in a ten-year period."

The companies involved in building the DAPL, including Enbridge, Marathon and Phillips 66, have attempted to skirt a mandatory environmental impact statement and accelerate construction on land that is covered by the Lakota Treaty Territory, threatening the Standing Rock Sioux's water supply and 8 million other people living downstream of the Missouri River.

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe has sued the U.S. Army Corps of

Engineers for fast-tracking approval of the pipeline without proper consultation with the tribe.

These issues have led hundreds and then thousands of protesters to converge on Standing Rock for peaceful protests that have been met with severe repression, from a police blockade of the main road out of the reservation to the cutting of waterlines leading to campsites.

But the crackdown reached another level on September 3, when bulldozers appeared and began tearing up the contested land. Private security forced armed with pepper spray and attack dogs confronted anguished protesters watching burial and ceremonial grounds be destroyed.

At least six people were bitten by the dogs, including a child and a pregnant woman, and 12 were treated for pepper spray. Police stood by passively during the attack.

Tribal activist Linda Black Elk put the company's assault in context in a Facebook post:

On Friday, the Standing Rock Nation filed papers challenging Dakota Access permits from the Army Corps of Engineers...because in a recent survey of the area, the tribe found many incredibly sacred sites, including burial sites, directly in the path of the proposed pipeline. The tribe had never been allowed to survey these areas before, so they hadn't been able to document these sites.

Today, barely 24 hours after those papers were filed, Dakota Access used bulldozers to destroy those sites. It was absolute destruction. They literally bulldozed the ancestors right out of the ground, along with destroying tipi rings and cairns. They

did all of this while assaulting peaceful resisters, using vicious dogs, tear gas and pepper spray.

There's only one conclusion: they are attempting to provoke us to violence. They learned exactly how to hurt us the most and then they threw it all in our faces. They were smiling and laughing the whole time...evil grins on their faces as their dogs tore in to peaceful water protectors. It is one of the saddest and most shocking things I have ever seen.

Despite this vicious repression, protesters were able to cross a thin barricade and push back the security forces and construction crew with their sheer numbers—the inspiring victory was captured on video by Democracy Now! The damage done to the site, however, is irreparable.

While it is unclear which company was involved in the September 3 attacks, it is known that DAPL officials have contracted with G4S, the infamous security firm known for its role in violent repression of Palestinians in apartheid Israel, as well as a range of scandals in the U.S. and around the world.

But the combined repression of police and private security hasn't stopped the development of one of the largest Native movements in the U.S. in decades. As Jacqueline Keeler wrote in Telesur:

This 1,168-mile-pipeline extending across four states from North Dakota to Illinois has sparked a prairie fire of united Native American resistance not seen since Wounded Knee and a return of the Great Sioux Nation. This is the first time since the 1876 Battle of the Little Bighorn that all seven council fires [of the Océti Sakówin or Great Sioux Nation] have camped together.

Just as the movement against DAPL has built on the successful struggle to block the Keystone XL Pipeline, the indigenous-led resistance to DAPL is building on the renaissance of Native activism begun by the Idle No More movement in Canada that spread south into the U.S. in the movement against the defeated Keystone XL pipeline project.

One of the most damaging lies put forward by Keystone proponents was the promise of thousands of jobs to workers looking for a way out of the Great Recession. In reality, Keystone XL would have provided 2,000 temporary construction jobs over a span of two years and only around 50 permanent jobs afterwards.

Similarly, the Dakota Access Pipeline is being lauded as a job creator and has been endorsed by the Laborers union, which called pipelines "crucial lifelines to family-supporting jobs."

Lifelines is an ironic word for something with such devastating potential to poison vital ecosystems, community water sources and the very air we breathe.

Speaking on Democracy Now! Native writer and activist Winona LaDuke addressed the need for organized labor to be on the right side of the pipeline fight, and to take up the demand for rebuilding infrastructure to provide clean water to places like Flint, Michigan, and Native reservations around the country. As LaDuke said:

I'm asking American labor to stand with us and to say we want pipelines. We want infrastructure that goes for people, that goes for communities, and not for oil companies that are going to destroy our environment and cause more climate change destruction to our planet.

As the government and oil companies combine to crush protests with brute force—and the mainstream media devote barely any coverage to their scandalous behavior—the need to build solidarity across the country is crucial.

The Sacred Stones and Red Warrior camps are calling for solidarity rallies across the country between September 3 and 17.

Under the banner of "Mni Wiconi," which means "water is life" in Lakota—we must demand access to clean water now and for all future generations and take up the demand for an energy system not for the profits of oil companies, but for a sustainable life for all people.

September 7, 2016

socialistworker.org

Solidarity won Adly's freedom

22 September 2016, by Eric Ruder

He had been held in pre-trial detention since he was arrested on May 5 for charges stemming from the April 25 protest against Egypt's ceding of the islands of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia. He was released after his lawyers successfully challenged a further extension of his pre-trial detention.

Adly's release came one week after leading lawyers from across Europe published an open letter condemning the horrific conditions in which Adly was being held. The letter also deplored the ongoing crackdown against lawyers and human rights activists, such as labor lawyer Haitham Mohamedain and Ahmed Abdallah, a legal adviser to the family of Giulio Regeni.

Adly is a founding member of the Front for Defending Egypt's

Protesters, a group made up of 34 human rights organizations and independent lawyers that offers legal representation to peaceful protesters and documents illegal practices carried out by state security forces against those exercising their right to protest. During his pre-trial detention, Adly had been tortured, threatened with execution, subjected to routine physical abuse and denied adequate medical treatment.

Ever since President Abdul-Fattah el-Sisi seized power in 2013, the regime has ruthlessly repressed all dissent, arresting, detaining and jailing tens of thousands of activists and trade unionists. Key to this crackdown has been the use of the government's judicial branch to deploy the full weight of the legal and prison system against those who dare to exercise basic political liberties such as the right to strike and the right to protest.

Lawyers such as Adly bravely resisted this assault on civil liberties by defending those imprisoned during this crackdown, but now these lawyers themselves are being subjected to the same judicial denial of their rights for the "crime" of defending those unjustly imprisoned by the regime.

A statement of concern regarding Adly's treatment by the United Nations' Working Group on Arbitrary Detention puts Adly's treatment and the treatment of lawyers in general in the context of Egypt's ongoing crackdown on basic civil rights, in particular the right to protest.

Particularly relevant to Mr. Adly's arrest have been the measures taken by Egyptian authorities to severely crack down on all forms of critique and peaceful dissent in response the Egyptian government's decision to

transfer the islands of Tiran and Sanafir to the government of Saudi Arabia...In the days leading up to the scheduled protests, security forces preemptively arrested at least 90 people in eight different governorates, many of them from local coffee shops...

On April 25, a heavy security and military presence prevented many of the scheduled peaceful demonstrations from taking place. Meanwhile, pro-government rallies were allowed to occur without interference. The few peaceful demonstrations that went forward and were critical of the government were violently dispersed with tear gas...

In the time since the April 15 and April 25 protests, hundreds of peaceful demonstrators have been arrested and sentenced, the Press Syndicate has been raided by police

for the first time in the country's modern history, and the crackdown against civil society and independent voices has severely escalated.

Malek's release follows the release of Taher Mokhtar, an activist doctor whose pre-trial detention was also successfully overturned by lawyers, and two other lawyers—Mahienour el-Masry and Yousef Shaaban—were released after serving 15-month sentences.

Yet Egyptian authorities continue to hold thousands more in their dungeons. Haitham Mohamedain is among them, as are workers from the Alexandria Shipyard.

The verdict in the military trial of 26 Alexandria Shipyard workers will be announced on September 18, and Egyptian trade unionists and solidarity

activists are issuing appeals for international solidarity. The shipyard workers were demanding better health and safety conditions, permanent contracts for temporary workers and the payment of overdue bonuses. These were the "crimes" that led to their military trial.

You can add to the global awareness of the campaign to defend the shipyard works by helping to spread the word.

Supporting Egyptian activists through international solidarity is critical. The Egyptian regime has shown that it's willing to shred any and all civil liberties as it constructs a "perfect" authoritarian state able to crush all dissent. International pressure can make them think twice.

September 7, 2016

socialistworker.org

Netanyahu gets his cheque and Obama cashes in

21 September 2016, by Michel Warschawski

Obama, who likes neither Netanyahu nor his policies, will certainly make a speech about the eternal friendship between the United States and Israel, all the more so as he wants to help Hillary Clinton in her electoral campaign; and like all the presidential candidates, she needs the support of the friends of Israel.

Netanyahu also presents this agreement as a great personal victory. In fact, it is "no big deal" as the Americans say: for several decades already Israel has been receiving from the American Treasury more than \$3 billion of military aid every year, and so there is no substantial change, in spite of the boastfulness of a Prime Minister who needs to reinforce his popular support, at a time when the courts seem to have decided to go all the way with their inquiry into the affairs of corruption of the Netanyahu

family.

Why, in spite of flagrant mutual dislike and important political disagreements, is the administration renewing its massive support for the State of Israel? Some people will mention the influence of the pro-Israel lobby (Jewish and especially Evangelical) as the primary reason for this unprecedented military aid. In fact, although the influence of this lobby is real in relation to members of Congress, it remains relative on the level of the United States administration, whether Democrat or Republican.

What underlies the perennial strategic alliance between Washington and Tel Aviv is first and foremost the role of Israel in the Middle East and its place in the system of defence of the Empire. In exchange for the \$3.8

billion and the diplomatic shield that that Washington provides for it, Israel protects the global interests of the United States in the region...and sometimes further afield.

Finally, when you add it all up, it is a good deal for the United States: the Jewish state replaces a Ninth Fleet in the region, which would have cost much more than \$3.8 billion; moreover, if anyone was to get killed it would be Israeli soldiers and not GIs; Israel is an immense aircraft carrier of the American armed forces, at a relatively modest cost.

The problem with which American administrations are sometimes confronted is that it sometimes happens that the Israeli ally takes initiatives that are not always in accord with the priorities of the White House and the State Department. The

tail is trying to wag the dog... But when American strategic interests are involved, the tail has to submit to the will of the dog, as has just been confirmed by the agreement between

Washington and Iran, which is still considered by the Israeli neocons to be a menace for the free [sic] world, and one which can only be defused by

force. Along with the cheque, the United States would have done well to explain to Benjamin Netanyahu the new geo-strategic realities and the need for Israel to change its hard disk.

Brexit and the North of Ireland

20 September 2016, by **Socialist Democracy**

Though the vote did not break down entirely along unionist and nationalist lines it is clear from the returns that bulk of the Leave vote was made up of unionists. The fact that the DUP was at the forefront of the Leave campaign locally also gives some indication of the nature of that vote. The Leave vote in the North was probably even more reactionary than that in Britain with anti-immigrant sentiment being layered over with sectarianism. However, it would be wrong to read anything too progressive into the victory of a Remain campaign that repeated the arguments of the Cameron led faction of the British Conservative party. The nationalist parties adopted similar arguments alongside a rosy-eyed view of the EU in relation to the peace process and Irish unity. To counterpose a progressive Europe to Brexit shows the extent to which anti-imperialist and class consciousness has declined.

Economy

Probably the biggest factor in the Remain vote in the North was an awareness of the importance of the EU to the local economy. The EU is Northern Ireland's largest market with £3.6 billion worth of goods and services (accounting for 60 per cent of all exports) exported there every year. When this is broken down by state we find that the most important export market for businesses in the North is the South - with the Irish state accounting for 37 per cent of exports to the EU and 21 per cent of total exports. In the manufacturing sector some 55 per cent of exports go to the EU with the South again accounting

for the biggest portion. It is also the case that the value of exports to the EU has been increasing. Over the period (2004 -14), the value of exports to the EU increased by 28 per cent. In every year within this period bar one Northern Ireland recorded a trade surplus with the EU. In addition to trade the EU has been an important source of foreign direct investment. Over the last five years, more than 40 per cent of FDI projects in Northern Ireland have been funded by investment from within the EU. A key factor in both trade and investment has been the north's position - as part of the UK state - within the single market. Indeed, part of the promotional pitch by Invest NI to potential investors is that they can "take advantage of tariff-free access to the world's largest consumer market of over 500 million people".

