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31 October 2016, by **robm**

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After the declaration of the CNI and the EZLN: the road to a campaign to organize and fight.

31 October 2016, by **PRT, Mexico**

For the PRT this political initiative can offer an alternative of struggle and organization for those at the bottom, resisting the capitalist dynamic that is expressed in the structural counter-reforms that alienate what is common and public as well as the rights of working people, in ecocidal megaprojects which destroy the biocultural wealth of our country, in systemic violence and state terrorism seeking to maximize profits and minimize costs, according to capitalist logic.

In a country where the spiral of violence is unstoppable, where the ruling castes attain ever more alarming levels of contempt and cynicism toward the people and where the mega-projects of dispossession of resources and territories to benefit imperialist interests are driven and

sustained by state power, resistance to the government and/or the legislature (a state outside social control and turned against society) acquires greater national relevance, as asserted by the statement from the CNI. Faced with all this it is urgent now not only to organize to resist, but fight to win and the possibility to do so is provided by having a political force organized nationally. Beyond the debate on whether or not there is a political turn, the Zapatista initiative changes the political coordinates of the presidential replacement. The political chessboard is disturbed by the possibility of the eruption, in this field, of a force which has been absent, and is not invited since it represents not only the strength of the indigenous movement contesting the system but the anti-capitalist left itself.

With this important political initiative we face the possibility of a broad anti-capitalist convergence that, through dialog, can build unity in diversity. The profound transformation that the country needs requires joint efforts as well as frank and open discussion of the strategic scenarios to change everything from below. The initiative, adopted at the consultation of the CNI, would therefore be completed with a call for unity to the whole of the anti-capitalist left also present in many struggles both in the countryside and in the city. Among the indigenous peoples but also between the working class and its organizations of struggle, including trade unions, like the teacher's movement or the electricians of EMS and their proposal for an Organización Política del Pueblo y los Trabajadores (OPT - Political Organization of the

People and Workers). In the workers' movement but also in other movements resisting the barbarity of capitalism, like the struggle against femicide, the struggle for women's rights (which could be represented very well with a female indigenous candidate) and in general against the violence of the state, with its terrible aftermath of executions and disappearances. Obviously, also the solidarity movement with the students of Ayotzinapa and the struggle for the 43 "alive they left, alive we want them".

The most comprehensive anti-capitalist unity will certainly require dialog and fraternal debate. But the debate that has opened around the initiative should not mean disqualification and slander. That is what it means to say that an independent candidacy of the anti-capitalist left plays the game of the right (to the parties of the Pact for Mexico?) or that it divides the vote of the left and is a manoeuvre against Morena. This insult is not new. Especially from the spokespersons of the institutional left who have claimed to be supposedly the only representatives of the left. Previously, the PRD claimed that they were "the left". Now Morena says that the PRD is not the left but they are the only true left. In 2006, Lopez Obrador, the PRD candidate, accused the "Other Campaign" of being allied with the right. In 2015, sectors of the movement in the fight against neoliberal power and the structural reforms of the Pact for Mexico did not vote for Morena, but called for abstention or boycott, like the teachers. Lopez Obrador also insulted the teachers' movement, accusing it of allying with the PRI at a time at which it started brutal repression against the movement. It must be understood that the anti-capitalist left and in general the movements of struggle against neoliberalism are not represented by the institutional left.

Lopez Obrador has, in recent weeks,

concerning the protests of September 15th, even opposed the slogan "Peña Out" saying that we do not want a government of rubble and proposing to subordinate every struggle to the election of 2018. On the contrary, we understand the proposal of an independent CNI candidacy as being to organize a movement in struggle against the power of the neoliberal oligarchy, a campaign of struggle and organization, not to subordinate the fight to the elections of 2018. The proposals of AMLO and Morena are different. A transitional cabinet with Peña Nieto is proposed to ensure a "peaceful" transition, therefore offering amnesty to the criminals of the regime. It is proposed to postpone the fight until the vote in 2018 with a transitional cabinet, i.e. a government of reconciliation. In reality this is not the time to define a formula of voting but to continue the struggles against the oligarchic power and its neoliberal agenda, including within the logic of "Peña Out". But at the same time it is possible to discuss the strategic perspective as it would be with a separate campaign, with registration or without legal registration (as was the case with the Campa in 1976). In contrast the proposal of AMLO proposes maintaining capitalist logic intact, as recently shown in Sonora where its proposal before the extractive dispossession of foreign mining companies was that they simply pay taxes.

A candidacy of this type, such as we had years ago with Rosario Ibarra, the first woman presidential candidate in the history of the country (whose motto in 1982 was precisely "up with those at the bottom"), is a call to organization and struggle from below, but must also be a call for unity of those who today are struggling to change our country to make it independent, fair, equal, multicultural and free of exploitation, dominance and oppression, that is to say in an anti-capitalist logic.

It is of special importance that the announcement of the CNI and the

EZLN emphasizes that the candidacy be headed by an indigenous woman. This questions a regime based on authoritarian, patriarchal and homophobic, but also racist and homogenizing bases. And this questioning is even more significant when women not only suffer patriarchal oppression in the family, at work and in society, but an attack on their rights as well as an extremely serious wave of violence whose most inhuman extreme is femicide.

For the PRT a candidate of this type would become a symbol for the major struggles of indigenous peoples who are not only still struggling for their right to autonomy but face all the projects of dispossession of resources, territories and culture that are being imposed across the entire national territory. It would also be a symbol for the women that today shout their "Enough!" against patriarchal contempt and violence. When politics is built on authoritarian, patriarchal and homophobic bases, to make visible those who bear the brunt of the crisis is also a way to question the bases of a regime that in addition to being authoritarian is patriarchal. It would be a symbol of unity with the struggles of the teachers as well as a symbol of the struggle and dignity of all workers. The candidacy of an indigenous woman would become a symbol for the young and for all those denied, oppressed, despised and excluded by a system in which values only making more money but not life and dignity.

We say that the possibility has opened of a broad anti-capitalist convergence that, through dialogue, can build unity in diversity. Including between the anti-capitalism that proposes the struggle for power and that which does not do so. The profound transformation that the country needs requires joint efforts as well as frank and open discussion of the strategic scenarios to change everything from the base, from below.

Mexico City, October 18, 2016

Condemn the mass killing of Maoists

31 October 2016, by **Radical Socialist**

We say at best, because it is well known, and has been revealed latest in the case of the killing of Madkam Hidme, [1] that adivasis [2] are killed at random to make up tales of police-military heroism, dressed in so called Maoist uniforms, etc. So without independent evidence one cannot take the words of the police as the truth. As the identification of bodies takes place, it has been alleged by activists, such as Varvara Rao, that some at least among those killed were villagers who had kept in touch with the Maoists rather than being Maoist cadres themselves.

In the first place, even if everyone had been a Maoist, there is a need to know

exactly what the Andhra police was doing, with arms, in Odisha. If the Maoists were holding a meeting, and if there was a need to apprehend them, why not only the Odisha police.