One of sectors of the north's economy to benefit most from the EU has been agri food. Currently the operation of the Common Agricultural Policy accounts for some 82% of farm income. Last year there were 30,000 applications for the Single Farm Payment. It is estimated that the figure of aid to the agri food sector for the period 2014-20 will be some £3.6 billion. If that level of aid were to be maintained after Brexit it would require at least £260m a year coming from the British exchequer in support payments. In terms of trade the EU is the biggest market for agricultural products with the Irish state alone accounting for an annual export value of £560m.

The north has also benefited from EU administered structural funds and

peace monies. Some £2.5 billion (equivalent to approximately 8.4% of GDP) was received from the EU between 2007 and 2013 with a broadly similar amount being available between 2014 and 2020. While a portion of this - the various PEACE programmes - is undoubtedly part of the patronage that underpins the political settlement, there has also been support for various infrastructure projects that are linked to real economic activity. In terms of EU funding the north is a net beneficiary. This will stop after Brexit and is unlikely to be made up by a future British government especially in a context in which the UK economy is slowing down if not falling back into recession.

What is likely to do the greatest damage to the economy is the disruption to trade and investment that would be caused by the imposition of tariff barriers between the north (UK) and the south (EU) of Ireland. An immediate consequence of the Brexit vote has been the implosion of the Executive's strategy of lowering corporation tax. This was premised on Northern Ireland being part of the single market and also having a comparative advantage over other regions of the UK. The Brexit vote, followed by the chancellor's announcement that he plans to slash UK corporation tax, means that these assumptions, tenuous as they were to begin with, can no longer hold. Overall, Brexit is likely to have a very negative impact on the north's economy.

Politics

The political impact of Brexit is no less significant. Commentators have focused on the potential breakup of the British state and the consequences of that for unionism. However, much of this is just speculation and is based on huge assumptions about a new drive for Scottish independence. The reality is that Brexit is more of a blow to nationalism - both in Scotland and Ireland - than to unionism.

In the north the narrative of the SDLP - and more recently of Sinn Fein - was that the EU was blurring out the border and making Irish unity a more realistic prospect. The EU was also credited with providing the framework that made the peace process and the political institutions possible. The Brexit vote completely overturns a long held perspective of Irish nationalists. The re-appearance of check points customs posts along the Irish border would provide a powerful confirmation of how wrong they have been.

The panicked reaction of Sinn Fein in its call for a border poll illustrates the crisis within nationalism. The argument for this was that the will of the people of the north to Remain in the EU had been thwarted by votes in Britain. Yet there is no reason to believe that that Remain vote would translate into support for a united Ireland. Indeed, recent surveys show

that support for Irish unity has never been lower. Moreover, the power to call such a poll is in the hands of British secretary of state who, along with the DUP, immediately rejected it. Notably, it was also rejected by the SDLP and the Irish government. What they proposed as an alternative - and which Sinn Fein quickly got behind after its bungled border poll call - was the creation of an all-Ireland forum on Brexit. The idea behind this was that the Dublin government - as a continuing member of the EU - would look out for the interests of Ireland - both north and south - during the Brexit negotiations. This was very much an assertion the "nationalist family" strategy with echoes of the New Ireland Forum of the 1980's. However, this proposal didn't even get on the agenda of the recent North South Ministerial Council with the Taoiseach conceding that it didn't have the necessary "buy in" from unionists.

Human rights

The new Conservative government in London will also have consequences for the north. Positioning itself even further to the right than the one led by David Cameron it will seek to harness the rabid sentiments aroused by the Brexit campaign. A big element of this will be the severe weakening of human rights legislation. The new Prime Minister, Theresa May, has made the scrapping of the UK's

Human Rights and ending the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights her signature political issue. Yet the European Convention on Human Rights is written into the Belfast Agreement. For the British government to unilaterally revoke these provisions would reveal the Agreement to be totally threadbare. However, it would not such a dramatic a change as the gestures towards equality and human rights contained in the Belfast Agreement have been progressively stripped away as the settlement is moulded more and more to the liking of the DUP and the most right wing elements of the British ruling class. Despite the degeneration of the process into a sectarian carve up we are told that by Sinn Fein that things are progressing well. Brexit won't change the right wing direction of politics in north but it will certainly accelerate it.

The decision of the trade union leadership to sign off on the local version of austerity - the Fresh Start programme - and the decision of the socialist groups to fall in behind them, followed by socialists and eirigi supporting an imaginary "Lexit" has left politics at a low ebb. What is needed is an acceptance of the total bankruptcy of the strategy of compliance with austerity and sectarian carve-up and of the need for a united workers movement that will begin the fightback.

[Socialist Democracy](#)

A victory of the far right - the results of the elections in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania

18 September 2016, by Manuel Kellner

In 2011, only 51.5 per cent of the electorate took part in the elections; this time it was about 61 per cent. It was especially the AfD, with an aggressive racist and xenophobic profile, that was able to mobilize public attention and the votes of those who had not gone to the polls five

years ago.

The SPD, which had governed together with the CDU, remains the strongest party, with 30.6 per cent of the vote, but lost five percentage points. According to the *Forschungsgruppe Wahlen* institute, it

was the popularity of its outgoing minister-president Erwin Seling that enabled it to limit the damage. According to the polls, 75 per cent of electors recognized that he "did a good job" as head of government and two-thirds want him to be re-elected to his post.

The AfD, standing for the first time in this Land, won 20.8 per cent of the vote and thus becomes the second political force in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania from an electoral point of view. Although there are very few immigrants and refugees in this Land, the noisy demagogic calls by the party to fight without mercy against the "wave" of refugees, Muslims, terrorists, spongers on the German social system, against Chancellor Angela Merkel for being irresponsible because she supposedly invited everyone to take refuge in Germany, against the "establishment politics" which does not care about ordinary people and the national interest, etc., functioned very well. Later, we will suggest some reasons for this sinister success.

The CDU only won 19 per cent of the vote, which corresponds to a loss of four points and represents its historically worst result in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania. Furthermore, from an electoral point of view; it came behind the AfD in this Land. In the public debate in Germany, this bad result is especially interpreted as a political slap in the face for Angela Merkel and her supposedly too friendly and welcoming attitude towards refugees. Die Linke, with 13.2 per cent of the vote, lost even more, 5.2 per cent. Its political profile is rather moderate (as in all the new L nder of the ex-GDR), and especially dreams of co-governing with the SPD and the Greens. Die Linke is broadly perceived as being part of the political establishment; The liberal FDP, with a minuscule advance on 2011 (when it got 2.8 per cent), with 3 per cent will still not be represented in the regional parliament. The same goes for the fascistic NPD, which only won 3 per cent of the vote (6 per cent in 2011). This party is of course the "victim" of the spectacular success of the AfD, which attracted a big majority of the far-right electorate.

Taking a look at the absolute figures, we can see some examples of the movement of electors towards other parties, published by the *infratest dimap* institute. The almost 21 per cent of the vote won by the AfD corresponds to 167,000 electors, mostly men, considerably fewer

women. The AfD was able to mobilize 56,000 of those who did not vote in 2011 and also 23,000 electors who voted for very small parties in 2011. The AfD took 23,000 votes from the CDU, 20,000 from the NPD, 18,000 from Die Linke, 16,000 from the SPD and 3,000 from the Greens. So the AfD made gains across the board. Especially, its hold over a significant part of the left electorate will have to be carefully discussed in the ranks of Die Linke.

In the new parliament of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania (which counts 71 seats) the SPD won 26 seats, the AfD 18, the CDU 16 and Die Linke 11. So a government of the SPD along with Die Linke remains possible (with 37 seats against 34 for the CDU and the AfD together). But this choice does not seem probable as things stand. The AfD has declared, before and after the elections, that it will not take part in any coalition, giving as its reason that within a coalition with the established parties it would not be able to attain its main objectives. The most likely outcome is the continuation of the "grand coalition" of the SPD and the CDU. But we will have to wait for the results of the negotiations between the representatives of the parties concerned.

The spectacular success of the AfD is very probably linked to the fact that the parties that make up the government at federal level (CDU and SPD), particularly under the pressure of the Bavarian CSU, do a great deal to validate the demagogy of the far-right. They do everything to prevent the refugees from coming to then European Union and to Germany. They made the shameful deal with Erdogan's Turkey; they have on two occasions reduced the right of asylum to tatters and made even more uncomfortable the situation of the refugees in Germany. Following a well-known politico-psychological mechanism, people prefer to vote for the original than the copies. The electorate of the AfD can with reason think that the electoral strengthening of the party really exerts an influence on the policies implemented, even though the AfD remains an opposition party.

As for Die Linke in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, even though it has interesting things to say in criticising unbridled neoliberal capitalism and makes good proposals concerning the welcoming of refugees, more social policies, for a more equitable sharing of wealth, etc., it in no way comes across as an anti-capitalist and internationalist alternative. It announces quite clearly its readiness to govern with the SPD and the Greens. On the European Union, for example, it only proposes to reform and democratise it. Moreover, it announces its willingness to respect "budgetary discipline" in order to bring the debt down to zero by 2020 (which is the entrance ticket for anyone to take part in government in Germany). Die Linke appears as being part of established politics - in a political climate that is more and more polarised and in a context of more and more obvious discontent among a growing part of the population.

The nostalgia for the former GDR is certainly present in the ranks of the party in the new L nder of eastern Germany. For example, on August 20 Helmut Holter, the principal candidate of Die Linke in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, took part in the *Landeswandertag* (a day excursion or traditional annual ramble) of the *Volkssolidarit t* (popular solidarity), an association for social assistance which already existed in the GDR. The participants in this kind of events are in general not very young, to say the least. But at the same time Die Linke in the new L nder still signs the declarations of ritual condemnation of the GDR as "Unrechtsstaat" (a term invented by German conservatives to put on the same level the Nazi dictatorship and that of the SED - the "communist" party of the GDR) that are regularly imposed by the SDP if it goes into a coalition with Die Linke.

The AfD has no problem adapting to feelings of nostalgia towards the GDR past, which can very well correspond to an extreme politico-cultural conservatism. Die Linke has a tendency to justify the policies of Putin's Russia (although that goes, alas, much more strongly for the majority of its anti-capitalist wing). As for the AfD, it supports Putin's Russia openly and without any

COP22 in Marrakech, Morocco: What strategy for the social movements facing climate change?

17 September 2016, by Attac-CADTM Morocco

The powerful in this world propose solutions based on "green" investments that worsen the devastating effects of a productivist and consumerist logic, a logic that allows for the enrichment of a dominant minority at the expense of the majority of people on the planet, including current and future generations.

In Morocco, the policies imposed by international financial and commercial institutions have the same objectives: foreign and local capitalists grabbing our country's rich resources to the detriment of popular and impoverished classes in urban and rural areas. Decision-makers try to evade their responsibility in pursuing policies that destroy human beings and their environment. Instead, they talk about climate change and launch "green development" projects that generate new fields for private capital, backed up by public investments that exacerbate public debt and cause austerity. Worse still, this is done in the absence of any economic, social and environmental feasibility studies.

By hosting the COP22, these politicians are also seeking to sustain their "green" investments by emphasising the political stability of the country. For their part, international institutions and major powers try to present Morocco as an "exception" in the region in order to maintain their neo-colonial policies.