The use of Greyhounds, trained to attack and kill, suggests that the operation was planned as a killing operation from the outset. Varvara Rao's description of it as a fake encounter is therefore apt.

We stand by what we have said in the past. If the Indian state claims to be a democratic state, it has to use normal laws, and compel its police forces to follow regulations and procedures. The use of special forces, whether the Greyhounds in Andhra and Telangana,

or other types including in Jammu and Kashmir and North East India, flouts the democratic rights of the people of India. India's people need protection far more from the state than from real or spurious terrorists.

• Abolish all so-called anti-terrorist laws that are deliberately worded in a vague and broad manner so that they can be and are used to terrorise ordinary people.

• Abolish "special" police forces trained to kill and count score for bonus. We need law, not bounty hunters.

27 October, 2016

Wallonia against CETA - what to do with this victory?

28 October 2016, by **LCR-SAP**

Victories against the neoliberal steamroller are so rare that they should be savoured and celebrated when they occur. The Parliament of the Wallonia ([French-speaking] region refused to give the Belgian government the green light to signing the CETA [3] and the Walloon government refuses to give in to ultimatums, threats and pressure from the European Union, the Belgian government, media business and the Flemish government.

A victory in the

fight

This is unquestionably a victory against the dictatorship of multinationals and against the European Union, this zealous servant of neoliberal governance. "There can be no democratic recourse against the European treaties already ratified," said Jean-Claude Juncker during Greek crisis. This is not the same type of treaty, but it is clear that the "no to CETA" of the Walloon Parliament resonates throughout Europe and beyond as a legitimate refusal to bow to this tyranny.

This victory is that of the struggle. It is the victory of social movements that

for years have been denouncing the dangers of first TTIP, the AACC then, and rightly say that the second is the Trojan horse of the first. On Monday 19 September, 15,000 people demonstrated in Brussels to say STOP TTIP, STOP AACC. Organized on a weekday, late afternoon, without work stoppages, this mobilization reflected the fact that the awareness campaign had touched a wide range of people: from the farmers' union to environmental organizations and consumer associations.

The introduction of private arbitration courts to which investors could complain and demand compensation if the standards (social, health, environmental ...) of a State are

unfavorable are not the only reason for the anti-CETA mobilization. But it is one of the most widespread. The European Commission has tried to rescue the signing of the agreement scheduled for 27 October *in extremis* by proposing that this clause is initially not applied. But this concession was too small and came too late to reverse the situation. "Too little, too late," as Churchill said...

A surprising political relay

The fact that the mobilization of social movements found a political extension at regional government level is a surprise. Indeed, the PS-CDH ruling majority in Wallonia leads a 100% neoliberal policy entirely focused on the promotion of capitalist investment. In addition, in 2013, the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats (and the Ecolo, which was in government) voted for the European fiscal treaty (TSCG) which imposes the "golden rule" on national governments and gives the Commission despotic power to verify compliance of national budgets to neoliberal dogma. At the time, trade unions and other social movements had shouted their opposition to the text. In vain...

Today, nevertheless the "Walloon No" kicks open the anthill. It opens the debate that the EU wanted to stop it and then tried to cover with the help of the mainstream media and all supporters of neoliberalism. They had their way! Without the slightest embarrassment, the Open VLD (Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats) advocated that Belgium sign the agreement, ignoring the Walloon Parliament; the libertarian Jean-Marie Decker dared to say that the Walloon government should be declared "temporarily incapable of governing" (like King Baudouin during the passage of the law partially decriminalizing abortion); VOKA (Flemish employers) estimated that the CETA was worth a community crisis; the idea that the EU should do without the agreement of Belgium was also discussed, and most media presented the Walloon vote as a disaster ...

The way that the Walloon authorities have maintained their position despite this pressure contributes to a spirit of resistance and revives the hope that it is possible to reverse the course of things. In Wallonia and Flanders but also throughout Europe. Given the history, it is nevertheless necessary to consider what is behind the determined statements of the Walloon Minister-President Paul, when he states his desire to "fight to the end" for "democratic principles" that ... he ignored when it came TSCG.

In fact, it is essentially for reasons of political tactics that the regional majority PS-CDH (Socialist Party and Humanist Democratic Centre) is resisting on this. Both parties are in opposition to a federal right government, backed by barely one quarter of the Walloon voters (those of MR (Reformist Movement), the Liberal party, of which Prime Minister Charles Michel is a member), and more hated for its ferocious austerity policy. At the same time, the two parties (and ECOLO the Green party) are abused in the polls by the breakthrough of the PTB (15%!). It is not enough to social democracy to denounce the federal government to regain the confidence of the electorate and maintain its hegemony over the leadership of the FGTB. The PS remains marked by the exclusion of the unemployed decided when its leader Elio Di Rupo was prime minister - an aggravating factor is that he is clinging to the presidency of his party. The closure of Caterpillar (6000 job losses in the city of the Walloon Minister-President Paul Magnette) and lay-offs announced by the ING bank have further deepened the confusion and anger of the masses. Policies that roll out a red carpet to big business no longer pass ...

The masterstroke of Paul Magnette

Under these conditions, the move played by Magnette is simply masterful. By moving a piece on the chessboard, the Minister-President obscures indeed the nature of its regional policy (the "competitiveness clusters", the university at the service of industry, sales of arms to Saudi

Arabia, etc.), blurs the balance of his party at the federal level, embarrasses the MR, traps the Flemish national Liberals of the NVA (main coalition party) with their own "confederal" credo, figures as an anti-globalization hero or even feasible challenger as President of the PS and captures the media attention away from Raoul Hedebouw, the very effective PTB spokesman. So he creates - at relatively low cost - conditions that could lead to social democracy 1) remaining the backbone of the regional majority; 2) returning to the federal government after the 2019 elections, as a "lesser evil".

This point is crucial. The strategy of the lesser evil has been indeed undermined by 25 years of participation in coalition governments that have piled austerity plan on austerity plan. Part of the FGTB union bureaucracy has begun to doubt that the PS is still its political relay. Despite the economic downturn, social democracy must absolutely prove in practice that its participation in rightwing governments can make the difference... when it is supported by trade unions and other social movements. What is at stake is vital faced with the PTB that has abandoned its Maoist rhetoric for a left social democratic discourse, calls for a "popular front" while refusing to enter government in the framework of European diktats and, last but not least, defends the unitary Belgian state against the right of peoples to self-determination.

Time will tell if the Paul Magnette move involves repositioning the SP on other issues (European tax harmonization, for example?) And if this repositioning is emulated elsewhere in Europe within social democracy which - with the exception of the Corbyn Labour Party - is sinking into the swamp of cuts and security policies. This is not excluded because it is not easy to return to the track after such a lurch. However, for now, nothing had moved in this direction, and we must not be fooled: the Walloon Minister-President is using the anti-TTIP and anti-CETA mobilization for political purposes not involving a break with neoliberalism. As proof, those statements where he stresses to free trade and that the

AACC blocking is for him "a miserable failure, even if democracy wins" ...