In order to give credence to their policies, these decision-makers strive to contain civil society organisations by creating a "civil society pole" inside the supervisory national committee of

COP22, designated by the King in February 2016. This pole has charted a roadmap in preparation for the COP22 that includes activities in 12 regions in Morocco, involving civil society, different state organs as well as the private sector. It has also embarked on a tour of the African continent to raise awareness of non-governmental organisations, networks and alliances in 12 African countries about the stakes of COP22 and Morocco's role.

Among the participants in this official dynamic is the Moroccan Coalition for Climate Justice (CMJC in French). It has adhered to the roadmap and has also scheduled gatherings called "Pre-COP22" in several regions of Morocco, designed in the image of the COP: knowledge popularising to offering expertise, display of climate initiatives advanced by governmental institutions as well as the private sector, consultation between different "partners", etc. All of this has been done in the absence of any critique of or independence from the state and its associates. Moreover, this CMJC also contributes to the civil society mobilisations outside Morocco such as the organising of the Maghrebi Forum for Social and Climate Justice in May 2016 in Hammamet, Tunisia. And here we are now seeing all these preparations culminating in an international meeting called by the coalition on 23rd, 24th and 25th September in Marrakech.

The official (institutional) civil society and the Moroccan Coalition for Climate Justice therefore contribute to ensuring a festive atmosphere during COP22, an atmosphere that will

sanction the facilitation of "green projects" and the search for funds at the expense of a real debate around climate justice associated to the larger debate around political, economic and social choices that perpetuate inequality.

We, at ATTAC CADTM Morocco, consider that the question of climate change is not an exclusively expert issue or a matter limited to negotiations between governments. For us, climate change is at the heart of the daily lived reality of citizens who demand a rupture with the liberal policies that are causing the deterioration of our social and environmental conditions. They also demand their inclusion and participation through a real democracy in decision-making around the solutions that ought to be based on social justice and equality in the distribution of wealth. This will necessitate leading struggles that would bring together popular classes that are victims of social injustice.

Moreover, ATTAC CADTM Morocco finds the cooptation of the Coalition for Climate Justice by the Moroccan state in order to serve the latter's agenda unacceptable. This is our central disagreement with the steering committee's dominant approach inside the CMJC and is the primary reason for our withdrawal from this coalition after having participated as a member since its creation in early 2016. In addition to this, we had serious concerns about the lack of democracy and transparency in the way decisions were being taken.

In parallel to this semi-official dynamic led by the Moroccan Coalition for Climate Justice, ATTAC Morocco has been engaged with several associations, human rights organisations and trade unions within the Democratic Network to Accompany the COP22 (Réseau Démocratique pour Accompagner la COP22, REDACOP22). This network aims to build a democratic environmental movement that is independent from those who wield political and economic power in our country as well as from international lenders and donors. Our plans to achieve this are based on the mobilisations of the real victims of environmental damage and degradation: the working class, poor

peasants, small-scale fishermen, people living in oases, indigenous populations, etc. REDACOP22 is currently making progress in setting up local sections relying on experiences of peoples' environmental struggles. It is within this strategic framework that we are working hard to mobilise around COP22, in order to highlight forms of resistance aimed at achieving social and environmental justice.

ATTAC CADTM Morocco will organise an international conference on climate justice on the 4th and 5th of November in Safi, one of the worst-affected cities in Morocco, from an environmental and social perspective.

And on the 6th November, we are participating in another international meeting in Marrakech organised by REDACOP22.

ATTAC CADTM Morocco remains open to all initiatives and forms of mobilisations around a genuine climate justice for all the duration of COP22 in Marrakech. Our actions will focus on denouncing the deceptive official proposals and solutions that are market-based. The fact that the ecological crisis is one of the most dangerous aspects of the crisis of the capitalist system makes us committed to the development of radical alternatives.

15 September 2016

The Voice for Change - On Hong Kong's 2016 Legislative Council Election Results

16 September 2016, by **Au Loong-Yu**

Three Trends

This election exhibits three new trends: politicization, polarization, and the rise of a new generation. These trends explain the results and also impact on future development.

For decades, Hong Kong people have been called "politically apathetic". In 1995, the partial direct election to the legislature, two years before the return of sovereignty to China, the voter turnout was merely 35.79%. In 1998, in the first election after the reunification with China, the turnout soared. An interesting phenomenon since then, however, is that voter turnout has mirrored the movement of a spring; only the first, third, and fifth elections witnessed a relatively high turnout, while for the second and fourth it was much lower. The results were as follows:

1998 53.29%

2000 43.57%

2004 55.64%

2008 45.20%

2012 53.05%

2016 58.28%

This spring like effect is related to Beijing's policy over Hong Kong. The high turnout in 1998 reflected an anxiety among the people after returning to Beijing's rule. The high turnout in 2004 was because in the previous year Beijing had tried to push the Hong Kong government to pass the national security bill, as stipulated in Article 23 of the Basic Law. The attempt was defeated by a mass mobilization, which in turn encouraged a high turnout in the election of the following year. Conversely, when Beijing did not impose a hard line policy in the interim period between two elections, in the next election the turnout tended to drop by 10 percent, as was the case in 2000 and 2008. The 2012 election's high turnout was a response to the

Hong Kong government's attempt to impose "national education" on students, a program aimed at making young people more patriotic to China and which was again defeated by a mass youth mobilization. It also coincided with the accession to power of Xi Jinping. Since then Beijing's policy has become even more hard-lined, which has pushed many young people to embrace a "Hong Kong identity" in defiance of Beijing's nationalistic and despotic policy. This finally accumulated in the 2014 Umbrella Movement, and after the government crackdown it should not surprise anyone that in the 2016 election we no longer witnessed a spring like effect of contracting after over-stretching; rather what we saw was the highest voter turnout ever, reflecting a period of politicization since 2012.

Despite vote rigging and bribery and a surge in the voter turnout, the pro-Beijing camp suffered a mild decline in their share of the votes, from 42.7% to 40.6%. This shows that sixty

percent of the voters continue to resent it, including many first time voters. However, this politicization also involves a polarization of attitudes towards Beijing and more generally towards "Chinese identity". The electoral victory of the five new hands in politics who demanded self determination has been at the expense of the so called pan-democrat camp, however. Many lost their long time seat, including Lee Cheuk Yan, the leader / head of the both the Labour Party and the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU). The success of these five self determination advocates shows that many voters, especially the new generation, no longer accept the excessively moderate policy of the pan-democrats in their dealing with Beijing.

The birth of two new forces for change

Since the 1980's when the colonial government first introduced local elections and then in the 1991 partial LegCo election, the political spectrum in Hong Kong has always been based on the dichotomy of "pro-Beijing" and "pro-democracy", rather than a left and right spectrum. This is just a copy of the liberal's idea about Hong Kong and China politics, namely everything is seen through the prism of the binary opposition between "state despotism" and "civil society". Even though there is a small labour party, no one can tell any major differences between this party and the other liberal parties in terms of program. All parties were centre or right wing. Things only began to show signs of change in 2008, and then soon there was a growth of the right wing localists, with some of them evolving into the far right during the Umbrella Movement. This far right force considers anyone who disagrees with them as "fucking leftists", when in truth there has neither been a publicly visible socialist left nor liberal left in Hong Kong for decades. What the far right did not expect was that their attack has actually helped bring about a new generation of liberal leftists - people who wish to be more assertive

in their opposition to Beijing but without yielding to the right wing discourses of racism and xenophobia. The liberal commentators have been unable to understand this phenomenon with their old paradigm. They consider everyone who advocates self-determination or independence as "self-determination localists", and apply this indiscriminately to all five newcomers, without noticing that using the same term for these five legislators blurs the left and right division among them. Some use the term "radical localists" to describe all five of them, but this is equally misleading.

While Yau Wai-ching of Youngspiration and Cheng Chung-tai from Civil Passion are right wing or far right localists, Nathan Law Kwun-chung, who represents Demosisto (Joshua Wong is amongst its founders), Eddie Chu Hoi Dick and Lau Siu Lai are more centre left leaning. In terms of political vision, although the two wings both advocate self-determination, their approach is very different.

The former wing uses a lot of racist and xenophobic language in its opposition not only to the CCP but also to target all Chinese. Youngspiration's program, for instance, explicitly demands to exclude those who cannot speak either Cantonese or English from citizenship. This is especially ridiculous as many senior Hong Kong indigenous do not speak either languages, but rather only speak Hakka or Chaochou. They also aim to exclude Mainland Chinese immigrants from enjoying basic benefits in Hong Kong. Civil Passion is also well known for inciting violence against Chinese. It is also not accidental that they have little interest in promoting labour rights or social security for marginalized groups and minorities. If these people are radical then they are radically conservative. The right wing localists received 7% of the total vote (this includes all candidates from this camp who ran).

The latter wing's call for self-determination has not been linked to any anti-Chinese sentiment. Eddie Chu has pointed out that while the former wing is "nationalist self-determinist",

he is for democratic self determination, which includes rather than excludes Chinese and other marginalized groups. Nevertheless, all three of the newly elected from this wing exhibit a lack of clarity in their advocacy for self-determination; it is not clear as to their actual plan and road map. It is still largely a slogan, although Nathan Law is more explicit in calling for a referendum on Hong Kong's future. Their political vision is, however, wedded to a social platform which includes labour rights, gender rights and minorities' rights, and is therefore very different from the right wing localists.

One must also add the League of Social Democrats (LSD) to this camp of centre left self-determination advocates. Although its choice of words concerning its political vision is slightly different from the three newly elected centre left young legislators (LSD calls for a democratic re-making of Hong Kong's Basic Law), its political and social position is close to the latter. Together the centre left camp garnered 15.2% of the vote (including all running candidates).

In this election the LSD struck an alliance with People Power. Previously People Power could never be considered as anything close to left. Its spiritual leader, Stephen Shiu Yeuk Yuen, has been very explicit in fighting against the trade union movement, on the grounds that it interferes with the "free market". Actually the leaders of the LSD and People Power were once part of the same party, namely the LSD 1.0, as I call it so as to differentiate the LSD first founded in 2006 and the LSD in 2011 when two leaders, Albert Chan Wai-yip and Raymond Wong Yuk-man, left and formed People Power, leaving Leung Kwok-hung, also known as Long Hair, as the only leader of the LSD, or LSD 2.0. The LSD 1.0 was a funny combination from the start. While the long time legislator Albert Chan was never a leftist and in fact was a Democratic Party legislator for many years, Raymond Wong has long been associated with the KMT and the mafia. Long Hair, a former Trotskyist, was a lone figure with a small group of supporters until he co-founded the LSD 1.0 with the other two. With the beginning of a change of mood

amongst voters, the three all won in their election campaign in 2008. The 2011 split created People Power, only to split again in 2013, resulting in the resignation of Raymond Wong. By then both the LSD and People Power had evolved into their 2.0 version. The splitting away of the right wing Raymond Wong plus the withdrawal of support from former People Power spiritual leader and funder, Stephen Shiu, has practically meant that People Power has been less right wing since then. Although the LSD 2.0's ally with People Power 2.0 in this election is less driven by politically correct motives, their joint program exhibits a tendency towards a centre left direction.

Entering a highly fluid period

Of course, the future direction of this new force of "democratic self-determination advocates" is still far from consolidated. One can detect signs of wavering when the right wing

localist pressure grows. But one must not lose sight of the fact that this new democratic force has the support of 15.2% of the voters. It is these voters who are fed up with the pan-democrats' political line of conciliation towards Beijing and who are looking for more radical answers to defend Hong Kong's autonomy. The reason that trade union leader Lee Cheuk Yan lost his long time seat is precisely because he stuck to his alliance with the liberal's position of striving for universal suffrage within the restraint of the Basic Law, an effort similar to squaring a circle, and a kind of effort with which 22.2% of voters disagree. The fact that they sent the five relatively radical democrats to the legislature is in practice not only an act to show their resentment against Beijing, it is also simultaneously an act to show their resentment against the pan-democrats without, however, yielding to the further rightward drift initiated by the demagogue right wing localists.

These "democratic left" voters are surely even less consolidated than the legislators they voted for. Many also

voted as they did because they are tired of the old faces of the pan-democrats leaders who have toed the same useless line for years. This is especially so among young voters. In general, the failure of these pan-democrats in giving any direction or leadership to the 2014 Umbrella Movement deeply discredited them. Lee Cheuk Yan's political career might have been sealed during the Umbrella Movement when, at the height of the occupation when thousands of young people tried to break through police barriers, Lee refused to take a helmet from a young person, symbolizing his disapproval of the civil disobedience action. He did not know that this also symbolized his break with the young generation.

All in all, this election represents how Hong Kong politics is entering into a period of volatility and fluidity after more than 40 years of stability, as well as the shaking up of the old and useless paradigm. It is a time to act, and act fast.

14 September, 2016

Exchange between Iranian and Syrian socialists

15 September 2016

National Security Thugs: Facilitators of Turning the Nation and State into Nationalist Bedfellows

The discourse of "national security" is being used to brainwash the Iranian public and prevent them from opposing the regime's destructive role in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen and Bahrain. In this effort, the regime is

being aided by the "democratic nationalist" reformist intellectuals. "National security" is being turned into an abstraction that has nothing to do with the welfare of the people in Iran or the region.

Iran's intervention in Syria is motivated by political, ideological and economic reasons. It needs Syria as a regional ally and as a route to the Hezbollah in Lebanon. It also counts on lucrative reconstruction contracts and real estate deals in Syria. The Iranian regime is also expanding its role in Iraq. In doing so, it has even alienated much of the Arab Shia population of Iraq who think they are

being used in Iran's competition with Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

Iranian intellectuals need to openly declare where they stand on the issue of Iran's intervention in Syria and its decisive role in the war. They need to ask: Why is Iran defending the Assad regime? Has the "conservative reformist" Rouhani been able to create any changes in this regard? Instead, reformist nationalists have committed the crime of embracing the false belief that Iran is a powerful force in weakening ISIS.

Iranian intellectuals need to expose the way in which the Iranian regime is using Syria as a key element in

building a new order in the region. This imperialism will lead to the further entrenchment of the regime of the Islamic Republic inside Iran, the further militarization of society and the further repression of internal dissidents.

The only solution is the regional solidarity of socialist/secular forces. An example of this is the Alliance of Syrian and Iranian Socialists. The Rojava struggle in northern Syria which emphasizes direct democracy, the peaceful coexistence of national and religious minorities, ecological concerns, equality of women and men on all levels, and grassroots leadership, is a model reminiscent of the Paris Commune of 1871 that needs to be strengthened and defended. Rojava's opposition to ISIS and the states that support ISIS has been heroic. International brigades like those which went to Spain in solidarity with the 1936 Spanish Revolution are needed in Rojava today.

If the existing opposition in Iran brings different groups together for the purpose of creating solidarity with progressive movements in the region, including Rojava and the popular democratic movement of the people of Syria, this solidarity will lead to strengthening democratic and progressive opposition forces inside Iran. Seeing the link between imperialist policies abroad and oppressive policies at home is crucial.

August 23, 2016

Response from Frieda Afary and Joseph Daher

We welcome this brave statement and its challenge to those Iranian reformist or leftist intellectuals who support Iran's military intervention in Syria and its imperialist motivations in the region. The authors not only expose the lies of the Islamic Republic and its intellectual supporters but also call for a principled alliance of socialist and progressive forces in the

region around the issues of social justice, secular democracy and an alternative to capitalism.

We agree that the Kurdish struggle for self-determination in Syria and elsewhere in the region is a test of all who call themselves socialists. Especially, at this moment when all the global and regional powers are backing Turkey's military intervention in northern Syria which is aimed at attacking and silencing the Kurds, defending the struggle for Kurdish self-determination becomes crucial.

Unfortunately, for various reasons, the collaboration of Arabs and Kurds in the beginning of the Syrian revolution in 2011 was later weakened considerably, while racism and sectarianism increased. First, Syrian liberal and Islamic opposition leaders and groups opposed any type of Kurdish self-determination, and on some occasions supported attacks by Islamic fundamentalist groups against the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and Kurdish civilians. In doing so, they expressed a chauvinist position that must be condemned. Secondly, the Kurdish Democratic Union Party chose a pragmatic non-aggression agreement with the Assad regime in the Summer of 2012, instead of directly addressing and joining the revolutionary masses who were still actively fighting to overthrow the Assad regime. In addition, in the Fall of 2015, the PYD supported Russian imperialism's massive airstrikes which were aimed mostly at Syrian Arab democratic opposition forces and civilians, and only in a minor way against ISIS or Jabhat al-Nusra. Those air strikes destroyed the much needed civilian institutions in the areas that were not under the control of the Assad regime or ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra.

The three cantons of Rojava administered by the PYD have provided a form of autonomy that includes women's rights, minority participation and secular institutions. Nevertheless, some contradictions and problems exist that do not represent grassroots self-organization but rather

processes controlled from above. We must address the authoritarian practices of the PYD both in their internal organization and functioning and in their attitude and practices toward dissenting views and organizations. (For further details please see Joseph Daher's articles and interviews with Kurdish activists on the website of the Alliance of Syrian and Iranian Socialists.)

This does not change the fact that all socialists need to uphold a principled position of support for Kurdish self-determination in Syria, Turkey, Iraq and Iran.

Now the Turkish army is using various armed Syrian Arab opposition forces including Salafists, other Islamic fundamentalist groups and various smaller sections of the Free Syrian Army to attack PYD forces, to bomb and kill Kurdish civilians and to build a barrier wall on the border to separate Syrian and Turkish Kurds.

We oppose Turkey's military intervention in Syria just as we oppose the military intervention of Russia, Iran, the Gulf monarchies, and Western forces. They do not support the interests of the popular classes and only increase sectarian and ethnic divisions. They all wish to maintain the Assad regime (with or without Assad), reject Kurdish self-determination, and will thus continue the war.

In conclusion, we agree with our Iranian comrades about the need for an alliance between Kurdish, Arab, Iranian and Turkish revolutionaries who oppose the Assad regime, defend Kurdish self-determination, oppose all religious fundamentalists, authoritarian regimes and imperialist alliances. That is why the Alliance of Syrian and Iranian Socialists is reaching out to Middle Eastern socialists who are searching for a humanist alternative to capitalism, its sectarianism, gender discrimination, racism and chauvinism.

September 7, 2016

[Alliance of Middle East Socialists](#)

Black Lives Matter movement grows stronger

13 September 2016, by **Malik Miah**

We're just a bullet away from being a hashtag. "Mistah F.A.B. Hearing my son say to the officer, "You shot me," it pierced my heart. "Wanda Johnson

I'm 61 years old, and I have been stopped by police 53 times in my life. "John William Templeton

As a physician I watch these videos and I see health care infractions. "Dr. Tiffany Chioma Anaebere

I'm not ready to have the conversation with my daughters. "W. Kamau Bell, (The San Francisco Chronicle, 7/31/16)

The quotes above came from Black residents living in the liberal San Francisco Bay Area. The statistics on police stops of Blacks and violence mirror other cities, especially in the Midwest and South. San Francisco has a six percent Black population "which suffers 40 percent of the city's shootings by cops.

The two major party conventions occurred in July and showed the powerful impact of the three-year-old Movement for Black Lives. At the Republican Party convention that nominated demagogue Donald Trump, the theme was that only white and blue lives matter. Black Lives Matter movement leaders were demonized and called violent, anti-cop and evil.

At the Democratic Party convention that nominated war hawk Hillary Clinton, the theme was to emphasize "unity." While nodding to Black Lives Matter, the focus was "All Lives Matter." Whenever the question was asked to delegates on the floor, the reply was to downplay a reality that Black lives for 400 years have mattered much less than whites.

Only the radical wing of the Bernie Sanders campaign mentioned the positive impact of the Black Lives

Matter Movement (BLM) and defended its demand for real reform of the police and criminal justice system.

Anti-Black Code Words

"All Lives Matter" is code to attack Black Lives Matter and defend the status quo. It is in line with the worst traditions of America's long racist origins. African Americans who have suffered oppression and systemic discrimination are told to wait for change "tone it down."

In the South, under legal segregation, "states' rights" were enforced to deny Blacks the right to vote. It is being done again since the Supreme Court gutted the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

The ongoing daily police violence against Black men and women is an extension of a long racist history that is rarely taught in schools. Whites and Blacks aren't educated in true racial history. It is whitewashed. Cops are rarely arrested or convicted. It is why the Movement to defend Black bodies continues to grow stronger, and the demand "No Justice, No Peace" is heard from Oakland to Chicago to Dallas and New York.

One of the most prominent business magazines, Bloomberg Business Week, ran a prominent article and a photo on the front page of the August 8 issue of Alicia Garza, a co-founder of the BLM. "If we want to get to the place where all lives matter," she said, "then we have to make sure that Black lives matter too."

When the parents of a fallen Muslim soldier (Humayun Khan, an Army captain killed in Iraq in 2004) spoke out against Trump for his smearing of Muslims and his plan to ban them from entering the country, Khizer Khan made a rare point that few

understand: it is the 14th Amendment to the Constitution that gives citizenship rights to "all persons born or naturalized in the United States." and also confers upon all citizens "equal protection of the laws."

That amendment was adopted after the Civil War and guaranteed former slaves their citizenship. It can't be taken away easily, Khan reminded us, even by an authoritarian figure like Trump as president.

His wife, Ghazala Khan, added that Islam is a religion of peace, that terrorists are not following the religion and that Muslims are as patriotic as other religious citizens.

What the Founding Fathers Knew

The founding fathers who wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution knew that the documents "including the Bill of Rights (the first 10 amendments to the Constitution) "only applied to whites. The Declaration's famous "all men are created equal" was exclusionary "Africans were considered property like any other livestock.

Women were raped and their children sold. Genocide/ethnic cleansing of Native tribes was legal.

Not until after the Second American Revolution (known as the 1861-65 Civil War) did a radical change to the Constitution occur with the addition of the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments.

Blacks have always seen "American exceptionalism" and the founding fathers differently than whites. On July 5, 1852, Frederick Douglass gave a speech at an event commemorating the signing of the Declaration of Independence. He said, "This Fourth

of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn." And he asked them, "Do you mean, citizens, to mock me, by asking me to speak today?"

Some Blacks did fight in the Revolutionary War hoping for freedom. Others fought with the British colonialists. Ironically the British banned slavery in the Empire between 1833-38. It compensated slave holders for their economic losses.

Yet the U.S. federal government rejected this course as the slaveholding states incorporated their right to keep slaves in the Constitution. They later declared independence from the union when they saw this "right" under attack.

The Abolitionist Example

The Black Lives Matter Movement stands on principles in the tradition of the Abolitionists who refused to compromise or tone down their demand to immediately end slavery. They were threatened by slaveholders and pro-slavery sympathizers.

The liberals of the day, including President Lincoln, were opposed to human bondage. But they still respected the rights of slaveholders. The Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863 was a tactic to defeat the Confederacy. It only applied to slave states in rebellion. It didn't apply to slaves in non-rebelling border states (Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland and Missouri).

The capital in Washington D.C. was built primarily by slave labor. When First Lady Michelle Obama made this simple point at the Democratic Party convention the far right attacked her including a leading Fox commentator, Bill O'Reilly, who said these slaves were fed well and had decent housing. (Their wages went to their owners!)