Transforming this move into a new impetus

Then: victory or recovery? The future is open. The answer will depend on the ability of social movements to link the anti-CETA vigilance to mobilization against any austerity, which implies first reviving the fight

against the actions of the right-wing government that the consultation strategy of the CCS and the FGTB leaderships led into a dead end. Respect for democratic forms only takes on its full meaning in connection with social and environmental content in the interests of the majority of the population: the working people, youth, women, farmers, undocumented migrants...

The representatives of these movement have the ability, if they wish, to turn Paul Magnette's move into a new impetus of the fight for

another policy. They have the ability, if they wish, to develop an anti-capitalist emergency plan and to submit it to a further discussion at the grass roots, in trade unions, associations, neighbourhoods. If they want, they can impose on the parties who claim to represent the exploited and oppressed to form governments on this basis alone. In Wallonia and elsewhere, why not? Governments which, by their resolute disobedience to the dictates, will help to cut down the EU to open the way for another Europe.

Increased repression of the trade-union movement in South Korea

26 October 2016, by Pierre Rousset

Since December 2012, the country's president has been Park Geun-hye, the dictator's daughter: governing by decrees, her regime is increasingly authoritarian. As for the Korean conglomerates (Chaebol), they are actively engaged in the offensive against trade-union rights.

The recurrent repression against the KCTU has today reached a new level. The public sector strike against the regressive reform of working conditions and the system of performance-based pay has been declared "illegal". Nine leaders of the Korean Railway Workers' Union (KRWU) are victims of the infamous accusation of "obstructing economic activity". To break the strike, the government is planning "emergency arbitration", a practice denounced by the ILO as a violation of the freedom of association. The self-employed lorry drivers, who were also planning to strike, are also faced with criminal and civil prosecutions.

More than twenty trade-union leaders and activists are in prison, although their only crime is to have defended workers' rights. Among them are the president of the KCTU, Han Sang-

gyun; the vice-president of the KPTU (transport), Cho Sung-deok; and the president of the KPCWU (factory construction), Lee Jong-hwa.

On July 4, Han Sang-gyun was sentenced to five years in prison for his role in organizing thirteen demonstrations against the government of Park Geun-hye, between 2012 and 2015. The police put out arrest warrants for more than 1500 trade unionists who had taken part in these demonstrations. Judicial proceedings were opened against 585 leaders and members of the KCTU. The authorities had even envisaged using against Han the charge of "sedition", which has never been used since the fall of the dictatorial regime, more than thirty years ago.

Over the years, many sectors have suffered severe attacks against their right to organize. Thus, in 2013, the government wanted to force the teachers' federation, KTU (which is part of the KCTU) to modify its statutes authorising sacked personnel to remain members of the union. For the same reason, it refused to register the federation of government service workers (KGEU). In 2012, migrant

workers were forbidden to look for another job than the one they already had, thus putting them at the mercy of the employers. For years the authorities have repressed the MTU, a migrants' trade union founded in 2005, whose leaders have been arrested and deported.

The offensive against trade union rights is constantly becoming broader, to the point where the conservative Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU) has led a joint campaign with the progressive confederation KCTU. The government of Park Geun-hye has in particular published new "administrative guiding principles" by virtue of which enterprises can dismiss workers considered to be "under-performing" and modify arbitrarily working conditions without the consent of the work force.

The anti-trade union policies in Korea have been widely condemned on an international level, by organizations in defence of human rights such as Amnesty International and the ILO.

Today, in the face of the new wave of arrests, an inter-union call for international solidarity has been

launched with the backing of the International Transport Federation (ITF).

Sign the letter in defence of South Korean trade-unionists [here](#)

Thailand: a high risk succession

25 October 2016, by **Pierre Rousset**

Known under his monarchical name of Rama IX, Bhumibol was 88. He had reigned for seven decades and was said to enjoy unparalleled popularity and respect. The history of monarchies is however never entirely happy. Since 1932, the Thai monarch is no longer absolute, but constitutional; with rare interludes, real power has been held by the army.

Bhumibol came to the throne in 1946, succeeding his brother who was shot in the head in circumstances which have never been clarified. [4] He was however only crowned in 1950, the kingdom having meanwhile been ruled by a regent. The situation was then favourable as his reign began.

During the Second World War, the Japanese occupiers had initially been presented by the authorities as an ally. After Tokyo's capitulation, the army wished to give a new legitimacy to its regime - and finally broke definitively with the left wing of the anti-monarchical coup of 1932, whose figurehead was Pridi Banomyong, an intellectual influenced by socialist ideas and non-Marxist European liberal concepts. From 1935, the new defence minister, Field Marshall Phibun, had established a dictatorship and martial law. However Pridi, in exile, had represented, with Seni Pramoj, the Free Thais (*Seri Thai*), one of the two anti-Japanese resistance movements (the other one being constituted by the Communist Party). In 1945, Seni Pramoj became Prime Minister to negotiate with the Allies. The following year Pridi proposed a new Constitution. In 1947, Phibun led a coup. In 1950, Thailand sent troops to South Korea alongside US forces. The kingdom was henceforth anchored in the "American camp".

The Communist movement remained

still very weak in Thailand, but it had taken root. [5] The Chinese revolution had triumphed and the Vietminh was growing in Vietnam. The US became the great tutelary power in South East Asia. In these conditions, the army was ready to establish an alliance with the royal palace in the name of anti-Communism.

Although unpopular in the 1930s and 40s, and officially stripped of its sacred status in 1932, the Chakry dynasty had not been historically subjected to a colonial conquest. Thailand was a buffer zone between the British and French possessions, aided by Germany, and the country was never directly colonised. It was then possible to restore the lustre of the monarchy and its sacred status: "the rituals and language of court were reinvented for it, constructing the renovated icon of a "Deva-Raj" (King-God, in the Hindu tradition) and of a generous monarch reigning according to the principles of Buddhist morals. Modernity obliged however that he maintained the behaviour of a man of the 20th century: he walked around with a camera around his neck and often played the trumpet during soirées in the palace... He was both more divinely venerated than his predecessors and closer to the people, whom he met with incessantly during his tours of the country". [6]

This rehabilitation of the monarchy was systematically continued by the military regimes that followed in successive putsches. General (then Marshal) Sarit Thanarat was one of the masters of the alliance between the Palace and the army high command. For some historians, Bhumibol "was in reality never persuaded that a system of the democratic type, which he once

characterised as a "principle imported from abroad", could apply in his kingdom. The figure of the enlightened and benevolent monarch coexisted with that of the sovereign capable of justifying the permanent coup d'état as a modern form of the Thai political game". [7]

As exceptions which confirm the rule, in 1973 and 1992, the authority of the royal figure and the political intervention of Bhumibol helped resolve crises which had become inextricable by forcing the temporary withdrawal of the military with the resignation of hated dictators. Then history resumed its "normal" course, the army returning to power with the blessing of the monarch, as shown by the dramatic events of 1973-1976. [8]

The first big crisis of the kingdom, under Rama IX, developed in the context of the US military escalation in Vietnam. The country had been transformed into an immense terrestrial aircraft carrier and was covered with brothels to cater for the GIs. Young people, students in particular, rose up, benefiting from a very broad popular support. The military junta was overthrown in October 1973, with the king's intervention. At the same time, the latter allowed the development of far right militias which prepared to take control of the country. This was done on October 6, 1976, through a bloody coup d'état. The army took back power with the blessing of the Palace.