Khan's point about the 14th Amendment is extremely important. It set the framework for the next 100 years of struggle for full equality. He correctly explained that no religion "neither the Bible nor the Koran" can be a replacement for the

Constitution, unless those amendments are repealed.

Blacks were not legal "Americans" until the late 1860s. Former slaves then faced organized violence by the state governments to take away that citizenship. The police, Congress and courts kept Black people in the segregated South and the entire country as second class.

The battle for life and respect has been a central feature of the Black freedom struggle. It is why the middle class and more wealthy Blacks (forced to live in segregated communities) had little choice but to join the movement or become agents of the oppressors.

Class divisions within the Black community widened after the victory of the civil rights revolution. The upper class Blacks can now live in areas that previously excluded them. That's a good thing, but also why they generally represent the "tone down" critics of the BLM.

Violent State Counter-Offensive

The state has pushed back hard to limit freedoms for African Americans. In the early 1900s, the ruling class had no problem with Booker T. Washington, the leader of those who accommodated with the racist status quo. The NAACP and other new civil rights groups challenged the perspective of accommodation. These leaders faced hostility from the government, even though their main demand was to end lynchings.

The most concerted attacks were against the rising Black Nationalist formation led by Marcus Garvey. His urban-based movement (sometimes called "Back to Africa") fought for freedom by demanding reparations and an end to police violence. Garvey's movement was strong not only in the Black communities but in the Caribbean where he was from. He was later deported to Jamaica.

The mass protests in the urban Black communities struck fear in the minds of whites and the ruling class. The present-day FBI began in the 1920s in

two dirty campaigns: against Garvey's nationalism and against the "Red Scare" socialists.

In the 1930s with the deep economic depression and rise of militant labor struggles, African Americans were not explicitly covered in the "New Deal." FDR's Democratic Party included the segregationists of the South who resisted any law that weakened white power.

Big unions formed white-only locals in the South. Northern labor downplayed racism under the guise of "unity" to win economic issues.

Housing discrimination was enhanced under the new Federal Housing Administration. Low-cost real estate loans (the way most working class whites created wealth) excluded African Americans. In the Second World War, white women could get hired in war plants ahead of Blacks, who organized protests to get some of those jobs.

A March on Washington Movement in 1941 pressed for jobs in the war industries. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his wife Eleanor did express sympathy for Blacks "a change in attitude more than in practice."

The military was segregated because most whites did not trust the loyalty of Blacks to "their" country. The end of military segregation happened after WW II. It was done by an Executive Order by President Truman. Congress would never have adopted such legislation.

Mass Action Tactic

The modern civil rights movement used mass peaceful protests. Martin Luther King Jr. understood that visible peaceful protests were key to facing down violence from southern city and state governments and extralegal terrorist groups (like the Ku Klux Klan) that murdered Blacks without fear of arrest.

The mass action tactic of previous battles set the stage for today's Black Lives Matter movement. Militant organizations like the Student

Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Black Panther Party, and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers in the Detroit auto plants, sent fear into the ruling class.

Malcolm X, who was assassinated in 1965, had a big influence on the younger generation of activists who did not view these legal rights as addressing society's structural racism. Many became socialist-minded.

In the 1970s a Republican president, Richard Nixon, backed legislation for affirmative action, Title IX for women in sports and supported school desegregation laws. Nixon was no vocal friend of Black rights. He acted because of the anti-Vietnam war movement, the legacy of the civil rights victory, and a rise of other social movements (Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Native peoples, women, gays).

The political pushback and reversals began with presidents Reagan, Bush and Clinton. The first Black president, Barack Obama, has never sought to reverse these losses. In fact, he hailed the leadership of Ronald Reagan.

Movement for Black Lives Platform

The vanguard leadership of the young women who started the Black Lives

Movement with the #Blacklivesmatter on Twitter, after the killings of Trayvon Martin in Florida and Michael Brown in Missouri, continues to advance and has led to similar formations in other countries.

As in the past the police, courts and state institutions have targeted these activists. The propaganda is classic obfuscation – similar to saying “reverse racism” to attack Black Power. Today it is “All Lives Matter” and “Blue Lives Matter” to belittle the idea that Black Lives do matter.

The power of the movement is its breadth and the role of dynamic women and men in leadership. There is a simple objective – justice and respect for Black bodies and arrest and prosecution of criminal cops.

After the two major party convention, leaders from a coalition of grassroots BLM groups drafted a Platform for going forward as a movement. It is a strong document (see <https://policy.m4bl.org/platform/>).

A 10-point program is outlined ranging from the rights of Black youth, immigrants, the LBGT community and an end to mass surveillance of Black communities. It is discussed under a key category: “End the War on Black people.”

There are five other broad categories: support for economic reparations; calls for demands to invest in Black

communities and divest from forces that oppress Black people; for economic justice, community control and ending Black incarceration; independent Black political power and self-determination.

The detailed platform (available on the website) is the most important independent political action program since the National Black Independent Political Party and Black Power conventions in the 1970s.

It is an organizing tool that takes the movement beyond where it is today and can win broad political support for fundamental change. It does not rely on elections as a Movement even though individual activists may run for office.

Elected Black officials stress working within the system and urge African Americans to join the electoral process. The Black Lives Matters leaders know better. Mass public actions are what bring real change. That's why their ongoing protests against police murders and violence along with the new Platform points the way forward.

BLM is increasing the confidence of Black youth that what they do matters. The marchers who said, “It is not illegal to kill Black people in America,” are ready to press on until that is no longer the case

[Against the Current](#)

The World's Largest General Strike

12 September 2016, by Vijay Prashad

Trade unions leaders are reticent to say how many people struck work on September 2, 2016. They simply cannot offer a firm number. But they do say that the strike – the seventeenth general strike since India adopted its new economic policy in 1991 – has been the largest ever. The corporate news media – no fan of strikes – reported that the number of strikers exceeded the estimated 150

million workers. A number of newspapers suggested that 180 million Indian workers walked off the job. If that is the case, then this is the largest reported general strike in history.

And yet, it has not been given much consideration in the media. Few front page stories, fewer pictures of marching workers outside their silent

factories and banks, tea gardens and bus stations. The sensibility of individual journalists can only rarely break through the wall of cynicism built by the owners of the press and the culture they would like to create. For them, workers' struggles are an inconvenience to daily life. It is far better for the corporate media to project a strike as a disturbance, as a nuisance to a citizenry that seems to

live apart from the workers. It is middle-class outrage that defines the coverage of a strike, not the issues that move workers to take this heart-felt and difficult action. The strike is treated as archaic, as a holdover from another time. It is not seen as a necessary means for workers to voice their frustrations and hopes. The red flags, the slogans, and the speeches – these are painted with embarrassment. It is as if turning one's eyes from them would somehow make them disappear.

Deprivation

A leading international business consultancy firm reported – a few years ago – that 680 million Indians live in deprivation. These people – half the Indian population – are deprived of the basics of life such as food, energy, housing, drinking water, sanitation, health care, education and social security. Most of Indians workers and peasants count amongst the deprived. Ninety per cent of India's workers are in the informal sector, where protections at the workplace are minimal and their rights to form unions virtually non-existent. These workers are not marginal to India's growth agenda. In 2002, the National Commission on Labour found that ‘the primary source of future work for all Indians’ would be in the informal sector, which already produced over half the Gross Domestic Product. The future of Indian labour, then, is informal with occasional rights delivered to prevent grotesque violations of human dignity. Hope for the Indian worker is simply not part of the agenda of the current dispensation in India.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who once more zipped off as part of his endless world tour, did not pay heed to these workers. His goal is to increase India's growth rate, which – as judged by the example of when he was Chief Minister of the State of Gujarat – can be accomplished by a cannibal like attitude towards workers' rights and the livelihood of the poor. Selling off state assets, giving hugely lucrative deals to private business and opening the doors of India's economy to Foreign Direct Investment are the mechanisms

to increase the growth rate. None of these strategies, as even the International Monetary Fund acknowledges, will lead to social equality. This growth trajectory leads to greater inequality, to less power for workers and more deprivation.

Class Struggle

Only four per cent of the Indian workforce is in unions. If these unions merely fought to defend their tenuous rights, their power would erode even further. Union power has suffered greatly since the Indian economy liberalised in 1991, with Supreme Court judgments against union democracy and with the global commodity chain pitting Indian workers against workers elsewhere. It is to the great credit of the Indian trade unions that they have embraced – in different tempos – the labour conditions and living conditions of workers and peasants in the informal sector. What power remains with unions can only grow if they do what they have been doing – namely, to turn towards the immense mass of the informal workers and peasants and draw them into the culture of unions and class struggle.

The class struggle is not the invention of the unions or the workers. It is a fact of life for labour in the capitalist system. The capitalist, who buys the labour power of workers, seeks to make that labour power as efficient and productive as possible. The capitalist retains the gains from this productivity, sloughing off the worker to their slums at night to find a way to get the energy to come back the next day. It is this pressure to be more productive and to donate the gains of their productivity to the capitalist that is the essence of the class struggle. When the worker wants a better share of the output, the capitalist does not listen. It is the strike – an invention of the 19th century – that provides the workers with a voice to enter the class struggle in a conscious way.

In India, the first strike was in April-May 1862, when the railway workers of Howrah Railway Station struck over the right to an 8 Hour Day. What inconveniences the strike produces to the middle class has to be weighed

against the daily ‘inconveniences’ that the workers endure as their extra productivity is seized by the capitalists. Those workers in 1862 did not want an interminable ten-hour shift that depleted them of their life. Their strike allowed them to say: we will not work more than eight hours. The critic of the strike will say, surely there are other ways to get your voice heard. No other way has been shown to the worker, who had neither the political power to ‘lobby’ nor the economic power to dominate the media. It is silent, but for these festivals of the working-class.

From Gujarat to Kerala

Workers in Narendra Modi's home state of Gujarat joined the strike with great enthusiasm. This included over seventy thousand crèche and mid-day meal workers as well as port workers in Bhavnagar. Garment workers in Tamil Nadu and automobile factory workers in Karnataka closed their shops. Bank and insurance employees joined power loom operators and iron ore miners, while transport workers across the country decided to stand outside their bus and truck depots. Communist unions joined with other unions to ensure the widest mobilisation of workers.

Each local union in this strike had its own grievances, its own worries and frustrations. But the broad issues that united these millions of workers revolved around the demand for workplace democracy, the demand for a greater share of the social wealth and the demand for a less toxic social landscape. The workers – through their unions – took their twelve point demands to the government, which ignored them. At the last minute, when it seemed as if the strike would be robust, the government attempted to deliver small concessions. This was not sufficient. It was, as the labour unions put it, an insult. There is no expectation that the strike itself would lead to major concessions from the government. After all, last year, 150 million workers went on strike and the government did not shift from its anti-worker policies. Instead, the government of Narendra Modi

deepened its commitment to ‘labour market reforms’ – namely to eviscerate unions and to enhance the right to fire workers at will.

What the strike says is that India’s workers remain alive to the class

struggle. They have not surrendered to Reality. In 1991, when the government decided to open the economy to the turbulent interests of global capital, the workers rebelled. In August 1992, textile workers in

Bombay took to the streets in their undergarments – they declared that the new order would leave them in abject poverty. Their symbolic gesture is the current reality.

[Alternet](#)

Why "Lesser Evilism" Is a Loser

11 September 2016, by **Jill Stein**

Against the Current: How do you answer the question that the only thing that counts is beating Trump?

Jill Stein: That’s the question we get every election. It’s the question we get most in this election. It’s what the Democrats said in 1964 about Goldwater. “Part of the way with LBJ.” Goldwater lost in a landslide but the Democrats escalated in Vietnam and lost the War Against Poverty there.