Once again, the authority of the royal family plummeted; to re-establish it, "cultural tradition" was not enough. So a veritable personality cult was imposed with the help of the USA and its propaganda services. The effigy of the monarch became omnipresent, respecting it was an obligation,

subject to severe criminal sanctions (today, the most minimum offence can earn 15 years in prison).

The crime of *lèse-majesté* is a formidable weapon to repress all sorts of criticism and forbid any debate on the regime, in the manner of accusations of blasphemy or endangering national security in other countries. Bhumibol Adulyadej played his role perfectly. He allowed himself to be deified without however contesting power with those who held it. Of austere appearance, with a sad and distant expression, he incarnated a "protective figure", loved by the people, a posture some characterise as "despotic paternalism". [9] The vast land possessions of the royal family - both urban and rural - allowed him to deploy a network of popular clientelism.

Under Bhumibol, the Thai royal family became the richest on the planet, with a fortune valued at 35 billion dollars (31.70 billion Euros). But what is its effective power? The question remains very controversial. [10] The British queen Elizabeth is also a big landowner, but she does not govern for all that. In principle this is also true in Thailand. What is the reality?

For some analysts, Thailand closed a chapter of its history in the 1990s. The end of the Asian revolutionary wave, the defeat of the Communist Party of Thailand, the socio-economic modernization of the country and the appearance of a new bourgeoisie rendered the era of military regimes obsolete. The weight of the "peripheral" regions was strengthened with the upheavals in the rural economy in the North East (Isan) and the North. [11] Coups were considered residual, anachronistic rearguard combats. The army had gone back to the barracks and would not re-emerge.

Democratization was, then the order of the day. In 1992, a Constitution which was relatively progressive for the country was adopted - but after the putsch of 2006, it was replaced by another, drawn up under the diktat of the army. Successive elections confirmed that a great part of the population aspires to structural changes. They represented a harsh

blow to the oligarchy which has dominated the political and economic life of the country for several decades: it lost its direct control of the legislative and the executive. Big social movements formed during this period, like the People's Assembly, founded in 1995. A good number of these movements resisted the predatory mode of development which robbed communities of access to their vital resources. [12]

Unfortunately, neither the royal palace, nor the traditional oligarchy, nor the army wanted any democratic process. Each time that the Shinawatra family (Thaksin and his sister Yingluck), representing this "new bourgeoisie", triumphed at democratic elections, it was overthrown by more or less legal coups d'états. The confrontation between "red shirts" (Thaksin and his business or popular supporters) and "yellow shirts" (the royalist and conservative reaction) had as one of its stakes the very possibility of establishing a bourgeois democratic parliamentary regime. The response of the dominant powers was unambiguously negative - a Constitutional Court siding with the traditional order, putsches (2006 and 2014), the massacre of 2010 in Bangkok, the systematic repression of the red shirts.

The lesson is all the clearer in that Thaksin was not a republican, but a royalist. Nor was he a democrat; he waged a "war on drugs" having recourse to extra-judicial killings and entered into juicy contracts with the army while repressing the Muslim movements in the South. However, he put in place real social programmes favouring the poor (in the area of health for example), which bypassed the networks of power of the traditional oligarchy and the old military élite, overshadowing the royal family by appearing himself as the "protector of the people".

The Asian financial crisis of 1997-98 a created the prior conditions for the army's return to power. Thailand was hit with full force. The elites and "urban middle classes" proved openly anti-democratic, denying the irresponsible poor the right to vote. The Buddhist institutions politicised

and a monk, Buddha Issara, took the head of the movement against the red shirts in 2014. The May coup in that year allowed the army to return to power on a lasting basis and thus prepare the royal succession.

The Thai kingdom is not a national abnormality. Far from leading a triumphant march towards democracy, the world neoliberal order favours the development of increasingly authoritarian regimes, right populisms, and new extreme rights. In Thailand, at the ideological level, the pillars of the regime are the monarchy (sanctified), the army (glorified) and the Sangha, the Buddhist clergy (the expression of the state religion, it has very close links with the establishment.). If the gravity of Bhumibol's state of health was hidden for so long, it is because of the problematic nature of the royal succession.

The monarch can only be a man. Women are excluded from the succession - although princess Sirindhorn is deemed the most reliable by the traditional elites. There remains the crown prince Maha Vajiralongkorn (aged 64). Living more in Munich than in Thailand, he has the reputation of being a play-boy and a party animal. Videos of his escapades circulate and he was photographed getting off a plane wearing a tight crop-top and slim fit jeans with his torso covered in temporary tattoos. Himself a fighter pilot, he appointed his poodle Foo Foo as an air force field marshal, while four days of national mourning were decreed after the dog's death. This unconventional behaviour could be amusing if his personality was not so disturbing. Vindictive in the extreme, he hounds those close to his father through humiliation. He exiled a previous wife and her children and has the traits of a tyrant. Supreme crime, he has been linked to Thaksin.

Duly designated crown prince by Bhumibol, Vajiralongkorn should have mounted the throne on the day of his father's death. Indeed as announced on television by the prime minister Prayuth Chan-ocha, the enthronement has been postponed, with rumours rife as to the reasons for this. [13] For the moment, the management of the

kingdom is assumed by Prem Tinsulanonda, aged 96, former commander in chief of the Army (1978), Prime minister (1980-1988) and president of the king's Private Council (1998). [14] A conservative and influential figure, he has organised several coups and Thaksin is his sworn enemy. [15]

The passing of the torch is all the more delicate since today, according to the academic Pavin Chachavalpongpun, "there is a republican movement, notably among the "red shirts"... Many Thais still have love and respect for the king. Most Thais are for the monarchy, but the political interventions of the Royal Palace are very badly received by

some of them. We are in a critical period for Thailand. The main cause is the royal succession, but the divisions between rich and poor, urban and rural, also play a role. [16]

For the moment the military regime has the country in lockdown. A year of national mourning has been decreed. On pain of criminal sanctions, all network servers must actively monitor their subscribers and denounce any words offensive to the monarchy or the ruling junta. The minister of Justice has called for the formation of "vigilante" groups, guardians of the moral order who can intimidate dissidents [17]. Persons accused of lèse-majesté (or not dressing in black) can be attacked and forced to bow before the effigy of the dead king. [18]

A climate of hysteria is knowingly created.

A hysteria which no longer has any borders. On October 16, 2016 the ultra-royalist Rienthong Nanna used Facebook to denounce Thaksin's living in Paris, giving the names and addresses of some, and calling on supporters of the monarchy to act - even if the crime of lèse-majesté does not exist in France. Such words could obviously have very serious consequences. [19]

If the Royal Palace was genuinely idolised by the Thai population, the military regime would not need such means to ensure its order. The succession to Bhumibol renders the future still more uncertain.

"We are on strike because we want to be alive"

24 October 2016, by Virginia de la Siega

This is a summary of the strike call to women by the collective #NiUnaMenos (Not one less). This is a summary of the strike call to women by the collective #NiUnaMenos (Not one less). [20]

What triggered this action was a wave of murders of women should suffer in Argentina whose climax was the kidnapping, rape and murder of a 16 years in the city of Mar del Plata. The kidnapping occurred at the same time that the police brutally repressed the closing event of the National Conference of Rosario, an annual event of women whose theme is the demand for decriminalization of abortion.

On 19 October, thousands of women dressed in black, like the Polish women the previous week, abandoned homes, schools, factories, offices for an hour and came together by banging pans and carrying placards that read, "If my life has no value, produce without me!" And "Excuse us but they are killing us!"

In Buenos Aires, despite the rain that swept throughout the day, thousands of women from the city center and the poor suburbs of Greater Buenos Aires, men and children gathered at 5pm at the Obelisk to march to the Plaza de Mayo. In the 30 most important cities of Argentina and throughout Latin America, from Santiago de Chile to

Oaxaca, Mexico, women marched against the violence done to them. In Europe there were support demonstrations in several cities including Paris and Copenhagen.

Saying he was "moved" by the popular response to the call of #NiUnaMenos, the Argentine president Mauricio Macri, with absolute hypocrisy, pledged his support to the movement. Of course he had forgotten he had dissolved the service that investigates cases of murders of women, eliminated the Complete Sexual Education Program and created a programme to eradicate violence against women without even assigning it a budget.

~Corbynism' and the challenge for the left

22 October 2016, by **Socialist Resistance**

The Labour Party has half a million members and rising. That is more members than the Tories, LibDems, Greens and SNP put together. Many of these are young activists from recent radicalisation such as the Occupy movement, UK Uncut [21], the Greens and from the direct action environmental movement.

It is entirely possible that the million members, which Corbyn has called for, will be achieved. Such growing membership enhances Labour's chances of becoming the largest party in the British Parliament after the next general election and, hopefully, of forming a government through a progressive alliance with other parties.

Momentum has around 20,000 members. [22] Whilst it is lacking in internal democracy, is a genuine grassroots movement that has been turning towards mass campaigning. It is a step towards the kind of social movement which Corbyn and McDonnell have been advocating.

The emergence of Corbynism has not been an easy process, of course. In fact, it has taken the form of a battleground with Blairism and other right-wing strands within the Labour Party that culminated in the coup attempt by the Parliamentary Labour Party in August. This conflict remains unresolved – the Labour Party contains two distinct parties in a single framework: only held together by the First Past the Post electoral system and the strength of the Labour brand. The fight to turn Labour outwards, and at the same time limit the damage by the right, will remain an ongoing struggle over the months ahead.

But Corbyn has been significantly strengthened by two recent events.

The first was Corbyn's thumping victory in the second Labour Party leadership elections and the other was

the way he and his team used the party conference itself, where he not only successfully defended the political line around which Corbynism originally emerged but strengthened it considerably. Of course there remain serious unresolved problems of team Corbyn's attitude to Scottish independence, to the electoral system, and to electoral alliances.

Corbyn not only strengthened his anti-austerity stance and his determination to democratise the party by handing power to the membership (which is transformative in itself). He also strongly defended immigration arguing that the task was to tackle the social problems caused by austerity and not blame migrants for them. This is a significant departure from the anti-immigration and bipartisan state racism that has characterised the Labour Party historically. He also went on to defend the free movement of people across Europe.

There were other important outcomes from the conference as well, such as the promise to completely ban fracking (and strengthening the stance on climate change), ending the right to buy (hugely important) along with the capping of rents and giving local authorities the right to raise money and build council houses. [23] The repeal of the anti-union laws is also crucially important along with the reinstatement of the collective bargaining structures – wages councils. He then placed the whole thing in an explicitly socialist framework – ‘socialism for the 21st century’.

These measures go sharply against the neo-liberal consensus and the austerity-lite programme of previous Labour leaders. This would bring immediate benefits to the majority and give confidence to struggle for more radical measures.

Socialist Resistance has reached two

principal (and interrelated) conclusions in response to all this. The first is that Corbynism is now (overwhelmingly) the main focus of political radicalisation in England and Wales today. Left Unity has played an important role since its formation, and Socialist Resistance has been an enthusiastic supporter since its launch in 2013. But we have come to an unavoidable conclusion that the space that Left Unity occupied to the left of Labour is not only rapidly closing down, but is being occupied by the Corbyn wing of the Labour Party itself.

In fact, Corbyn made a very similar point in his speech to the Labour conference. In other countries, he said, radicalisation has taken the form of the creation of new parties of the left breaking from neoliberalism, while in Britain this same process is taking place through a traditional Labour Party.

We have therefore taken the decision to move our political centre of gravity into the ‘Corbyn movement’ in order to fight more effectively for a Corbyn led anti-austerity government at the next election. We hope the whole of the left will be behind the struggle for such a government, which gives us the best opportunity to defeat neo-liberalism and austerity and opens the door to more radical change.

This is not a break with the idea, which we have long defended, of building radical left parties to the left of social democracy across Europe; rather it is the continuation of such a policy by a different route.

We will continue to work with Left Unity wherever we can, and some SR supporters will continue to be members of and be active within Left Unity. We think, however, that the movement behind Corbyn, McDonnell and Abbott is the most effective way to build a radical anti-austerity party at the present time.

Lelisa's Message

21 October 2016, by **Ezekiel Gebissa**

The marathoner's gesture comes from a nonviolent resistance movement that has organized demonstrations across Oromia " which includes the capital city, Addis Ababa " for the eight months leading up to the [Rio Olympics](#) . It also mourns the more than eight hundred Oromo citizens murdered by government security forces.

With a simple gesture, Lelisa highlighted the reality of life under a brutal dictatorship, where a few oligarchs have done well at the expense of the majority, who suffer from famine, rampant unemployment, land confiscation, personal insecurity, and the loss of basic human rights.

The Trigger

The Oromo protests began two years ago, when the Ethiopian government " led by the Tigrayan-majority [Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front \(EPRDF\)](#) " unveiled its urban master plan, called the Integrated Development Plan for Ethiopian Renaissance.

The plan designated a total area of 1.1 million hectares of land " extending in a forty-to-one-hundred-kilometer radius around Addis Ababa " part of the planning region. This area included seventeen rural districts and three dozen cities in the Oromia regional state. In effect, the plan would increase Addis Ababa's size twenty-fold.

When the plan was presented to the Oromia state for approval in February 2014, the regional government members opposed it, arguing that it violated the principle of federalism, the human rights provisions, and the transparency clause of the Ethiopian constitution. That April, students took to the streets decrying the planned displacement of Oromo farmers and residents on the affected land. Above all, the protesters demanded respect

for the autonomy of the Oromia regional government in deciding local issues, including land transfers.