Goldwater’s crushing defeat did not stop the victories of Nixon, Reagan and the Bushes. Instead, it led to four decades of the Democratic Party abandoning its New Deal liberalism as it embraced the neoliberal austerity, neoconservative militarism, and environmental stupidities of the Republican right.

Lesser evil is a losing strategy. It paves the way for greater evils.

When the lesser evil Democrats had the White House under Carter, Clinton, and Obama – with Democratic majorities in both Houses of Congress for at least one session under each of these presidents – it was conservative Republican priorities that the Democrats implemented: increased military spending and foreign interventions; private instead of public health insurance; deregulation of trucking, airlines, media, telecommunications, energy, finance, and other industries; abandonment of promised labor law reforms; repeal of the federal welfare guarantee; deep cuts to federal spending to public housing and other

safety net programs; “law-and-order” legislation that spawned mass incarceration; trade bills that strengthened corporate power and pitted workers against each other across national borders.

Then came a de facto moratorium on the enforcement of anti-discrimination and desegregation in housing, schools, and employment; the high-stakes testing to justify charter school privatization of public education, inaction on the climate crisis...the list could go on.

The point is that for the last 40 years the Democrats have been more successful in getting Republican platform planks through Congress than the Republicans themselves.

Hillary Clinton has been at the center of this evolution from New Deal Democrats to corporate New Democrats over the last four decades.

☞ Defeating Trump with another Clinton won’t count for much for the left. What counts most in this election is building a political alternative that can defeat the corporate militarism and environmental inaction shared by both wings of the two-corporate-party political cartel.

☞ Defeating Trump by electing Hillary Clinton won’t defeat the racist scapegoating of minorities that has been the politics of the right from Goldwater, Nixon, and George Wallace to Donald Trump. Clinton’s pro-corporate domestic program has no answers for the downwardly mobile white working and middle classes that

are the mass base for Trumpism.

The history of Clintonism is “triangulation” – accommodating the right. The Clintons have a long history of dog-whistle racism: the execution of Ricky Ray Rector, the dissing of Sister Souljah at a Rainbow Coalition conference, Hillary’s characterization of Black youth as “super-predators,” Hillary’s 2008 campaign surrogates Bill Clinton, Geraldine Ferraro, Ed Rendel and others messaging that Obama can’t win white votes because he is Black.

We can’t rely on Hillary Clinton to fight the right. The best way to defeat the right is with a strong, viable left that can win over the white working-class and middle-class base of Trumpism on the basis of a social and economic program that unites downwardly mobile whites and people of color.

No Time Like Now

There is no time like the present to push a strong and unapologetic left agenda in the electoral arena. A voter revolt is underway in this country and we are beginning to see the outlines of a major political realignment in this election. An unprecedented number of Americans are rejecting both parties and their candidates.

The Republican Party appears to be in meltdown as Donald Trump’s erratic campaign continues to falter. Meanwhile, Hillary Clinton is welcoming establishment Republicans fleeing Trump into the Democratic

Party through her "Together for America" initiative, moving even farther to the right just weeks after having sabotaged Bernie Sanders' campaign, as we learned through the leaked DNC emails.

Her recent appointment of Ken Salazar — a champion of fracking and the TPP — as transition chief is sending a clear signal to progressive Democrats that their views and their agenda are no longer welcome in the party.

These heartbroken progressives who are leaving the Democratic Party in droves after this latest series of betrayals, along with millions of young people and independents who have already rejected the two major parties, are looking for a place to go.

There are many ways to advance the struggle for democracy and justice in this election — whether we win the White House or simply win the day by building momentum for the revolutionary change the American people are clamoring for.

First, the Green presidential campaign plays the traditional role of left third parties in the U.S. of forcing the political system as a whole to take up demands of the people that the major parties have ignored, from the abolition of slavery to old age pensions (Social Security).

Our campaign will not let the corporate candidates and media forget such popular demands as improved Medicare for all, an emergency clean energy/climate action program, tuition-free child care, pre-K and public higher education, progressive tax reform, raising the minimum wage to a living wage, public jobs for the unemployed, expanded Social Security benefits, and military spending cuts.

We can define the issues that are up for debate. The higher the Stein/Baraka ticket goes in the polls — and the bigger the Stein/Baraka vote on election day — the more political leverage the Greens and the left have in this election and after.

Second, ballot line qualification or retention for the Green Party can be won in 37 states for a presidential

vote of 1% to 3% in most of these states.

The Greens' goals are not limited to pressuring the two-party duopoly. We want to elect Greens to have the powers of elected office. Greens plan to build that power from below by electing local candidates for municipal, county, state legislative, and US House offices. Winning ballot access in the states through the presidential campaign enables Greens to run and win in local races going forward.

Third, 5% of the national presidential vote wins at least \$10 million in public funding for the Green ticket in the 2020 presidential general election. The bigger the Green vote, the bigger the public funding. We are now polling in the 4% to 7% range. 5% is a goal within our reach.

Fourth, our presidential campaign is building organization and experience among grassroots Greens. Local campaign committees are identifying supporters and getting them out to vote. This electoral campaign experience and the lists of supporters developed will be used by local Green parties — and campaign committees that become local Green parties after the election — in local elections and issue campaigns starting the day after the presidential election.

A vote for Clinton may be a vote to defeat Trump, but it also a vote to defeat the emergence of an independent left political alternative, a vote against popular progressive demands, a vote against Green ballot lines, a vote against public funding for the 2020 Green presidential campaign, and a vote against building an alternative to the neoliberal austerity, neoconservative militarism, and climate catastrophe represented by the Clintonite status quo.

From Bernie to Jill

ATC: How much support are you seeing from Bernie people who are committed to a political revolution?

JS: Our volunteers and donations from Bernie supporters exploded when

Sanders endorsed Clinton. We raised nearly \$1 million in two weeks after Sanders backed Clinton in mid-July, most of which will be matched by federal presidential primary matching funds.

In the streets outside the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia, the Sanders supporters as a whole — and organized groups like Bernie or Bust, Black Men for Bernie, anti-Clinton delegates for Sanders — were chanting "Jill, Not Hill." They had me speak at their planned gatherings and impromptu street gatherings.

My campaign workers and I didn't run into one Sanders supporter on the streets who was settling for Clinton. About 100 Bernie supporters we met in Philadelphia made last minute plans and joined us at the Green National Convention the following week in Houston.

A number of former Sanders staffers are now on our campaign staff. Former Sanders surrogates Dr. Cornel West and YahNe Ndgo spoke at our Green convention.

ATC: What have you learned from Bernie's run?

JS: Bernie's campaign demonstrated two realities that make us hopeful for our campaign. First, the Sanders vote demonstrated that there is mass support for the kinds of progressive social, economic, and environmental demands Greens have been raising for years. Second, regular people will financially support a progressive political campaign at a scale that can compete with the candidates representing the corporate elites that fund their campaigns.

ATC: How can the Greens become a more effective party?

JS: We have to strengthen our grassroots organization and the financial support of our grassroots supporters.

The party is exploring the idea of being a membership party where members are expected to support the party with dues, with waivers for those facing severe financial hardship. And we have to organize those

members into local parties that can compete for local elected office as well as participate in social movements and support with real organizational and financial resources their demands for change.

The mass membership party is an invention of the left. It is how working people have won gains against the older top-down parties of landed and business elites. Uniquely among the developed democracies of the world, we have yet to form such a mass party in the United States.

The Greens don't take corporate money as the candidates of the Democratic and Republican parties do, which ensures our political independence from the corporate elite. We can beat the organized money of the corporate elite and their political representatives in the Democratic and Republican parties

with organized people.

That means organizing our supporters into local party branches and expecting the members to support the party with regular small contributions.

A central mission of this local organizing must be to build relationships and solidarity across the racial and occupational divisions that divide working people. We are increasingly segregated geographically in our housing and schools. Local Green parties must become a place where we bridge these divides across cities, towns, and metropolitan regions and forge common demands, movements, and campaigns.

ATC: What should happen after the election?

JS: No matter who wins, even me, the progressive movements must continue to press their demands. We understand that not all the power is up for election.

The only power we have to counter these powers that are not up for election "and this is true whether it is Clinton, Trump, or Stein in the presidency" is the popular power of social movements between elections.

The Green Party must give these movements political expression in local elections in the coming elections so that progressive voters cannot be taken for granted by the Democrats. The bigger the Green vote in 2016, the more leverage we will have for these movement and electoral activities going forward. (See the campaign website [here](#).)

[Against the Current](#)

Choppy times ahead for the Leprechaun economy

10 September 2016, by Socialist Democracy

Capital inflows to Britain have already faltered and an ERSI study, titled "Scoping the possible", estimates that trade with the UK could be reduced by an average of 20%, and in some sectors more. This was confirmed by a Stormont Research and Information Service paper which found that southern "sectors such as Agriculture, Food and Beverages and Basic Metals are relatively more dependent on exports to the UK and so the impacts on them would be severe".

This has obvious repercussions for an economy that has around £1bn a week, 40% of its trade, with the UK which the Stormont study found represented around 200,000 workers, or 10.4% of the total workforce, employed as a direct result. An earlier Oireachtas inquiry heard evidence that the "agri-food sector is reliant on

the UK market" and that "GDP could decrease by 3.6% were the UK to withdraw from the EU and the single market".

The fall in Sterling has immediately hit trade meaning that Irish exporters to Britain are already getting less for their product. The possibility of the 4% tariff that the EU currently imposes on non EU produce, 20% on agricultural produce, affecting British goods and the probability that the UK would reciprocate that tariff would further impede the flow of goods.

Even if a 'favourable' trade deal between Britain and the EU is put in place and no tariffs are raised the Oireachtas investigation heard that there would be an additional cost imposed by the establishment of "customs controls, rules of origin checks, import licence requirements,

as well as the additional costs of complying with two different regulatory regimes where regulatory divergence occurs".

In the absence of a 'favourable' deal the Dublin government cannot negotiate separately with Britain as individual EU member states cannot make separate trade deals with non-member states so the deal worked out between the EU and the UK will be the deal that the Irish capitalism is tied to.

In addition, Britain would no longer be part of the Common Agricultural Policy and could trade freely around the globe which would mean South American beef and agricultural produce being increasingly imported and at least staunching the British consumption of Irish agricultural produce which stands at half of all

Irish beef and one third of dairy output.

Foreign Direct Investment

Irish growth figures depend heavily upon the performance of imperialist capital as it skims across the economy leaving hardly any local imprint, apart from fantastic sounding statistics, the latest of which at 26% has been dubbed 'Leprechaun economics' by Paul Krugman. The Irish capitalists' hopes that the transfer of financial institutions to Dublin can compensate for the overall impact on trade are ill founded. The ERSI's report found that any "additional attractiveness of Ireland to new FDI projects is likely to be small." and goes on to suggest that a fall in UK FDI would be of "no real advantage to Ireland". It envisions that the "larger EU member states, such as Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Poland, would benefit more from the redirection of new FDI away from the UK."

The Stormont report's authors also argued that the south will remain an attractive destination for FDI relative to the UK due to "more competitive

corporate taxation' but even this marginal advantage has been thrown in to doubt by the British Tories rushed commitment to lower corporation tax. Any advantage would only at best be marginal and the shrinkage of British economic growth would erode that advantage due to its negative impact on the real economy.

In any case the relatively small number of specialised jobs created by increased FDI would be of no consolation to small farmers or workers being laid off from export dependent industrial sectors. The difficulties created by Brexit for Irish capitalism is only the first wave to break in a recessionary flood stemming from the global capitalist crisis.