Government security forces [responded](#) by firing live ammunition and violently beating peaceful protesters. They killed seventy-eight, injured hundreds, and sent thousands to concentration camps in the humid Afar region. The action was so egregious that the protests garnered international attention.

The government has strongly denied any wrongdoing, even as images of dead bodies and injured protesters were widely broadcast across social media. The demonstrations subsided without resolving the problem that incited them in the first place " but not for long.

In the May 2015 national elections, the EPRDF claimed 100 percent of the country's [parliamentary seats](#) . It interpreted its alleged victory as a mandate to accelerate development projects, including the Integrated Development Plan for Ethiopian Renaissance.

In November 2015, government officials arrived in Ginchi, a small town west of Addis Ababa, to lease out a school playground and sacred forest area to an investor. Students and residents protested, and the movement quickly spread to all corners of Oromia. What started as resistance to land seizure quickly transformed into a sustained opposition to the governing party's stranglehold on the political landscape, to ethnic discrimination in allocating national resources, and to the incessant use of violence to resolve political differences.

Historical

Injustice

The issue of land founds the protests' demands. In Ethiopia, land serves multiple purposes. For smallholder farmers, land marks their identity, organizes their social lives, and provides their means of survival as individuals and as members of a household and a kin group. For elites, land supports the state machinery and serves as an instrument of social control.

The struggle for political power and economic control often takes the form of struggle for land control. Indeed, throughout Ethiopian history, whoever controlled land also controlled the economic base and the infrastructure of domination.

In the nineteenth century, the southward march of imperial Ethiopia in search of arable land and natural export commodities culminated in the conquest of several independent Oromo states and other entities. In the 1880s, [Emperor Menelik II](#) annexed their territories and assigned their conquering soldiers as administrators. The new rulers and their retinues drew no salaries, instead living off the land they confiscated and the evicted tenants' labor.

Oromo farmers would lose more land for the next century. After the end of Italian occupation in 1941, [Emperor Haile Selassie](#) transferred large tracts to private holders, including members of the royal family and the nobility, individuals with connections to the imperial court, and loyalists who claimed to have fought the fascists.

At the same time, the imperial regime promoted private investments to develop commercial agriculture. Well-connected officials acquired thousands of hectares to grow coffee for export. Foreign firms " such as the Dutch HVA and the British Mitchell Cotts "

were given land to grow sugar and cotton in the fertile southern and southwestern areas. The evicted Oromo farmers became day laborers for the commercial companies or seasonal laborers for the new landlords. Many migrated to towns in search of opportunities.

In 1974, this unresolved issue occasioned the imperial government's collapse. In February 1975, the Derg, the military junta that took power, nationalized rural land, allowing farmers equal access and use rights, prohibiting private ownership, and outlawing hired farm labor. To retain their rights, farmers had to meet numerous demands including joining farmer-operated cooperatives and peasant communes.

In time, the Derg became the sole landlord, turning the cooperatives into its extractive arm and instrument of political control. The regime's unending demand for surtaxes, fees, various charges, and recruits for the army rendered the gains of the revolution immaterial to the lives of the peasants.

Land to the Investor

The Derg fell in 1991 after almost two decades of struggle. The EPRDF, which largely consists of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF), came to power. Its leaders argued that the land-ownership prohibition protected farmers against rapacious capitalist land-grabbers and affirmed state ownership in the 1995 constitution and several land administration proclamations.

This started to shift in 2002 when the late prime minister Meles Zenawi launched an antipoverty campaign. The program rested on increasing productivity in agriculture, which justified allocating land to private interests. At first, the government transferred small plots of land to domestic and foreign capitalists to grow flowers for export, but the practice grew: soon vast agricultural lands in Oromia and other states were being leased out.

In 2005, the EPRDF won highly controversial national elections. In the aftermath, the party leader declared that the country needed an activist government to ensure accelerated, sustained, and broad-based growth. In a surprise about-face, the land law that was supposed to protect rural owner-operators against wealthy capitalists instead facilitated land transfers to investors. The federal government replaced the law that recognized the regional states' authority over land administration with one that granted that authority to the federal government. The regional states were forced to change their laws to conform to the federal proclamation.

Having passed the unconstitutional measure, the government opened farmlands for foreign and domestic capital owners with generous terms, minimum restrictions, and token capital requirements. Terry Allen [sums up](#): "At a price ranging from cheap to stolen, investors lease vast tracts for as long as ninety-nine years and for as little as forty cents per acre per year."

When the lease wasn't cheap enough, corruption helped. One investor noted, "You get a bottle of Johnnie Walker, kneel down, clap three times, and make your offer of Johnnie Walker Whiskey."

Investors flocked in. By 2011, about 3.6 million hectares of land had been awarded to foreign capitalists, and 4 million hectares more were still available.

To be sure, the federal government wasn't supposed to get in the business of redistributing land. Under the cover of development, it used land with a view to short-term political goals rather than long-term economic processes. As a result, it fueled unbridled corruption that dispossessed millions and relegated them to destitution. Among the Oromo in particular, this meant not only lost property but also a breakdown in traditional social organization.

In 2015, these concerns converged around the Integrated Development Master Plan. Addis Ababa was originally built on the stolen ancestral

land of the Oromo. As the city expanded, the surrounding people were evicted, and new settlers took over, changing the area's demographic composition.

The new development plan evoked the Oromo's bitter experiences of the predatory relationship between Addis Ababa and the surrounding area. The scale of the proposed plan and its potential to displace millions touched off the massive resistance that came to be known as the Oromo protests.

State Capture

The Tigrayan People's Liberation Front "which played a central role in toppling the Derg in 1991 and now constitutes the major part of the EPRDF" hails from the northern part of Ethiopia. They initially argued that coercion, forced cultural assimilation, and political centralization cannot succeed as a state-building strategy.

To reconstruct the collapsed state, they devised a new constitution that instituted a federal arrangement among newly demarcated ethnic-based regional states. The approach recognized the unconditional right of every nationality in the country to self-determination, including secession. It was a novel response to the problem of national integration in light of the failure of past regimes.

However, TPLF leaders were never committed to either constitutional rule or their unique federal structure: neither would aid their political or economic interests. From the start of their rule, party leaders understood that the survival of Tigray depended on people migrating south and wealth migrating north. To enact this, the party had to dominate the political center. As John Young [points out](#), the TPLF "did not seriously entertain the idea of building alliances with existing southern parties and instead drove them largely out of existence."

After 1991, the TPLF-led coalition deployed various justifications for the one-party rule it envisaged, but never succeeded. It finally decided to simply make the institutions of the state subservient to the political will of a

party. Elections were conducted, but only to confirm the ruling party in power and to ensure that its development programs were not disrupted by short electoral cycles.

The TPLF-dominated parliament passed draconian laws to consolidate its hold on power.

One measure, approved by parliament in July 2008, added to the numerous restrictions placed on the Ethiopian press. For example, it made journalists and editors potential accomplices in acts of terrorism if they published statements that the government classified as an act of sedition.

In January 2009, a [civil society organizations law](#) prohibited foreign non-governmental organizations from engaging in any human rights or governance work, rendering most independent human rights work virtually impossible and making all NGO work that the government declared illegal punishable as a criminal offense.

An [antiterrorism law](#) passed in July 2009 granted broad powers to the police and enacted harsh criminal penalties for political protests and nonviolent dissent. Together, the laws gave absolute power to the government to accuse, convict, and punish anyone by executive order. As the result, thousands of journalists, human rights advocates, and political dissidents have been sent to infamous federal prisons in the outskirts of the capital. They languish there without trials or visitation rights, at the mercy of prison guards.

As a direct consequence, human rights violations became more flagrant. International rights groups and other organizations have documented the government's extrajudicial executions of political opponents, its degrading treatment of prisoners, and its rejection of court orders to free dissidents. As a former defense minister of the incumbent regime noted, the vast majority of the inmates at one of the most notorious prisons belong to the Oromo ethnic group.

Once the Tigrayan-majority party fully captured the state, economic benefits

began to flow to political and military elites in exchange for loyalty. Millionaires emerged overnight, and current and former officials now own massive skyscrapers. Apart from these nouveaux riches, the party itself owns businesses that amount to two-thirds of the economy. Meanwhile, [ordinary citizens](#) suffer from double-digit unemployment, insufficient housing, rising inflation, and economic insecurity.

State capture requires full control of the coercive apparatus. After the Derg's national military force was dismantled, TPLF commanders and political commissars created a new non-political military to support the new democratic state rather than to act as the ruling party's private army.

They organized a new Ethiopian Defense Force, which was smaller in size and broader in its rank-and-file's ethnic composition. But the military command-and-control structure remained under TPLF control: more than 95 percent of the general staff and commanders come from Tigray. While the military is ostensibly apolitical, it remains highly connected to the political apparatus.

The military is also deeply involved in the private sector. Active and retired military officers own their own businesses. Furthermore, the EPRDF government has increased the military's stake in the economy through the [Metal and Engineering Corporation](#) (MetEC).

Created in 2010, MetEC is supposed to ensure technology transfer across the country. According to its establishing proclamation, the company is directly accountable to the prime minister and operated by the ministry of defense. It participates in all sectors of the economy "manufacturing, construction, energy, and transportation" and produces weapons for the country's defense forces, including armored vehicles, explosives, ammunition, big guns, light weapons, and personal weapons. The military has become an economically powerful actor.

The TPLF coalition built a political

system that has no space for dissenting voices. The architecture of power relations that was meant to ensure the interest of a minority group has now produced an unbridgeable political chasm that is growing thanks to economic inequality, political instability, and personal insecurity. The shortsighted arrangement designed to ensure minority rule in perpetuity has now come back in the TPLF's face like a boomerang.

Impending Danger

John Markakis concluded his latest book, *Ethiopia: The Last Two Frontiers*, with a warning for the EPRDF:

At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the incumbent regime in Addis Ababa is engaged in the same battles that exhausted its predecessors, impoverished the country, and blasted peoples' hopes for peace, democracy, and an escape from dire poverty.

Indeed, previous governments were brought down because of their refusal to share power with the country's diverse constituencies and interest groups.

To keep power, the incumbents have built a politically connected, heavily armed, and economically powerful military to protect its monopoly on political and economic power. Because the protesters threaten the party's and its high-ranking officials' interests, the military has used force with impunity, killing hundreds of innocent protesters who simply demand respect for their constitutionally guaranteed rights. But force will breed more instability and demand the use of more force.

The military has not succeeded in putting down the protests, and it's hard to say whether they will.

But Ethiopia's history shows that when structures fail, humans are capable of unimaginable cruelty not just for survival but in defense of their insatiable desire for comfort. Feyisa Lelissa gave the world fair warning.

[Jacobin](#)

The left currents in the Philippines and the Duterte presidency

20 October 2016, by **Pierre Rousset**

The new president has a discourse (crudely) marking a cleavage and he cultivates political ambivalence. For some currents (especially the Communist Party of the Philippines, CPP, Mao-Stalinist) Duterte may "fall to the left." For others, he is already falling to the right by resorting to extrajudicial executions in his "war on drugs" and brandishing the spectre of martial law. All of them, however, are trying to advance their causes by taking advantage of the campaign promises of the elected candidate, of a chaotic domestic situation and of real opportunities such as the commitment to the peace negotiations in a country marked by armed conflicts that have lasted for fifty years.

Having been elected on May 9, 2016, Rodrigo Duterte officially took office on June 30. He was, however, the least presidential of all the candidates. His campaign started as a joke and ended in triumph, accumulating records and "firsts": an exceptionally high turnout in a presidential election (81 per cent); the largest number of votes ever obtained in such a ballot (15 million); the first victorious candidate from Mindanao, the large island in the south of the archipelago; a rapid conquest of power by a local figure not belonging to any of those traditional "big families" which determine national politics; a support rating exceeding 90 per cent (and still 65 per cent one hundred days later). He is also the oldest president ever elected in the country (he is 71 years old).

Starting from nothing, he won the prize by getting massive support among the popular layers, but also, it must be emphasized, among the middle classes and even among those elites that he loves to insult.

Kick out those in power: the crisis of the regime

Since the overthrow of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986, minor candidates or outsiders have several times won the presidential election. This time however, Duterte was carried by a huge wave of protest, an "electoral uprising", to such an extent that the mainstream parties had to give up the idea of rigging the results to bar the way to a dangerously unpredictable man. "Let's kick out those in power!" We have seen the strength of this rejection in many countries. It reached the Philippines with a force rarely equalled.

Duterte's victory reveals the extent of the bankruptcy of the outgoing administration and President Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III, who had become the embodiment of clientelism and the reign of family dynasties, institutionalized corruption, the indifference of the elites with regard to the fate of the people [24], gross incompetence and lack of political courage [25]. The time of the Aquinos had (re-) opened with the murder of Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr. in 1983 under the dictatorship and the election of his widow Corazon ("Cory") three years later. It is closing - after many vicissitudes - with the downfall of the son.

Power struggles within the Philippine bourgeoisie are settled between the great families of Luzon (in the north of the archipelago) and part of the central Visayas (the islands of Negros, Cebu...). Politics is a financial investment and the positions acquired are a way to fructify it. Alliances of circumstance are made and broken between regional dynasties in the

election process, then in the construction of presidential majorities in the House of Representatives and the Senate. Changes in the party political affiliation of elected representatives are common, because joining a party is not done on the basis of a programme.