ICTU

The Irish working class faces into this capitalist crisis without a coherent political leadership and dominated by a bureaucracy that is tied hand and foot to the capitalist state. ICTU accepts that the solution to the capitalist crisis lies in promoting "an agenda of growth within the narrow parameters of the TROIKA program", but if those parameters felt narrow in 2012 then the advent of Brexit and a

looming recession means they will soon feel a whole lot narrower.

The working class has been carefully manipulated by a section of the trade union leadership, taken on a series of token protests then directed off the streets and, to the delight of the reformist left, into an electoral campaign. The resulting elected socialist opposition is isolated in a corner of the Dail and faced with the prospect of limiting their demands, on the housing crisis for example, to fit within 'realistic' fiscal parameters, or acting as a left rump to Sinn Fein, an austerity party.

ICTU's view is that the workers must pay for the crisis while they trust in an imminent recovery in the real economy to soften the blow, a view summed up by Jack O'Connor's call for the re-election of the last coalition government, but the recovery is not coming. Brexit is the latest political crisis to hit a European capitalism driven by a global systemic economic crisis; the system is failing, and the working class needs a leadership that is not prepared to sacrifice the interests of the working class and poor on the altar of capitalist profitability.

[Socialist Democracy](#)

A Giant, Flushing Sound

9 September 2016, by [Against the Current](#) Editors

There is also one issue on which the established leadership of the Republican and Democratic parties, amidst all the infamous gridlock of Congress, agree: They want the TPP. And it's just possible that in the "lame-duck session," that interregnum between the November election and the January installation of the new President and Congress, they might try getting together to pass it and have outgoing President Obama sign it.

The twelve current members of the pending TPP are Australia, Brunei

Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United States and Vietnam. Collectively they account for 40% of the world economy. It's not only in the United States that TPP is viewed as a corporate coup and menace to labor rights and national sovereignty. For a perspective from Indonesia, for example, see ["TPP May Bankrupt Indonesia, activists say"](#).

Because of "fast-track" enabling legislation, TPP would be subject to an up-or-down vote in the U.S. Congress, with no amendments of a 1200-page

agreement that few if any members of the House of Representatives or Senate have actually read. It would not be subject to the usual requirement of 60 votes in the Senate that's usually necessary to bring legislation forward.

The lame-duck ploy might not be the only option. A leading ruling class militant, Thomas Donohue, president and CEO of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, says he believes that Hillary Clinton in the White House would implement the TPP "an indication that this institutional organ

of U.S. capital may be leaning her way. Michael Bloomberg, of course, also roundly endorsed her during the Democratic convention.

(For a report on Clinton supporter and Virginia Gov. Governor Terry McAuliffe's speculation that Clinton might "flip" to support TPP after all, [see here](#). Nobel Prizewinning economist Joseph Stiglitz, a Hillary Clinton advisor and opponent of TPP, told "Democracy Now" that he's convinced TPP is "dead" for the Obama administration and would have to be "[renegotiated](#)" [for her to support](#).)

Bernie Sanders' opening-night convention speech bravely attempted to square the circle, praising "the most progressive platform in the history of the Democratic Party" while stating that there must be no lame-duck vote on the TPP "glossing over the reality that the Clinton-dominated platform committee majority rejected his demand to oppose that prospect.

If Sanders made the best job he could of making lemonade from some fairly rancid lemons, it says quite a bit about democracy in the United States that the two capitalist parties might stop slitting each other's throats just long enough to adopt the very thing that their voting bases both hate. So what's the TPP all about, and what makes this a corporate priority?

Back in 1992 when maverick billionaire Ross Perot ran for president, he famously asserted that the then-pending North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) would create "a giant sucking sound" of U.S. manufacturing and industrial jobs moving to Mexico. When NAFTA came into effect with the signature of President Bill Clinton in January 1994, it certainly accelerated the "de-industrialization" of America although it didn't cause it (the domestic steel industry, for example, had virtually collapsed years earlier).

Destroying Mexico

But NAFTA didn't only ship out U.S. jobs. It also forced open Mexican markets to the 800-pound gorilla of heavily subsidized U.S. agribusiness,

wiping out huge chunks of Mexican domestic agriculture and hollowing out farming communities that couldn't possibly compete with U.S. imports.

This result was actually intentional, based on the neoliberal strategic notion that Mexico would become a food importer and its erstwhile farmers would become workers in the maquiladores, Mexican industrial zones where the jobs of former U.S. workers would be relocated. But the global spread of "free trade," represented by the World Trade Organization "a gold rush for capital to find the very cheapest possible labor" meant that many of those jobs now migrated further, to Haiti or Indonesia or, if Indonesian workers got uppity, to Vietnam.

As a result, breadwinners or whole families of devastated Mexican communities had no choice but to head north to find work "legally or otherwise" in the United States. (Believe it or not, they weren't hoping for jobs, for example, in Iowa meatpacking plants in order to enjoy the wonders of Midwestern winters.) This trend has continued "including the accelerated depletion of Mexican lakes and groundwater sources under the impact of water-intensive vegetable cultivation for upscale North American markets.

The Trans Pacific Partnership, which has been called "NAFTA on steroids," represents a further evolution of the "free-trade" regime. But the United States already has bilateral trade agreements with most of the other parties, even without the TPP. In fact 24 of its 29 chapters, negotiated in deep secrecy, aren't really about trade. They're fundamentally about expanding the power of corporate interests to roll over the attempts of any country "the United States or any other" to protect its labor standards, its environment, its citizens' access to affordable drugs and their right to seek redress from corporate piracy.

One dirty secret is that the most odious provisions on "intellectual property," notably extended copyright protection for pharmaceutical companies to extract gargantuan profits "at the expense of the lives

of patients who can't afford essential drugs" were included at U.S. insistence. The praise of "free trade" is a cover for corporate sovereignty.

Thus under TPP's investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) investors get the right to sue foreign governments for treaty violations. On paper ISDS is meant to provide investors in foreign countries basic protections from foreign government actions such as "freedom from discrimination," "protection against uncompensated expropriation of property," "protection against denial of justice" and the "right to transfer capital."

In short, this kind of "free trade" liberates capital from the bother of national regulation, while working people remain subject to the nation-state's laws and repression. Economist and former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich calls TPP a "Trojan horse in a global race to the bottom."

Reich should know, having been there when Bill Clinton promulgated NAFTA and subsequently ended "welfare as we know it," with all the horrific consequences. This hasn't stopped him from transferring his support now to Hillary Clinton, who he confidently says "will be a good president if not a great one."

For the Obama administration and both Congressional parties, the TPP is a priority for "strategic" reasons as well. It's part of the United States' "pivot toward Asia" against the rising political and military reach of China "in other words, a clash between an established imperial power and an aspiring regional hegemon. As China muscles up on its neighbors, and the Philippines and Vietnam look toward Washington for protection, it's an economic and political rivalry with, ultimately, a dangerous military dimension.

According to August 22 New York Times, that's a big part of why "Despite Opposition, T.P.P. Gets a Final Push" from the Obama team. In brief, the TPP is where free-market theology meets the doctrine that the United States, "the indispensable nation," has the right to rule the Pacific and the world.

Donald Trump's boasts that he'll "negotiate great trade deals" and bring manufacturing jobs flooding back to U.S. shores are as empty as the library shelves at Trump University. But Hillary Clinton's statements require closer scrutiny, especially since she's the likely next U.S. President.

Hillary Clinton's Record

The evolution of Hillary Clinton's pronouncements on TPP are documented by [PolitiFact](#). Here's what the then Secretary of State said in Australia in 2012:

"So it's fair to say that our economies are entwined, and we need to keep upping our game both bilaterally and with partners across the region through agreements like the Trans-Pacific Partnership or TPP. Australia is a critical partner. This TPP sets the gold standard in trade agreements to open free, transparent, fair trade, the kind of environment that has the rule of law and a level playing field. And when negotiated, this agreement will cover 40 percent of the world's total trade and build in strong protections for workers and the environment."

That same year in Singapore, she opined:

"The so-called TPP will lower barriers, raise standards, and drive long-term

growth across the region. It will cover 40 percent of the world's total trade and establish strong protections for workers and the environment. Better jobs with higher wages and safer working conditions, including for women, migrant workers and others too often in the past excluded from the formal economy will help build Asia's middle class and rebalance the global economy."

PolitiFact points out that these are "in contrast to more recent comments where Clinton said she had concerns about the deal and that she ultimately opposes it. The [current] statement is distorting her previous comments. We rate it Half True."

That judgment may be charitable, but there is no need to debate here whether Hillary Clinton's reconstruction of her history is "Half True" or "Total Lie." It's a fool's errand to expect corporate politicians to be truthful about questions where the will of the people clashes head-on with the wishes of the ruling class. Corporate elites for their part don't demand that a political leader openly declare her loyalty, especially if that would compromise her ultimate ability to act in capital's interests.

Goldman Sachs, the pharmaceutical industry and other corporate sponsors didn't really "buy" Hillary Clinton with the hundreds of thousands of dollars they paid her for what Bernie Sanders quipped "must have been really great

speeches." Rather, Wall Street was expressing thanks for her previous services and its well-placed confidence in future ones. How and when President H.R. Clinton would bring the TPP into effect is a tactical, not a principled, issue.

A Donald Trump election would present a somewhat different problem, since his only proven loyalty is to himself and his stated program is one of crude economic nationalism. In that scenario we could well see the Congressional leadership team up with the outgoing Obama administration to pass the TPP before Trump's inauguration (a trick he could violently denounce without having to actually do anything about it).

Where the TPP fight will go is up in the air. It will depend in part, of course, on the outcome of this strange and disturbing election. More importantly it will be shaped by the extent of the popular opposition and outrage, and by how great a price is paid by politicians for obeying the dictates of their corporate masters.

In capitalist America, that's pretty much the meaning and the limits of what's called "democracy." Whether the ultimate giant flushing sound is the TPP going down the drain, or sucking the life from the workers of America and Asia alike, will be decided in struggle, both in the United States and globally.

[Against the Current](#)

The Struggle Against Syriza's ?Austerity Program

8 September 2016, by [Aaron Amaral](#)

Despite the praise coming from the finance ministers and sections of European capital over the latest rounds of cuts being managed by Syriza, [16]

D'Amato writes,

On one side is the argument that Tsipras must be defended for acting in the only way he possibly could. With a gun to his head, he had to give in and accept defeat, if only at some future date to be able to resist in some other way the dictates of Europe. The

opposite argument is that Tsipras' capitulation is proof that it was a mistake for the left to enter, participate in, and build Syriza—it was bound, as a reformist party, to do what it did, and being in it has only lent these failed politics legitimacy

they don't deserve. There are serious problems with both of these positions. The third position is the one laid-out by DEA [17]—in which it was necessary to work within Syriza, and through it to build the left on a stronger and more united footing, but also maintain and defend an independent line. [18]

Ultimately, it is this third position, the strategic imperative to build both a principled left and simultaneously the coherence and capacity of the working class and popular movements in Greece, that offers any prospect of breaking through the dynamic of simply accepting the objective conditions as dictated by European capital or alternatively waiting for the mythic ideal organizational vehicle.

In the two years between May Day 2010 [19] and the signing of the First Memorandum shortly thereafter, and the elections of spring 2012, the degree and character of social mobilization was unprecedented. This included more than twenty separate general strikes and demonstrations of hundreds of thousands in Greece fighting for basic economic demands. Over 2011, Greece was the beating heart of a fightback within Europe against the impact of a brutal recession driven by ineluctable neoliberal logic. With the momentary exhaustion of social struggle and the apparent inability of the social mobilization on its own to overcome austerity and the power of the Troika, there was a predictable turn toward seeking an electoral resolution. As Antonis Davanellos [20] explained,

Those who were engaged in various struggles understood that in order to save themselves and save their class from the consequences of austerity, they needed to overthrow the government memoranda—the post-crisis EU-imposed austerity packages. They succeeded against George Papandreou (PASOK's leader, who resigned November 11, 2011); they were successful against Loukas Papademos (former governor of the Central Bank of Greece, former [European Central Bank] vice president, technocratic prime minister from November 2011, who called new elections in June 2012); and they found themselves opposed to Antonis

Samaras (New Democracy, June 2012 to January 26, 2015) with the [Republican Security Companies] riot police, tear gas, and the requisitioning of striking workers (a military-type mobilization of employees, for example in the subway, to return to work). Successfully overthrowing Samaras using street tactics and direct action presupposed a semi-revolutionary situation, presupposed a working-class strength greater than there was at our disposal. When the popular majority arrived at this conclusion following certain “attempts,” people turned toward a perspective of putting themselves on the road toward using elections as a means to combat austerity. It didn't signal a massive “shift to the right.” [21]

It is in this three-year period—between May 2012 and the initial electoral breakthrough by Syriza, its historic victory in January 2015, and then its capitulation in July and September 2015—that no country within the advanced capitalist world was more at the center of the left's attention than Greece. Yet the predominant lesson that seems to have been drawn after the July to September 2015 period is that the Syriza experience was entirely wasted. And while the complete submission to the Troika by Tsipras' Syriza represents a defeat, it does not come entirely out of the blue. In fact, it is consistent with a problematic and longer-term process that faces the entire revolutionary left. And as recent months show, the defeat in no way represents the final quiescence of the Greek working class, nor even the terminal end of a decade-long cycle of Greek working-class resistance to neoliberalism.

Despite representing a high-water mark in European class struggle since the 1970s, Greece in this decade has not represented a revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situation. Ultimately the failure to recognize this, and the relative strategic exhaustion of the movements by 2012 with the turn towards electoralism, has led to errors of the ultra-left variety. The fact that as of 2010 broad sections of the working class and social movements began to look to Syriza, and not to more programmatically pure anti-

capitalist formations, for political leadership in the anti-austerity struggle thus was both a reality and an opportunity, one unfortunately lost on sections of the left.

However, the failure to recognize the more germinal process that had begun after decades of defeat and retreats by the international left, and to understand that the electoral opening was only made possible by the principled struggle of millions against austerity, led to even more devastating errors, culminating in Tsipras' capitulation. The Syriza leadership had the opportunity to recognize the power of the mass support that they had begun to build in 2012. Despite the exhaustion at the time, it was possible to choose a strategy that was not in the first and last instance driven by electoralism, a strategy that would have required placing the critical choices in front of the Greek people well before July 2015.

There is no doubt that truly preparing the Greek population for being forced out of the Eurozone as a result of their principled opposition to the shackles of debt and austerity was a possibility for Syriza. This is not to say that such preparations would have been easy, though certainly it was more likely to lead to success than the strategy they chose, one premised on convincing European capital to give up on austerity. However, the fundamental prerequisite for the success of any such “Plan B” required a broad understanding on the part of the Greek people that future sacrifices, unlike those currently made to debt and austerity, offered the potential for a brighter future, in which they, and not the Troika, were the agents. Today, DEA (Internationalist Workers Left) and the Red Network [22] have raised the slogan: “Not a single sacrifice for the euro, no illusions in the drachma.” Given the very real failure of Syriza to ever prepare the ground for such a reality, the meaning of that propagandistic slogan will have to be prepared and fought for in the immediate future, something that Syriza once promised, but failed to undertake in practice.

The Syriza left's participation in and commitment to that organization were

predicated on recognizing that “the foundation of Syriza was facilitated in a decisive way by a tide of radicalization within Greece and internationally.” [23] It was precisely the experience of the period of mass radicalization and mobilization that motivated the Syriza left and its thinking. There was more than a decade’s worth of struggle within Syriza for creating a principled organization out of the anti-globalization, and then the anti-austerity, movements. [24] This process was created by consistent breaks to the left of sections of Synapsismos [25]/Syriza, in a dialectical relationship with the movements in the streets and homes, squares and farms, schools and workplaces. [26]

The process did not end with the first electoral breakthrough in 2012, nor certainly did it end in January or September 2015. As I noted in my talk for a February 2015 forum sponsored by the Campaign for Peace and Democracy, AKNY (Greece Solidarity Movement New York), and other groups in the immediate and hopeful aftermath of the January 2015 elections,

There is a struggle starting in 2012 within Syriza about what’s going to be the strategic perspective at a time in which what develops post-2012 is an exhaustion within the movements ... that created a struggle internal to Syriza. ... A turn by certain parts of the right wing of Syriza toward electoralism, a move to seek alliances with sections to the right, in this context, it became important to create a Left Platform within Syriza that could stand up and defend the historic roots of Syriza and its relationships to the social movements. And to defend some very basic principles about what the face of the anti-austerity fight was going to look like, and the idea that the electoral breakthrough was not the be-all and end-all, but was just one phase of a battle, which ultimately was going to depend on the capacity to mobilize the base out of which Syriza came. [27]

The sections of the Syriza left, represented by the Red Network of Popular Unity (LAE, by its Greek acronym), were at the heart of that

struggle. They made a decision not to take any positions in the Syriza government, including any ministerial positions, nor any of the approximately ten thousand other more prosaic sinecures. There was a recognition from mid-2012 onwards of a real struggle within Syriza for the meaning of the Syriza project. With the ever more serious battles within it, and the leadership’s attempts to silence and discipline the left, to ban organized factions inside Syriza, and to centralize power in Tsipras, it would have been impossible to ignore the stakes in what was taking place. [28]

The principled Syriza left largely regrouped as LAE for the September 2015 elections. As the Left Platform within Syriza, it had spearheaded opposition to Tsipras’ leadership in defense of an anti-austerity politics and for a government of the left. The two main forces working within the Left Platform (and now LAE), were the Left Current, the former left wing of Synapsismos, and the Red Network, which consists of several smaller left groupings led by the revolutionary socialist Internationalist Workers Left (DEA). Two significant factions [29] of ANTARSYA [30] and a number of other far-left organizations and individuals beyond the Syriza membership also subsequently joined the LAE .

Despite having failed to cross the 3 percent threshold for parliamentary representation during the September elections, winning only 2.9 percent of the popular vote, LAE has continued to organize itself for the coming struggle. LAE’s poor September election performance was not a surprise. Notably, the abstention rate for those elections was a record 45 percent, and LAE had formed less than a month before the elections, an outcome forced upon it by Tsipras’ tactical maneuvering and one leading to strategic disorientation and relative disorganization. Nonetheless, LAE has been preparing both for its own founding congress in June 2016 and also for the coming general strikes and continued resistance to the Third Memorandum.

In the run-up to the LAE founding congress in June 2016, more than four

hundred meetings have been held across all parts of Greece, which have drawn in more than five thousand participants to debate various proposals and to select delegates. This bodes well for the survival and breadth of LAE, as well as for building a strong organizational base. Different political tendencies have formed, with the Left Current having held their own congress this spring. The expectation is that LAE will have the character of a political front, but one that allows for one member, one vote, while giving rights to independent organizations and independent platforms. However, the exact form is under discussion and will be decided at the June congress.

These preparations have not prevented LAE from being active on a day-to-day basis. In the month leading up to the May 2016 legislative proposals, LAE held more than one hundred meetings across Greece to explain the scope of Syriza’s Third Memorandum austerity plans and to begin to organize for the May general strike. The level of participation across all of Greece has not been seen since pre-2012 and is another positive sign for the coming struggles.

The attempts to defend “the historic roots of Syriza and its relationships to the social movements” and “the face of the anti-austerity fight” arise out of an understanding of the urgent need for a united-front struggle against neoliberal capitalism, and against austerity, at a moment of historic weakness for the international left. [31] This means taking seriously, and offering critical support for, those remnants of the historic organizations of the working class when they show a commitment to fighting back and are engaged in real fights, while at the same time not giving up an independent voice.

This is what had driven the left within Syriza, and continues to motivate their work within both the LAE and the social movements and trade unions in which they are embedded. And the success or failure of these efforts is the only grounds by which to judge a strategy that does not look abstractly at political program. What is key is the relationship between the class, the social movements, and the

organizations to which they belong and to which they look for political leadership. This then is part of a longer-term effort to strengthen the organizational capacity of the class and social movements and to build on the political and strategic clarity of these organizations in the face of the weaknesses and challenges of the left. For the Anglophone left, the need for principled, independent organization while fighting for unity in struggle, and the need for such struggle as an absolute precondition for any broader, sustainable organizational and electoral breakthrough, is a lesson that should be learned. This is particularly true in a moment of renewed electoral energy for left and progressive forces in some other European countries and the United States, existing in the absence of any movements comparable in relative strength to what exists in Greece.

Meanwhile, in Greece the principled starting point going forward for this renewed left continues to be the overthrow of the politics of austerity and its concomitant social struggles. The next rounds of confrontation with the Troika, and the Syriza government doing its bidding, have arrived. The historic mobilization for the Oxi ("no" vote) in early July 2015 presaged that the moment of mass mobilization had not passed, even if the full weight of this defiant act, and the subsequent vote, was ignored by the Tsipras leadership. And despite the disorientation caused by that leadership's capitulation to the Troika and the subsequent fragmentation and collapse of Syriza as a party defending ordinary Greeks, it did not take long for the fight against austerity, and with increasing clarity the fight

against Tsipras' Syriza government, to return.

Thus, in early November 2015, less than two months after driving out the left and destroying any semblance of democratic accountability within Syriza, Tsipras and the government were met with the first general strike against pension cuts. In January 2016, lawyers launched an indefinite strike, [32] which continues to this day (along with journalists and workers in television and print media [33], and doctors, engineers, and mariners followed. This also marked the beginning of ongoing strikes and mobilizations by farmers and rural workers, which saw successful highway blockades [34] with high levels of participation.

And then on February 4, 2016, an enormously successful general strike was called by both public- and private-sector unions. The rate of participation in the strike itself for teachers and municipal workers was between 50 and 55 percent, which compares favorably to the 10 to 15 percent that took part in the January 2016 movement. In Athens, between 60,000 and 80,000 people joined in, recalling the heights of the anti-austerity fights of 2010-2012. Yet perhaps more impressive than the size of the participation in Athens was the breadth of support, from all across Greece, in small towns and villages, and the cross-sectoral support manifest when farmers escalated their blockade and converged with municipal workers in Syntagma Square in Athens. [35]

The government's capitulation on the anti-austerity and anti-debt struggles is not the only ground upon which

Syriza faces a revolt. The government's handling of the more than 50,000 refugees being held on Greek soil has been a travesty and a complete abdication of the principles upon which Syriza had been founded. The Tsipras government, consistent with its general policy, has sought to curry favor with Brussels and has accepted its dictates without any real objection. They have invited Frontex [36] and NATO into Greece, while allowing the migrant camps to be controlled by the Greek army. This has made solidarity difficult, as the camps carry the character of concentration camps, with the migrants generally kept away from the Greek population; permission must be acquired from the army before entering. [37]

Despite these obstacles, great efforts to organize solidarity have been made across Greece and across the left, both on the islands and in Athens. Movement activists have made consistent demands for basic human rights for the migrants, many of whom are facing violations of their Geneva Convention rights as war refugees. The movements have regularly called for basic solidarity—and demanded integrated housing and education, health services, and open borders—while attempting to connect the refugees with the Greek workers' and trade union movements. Nonetheless, thus far the government has continued to act at the bidding of Brussels and NATO.

The new round of general strikes and the broad social movements in defense of human rights for refugees and immigrants represent a renaissance of coordinated resistance to austerity [