This political system has run out of steam

Mindanao is the second largest island in the Philippine archipelago in terms of area and population. Yet it has been kept out of national politics, serving as an electoral reserve: parties come there to buy votes that they lack in national elections. Although himself from a local dynasty of the Visayas in Cebu [26], Rodrigo Duterte, the mayor of Davao (in the east of Mindanao) was in this sense well and truly an outsider. Throughout his campaign, he did not miss an occasion to denounce "imperial Manila" and regularly called members of the administration "arseholes". More than anyone else, he was able to crystallize the visceral rejection of the establishment.

A caricature of a populist, Duterte has earned a worldwide reputation for the "Trump-style" brutality of his remarks, boasting of having coldly executed offenders in the city of which he is mayor, or regretting not having been the first to "have a go at" an Australian nun raped and killed by criminals on the run (whom he liquidated) [27]. His crude macho postures have reinforced his image as a man of action.

Dutertism in power

Rodrigo Duterte ran the risk of being faced with a House of Representatives and a Senate largely dominated by the opposition; but the Filipino elites being what they are, yesterday's enemies have rallied massively to the winner by forming a presidential "grand coalition". Since then, he has been conducting his policies with very few institutional barriers. We briefly present here some particularly important aspects, in order to understand the positions adopted by the left. [28]

Ministers chosen by the PCP, peace negotiations

Rodrigo Duterte relies on a small team of close collaborators in whom he has confidence personally, including Leoncio "Jun" Evasco Badilla Jr., Secretary of the Cabinet.

Duterte has appointed to government posts men of the right and direct representatives of the ruling classes; but he also asked the Communist Party of the Philippines/National Democratic Front (CPP-NDF) to choose four potential ministers: Joel Maglunsod has been appointed Undersecretary of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE). Judy Taguiwalo is Secretary of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and Rafael Mariano of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR). As for Liza Maza, she finds herself heading the National Anti-Poverty Commission.

Duterte announced during the campaign that he would open peace negotiations with the CPP and its guerrilla New People's Army (NPA). He took the initiative of a unilateral cease-fire, which looked uncertain until a cease-fire, this time bilateral, went into force on 27 August. He released 22 jailed party cadres so that they could participate in the discussions that began at the end of August in Oslo (Norway) [29].

The participation of the CPP in the government obviously creates a completely unprecedented situation in the Philippines. Its judgment of the Duterte presidency is vigorously opposed on the left [30].

Peace negotiations in Mindanao

The South of the Philippines has been the scene of numerous armed conflicts; the Muslim population lives there

The Aquino regime had presented a peace agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), currently considered to be the main Muslim armed organization; but its ratification by Congress did not take place. Rodrigo Duterte wants to revive the process by integrating this time the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Lumad (mountain communities) and Christians (the "majority population" of the archipelago).

The establishment of this wider process of negotiation and representation is one of the major challenges of the present period in the Philippine south.

From the "war on drugs" to the threat of martial law

Duterte can play the fool and strike a strong-arm pose, but he is not making it up. He really did "clean up" Davao City by allowing police to operate with impunity, summarily liquidating offenders, drug dealers, street children ... Known as the "Mayor of the death squads," he was imitated in other provinces. He is now applying this summary policy nationally. He has repeated loudly that he covers with his authority all those who liquidate addicts and dealers. These people are "no longer human beings," why would their human rights be protected?

The number of killings is increasing. Let us say that in round figures 3,500

people have been summarily shot - a third by the police, a third by the "vigilantes" (paramilitaries) and a third by neighbours, gangs, etc. Rodrigo Duterte bears the political and moral responsibility for this killing spree, as he has repeatedly given the go-ahead for extrajudicial executions.

Officials, judges and personalities have been denounced by the president, who has threatened to execute them, but for now only the poor are falling victim to the death squads. More than 600,000 suspects surrendered to the police for fear of being liquidated - to the point that the administration does not know where to put them.

After an attack committed in Davao by the Abu Sayyaf group of kidnappers, Duterte introduced a state of emergency throughout the country. He brandished the threat of establishing martial law. In this poisonous atmosphere, cadres of popular organizations (peasants, urban poor, unions) are also being killed by a procedure similar to that of the "vigilantes". [31] This happened in particular in Cebu to a member of the Workers' Party (PM) [32] and in Luzon to a cadre of Kilusan [33].

Under the Marcos dictatorship, many activists were abducted, tortured and executed. Since then, especially landowners, but also bosses have had too troublesome "elements" killed. However, this is the first time in the Philippines that these extreme violations of human rights have been openly claimed and assumed by the highest authority of the country - at least as concerns the war on drugs. Duterte has also threatened to kill workers who "sabotage" the country's economic development.

Extractivism and the precarious nature of work contracts

Overall, Duterte's socio-economic programme is (ultra-)liberal; but on two issues in particular, it opens a window of action to the popular

movements: coal mining and the policy of precarious work contracts (contractualization). Numerous local struggles are taking place against the coal industry; one of the principal campaigns of the left unions specifically targets the use of a precarious workforce.

Foreign policy

In recent weeks, responding to international criticism of the non-respect of human rights, Rodrigo Duterte has been threatening ever more openly to open the country to the Chinese and the Russians. He does it with his usual macho rudeness.

So, he called the US ambassador a "poof" and a "son of a whore" - then he used the latter expression about Obama himself. He said the special forces of the United States should withdraw from Mindanao. He responded to the European Parliament " 'F**k you,' ", illustrating his words with the appropriate action. He told Western investors worried about the deteriorating political climate "get the hell out of here!", he would invite Chinese and Russian capital to take their place.

He is increasingly making overtures towards Beijing. He refuses for now to use the judgment of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague recognizing Philippine sovereignty over the Scarborough Reef, occupied by China. He invites China to invest massively in his country and never has a word to say against it...

For the moment it is just talk. No concrete steps have been taken to revise military agreements with the United States that allow the US Seventh Fleet to use Philippine ports and its special forces to establish listening centres. In economic terms, the constitutional review announced by Duterte in fact proposes to lift restrictions limiting the freedom of foreign investment - too bad for nationalism.

Is Rodrigo Duterte simply engaged in a game of poker, waving the Chinese scarecrow to get maximum concessions from the US, the tutelary power; or does he really intend to put

in question the strategic alignments in this part of the world - and in the first place does he really know what he wants or is navigating without a compass in increasingly agitated Asian waters? The question should not have to be asked, given the importance of the regional and national issues.

Where is Duterte going?

If there is nevertheless room for doubt, it is because the new Philippine president is a man in a hurry and, so it is said, "pragmatic". He got himself triumphantly elected by promising to radically change things in three to six months.

The "war on drugs" was launched as soon as his election was confirmed.

However, Duterte has announced that he needs to extend it for six more months. It risks getting bogged down, becoming a very deadly "endless war".

Peace negotiations are underway with the CPP and have been announced in Mindanao - but no one can expect a solution that is both favourable and quick.

However, Duterte cannot afford inaction, which would provide an opportunity to some of his current "friends" to turn against him. He does not have a power base of his own; to survive, he conducts a permanent war of movement.

A massive influx of Chinese capital would allow Duterte to take the initiative on a new front: investment, major public works, employment ... The idea is tempting, but risky. Barack Obama has already clearly expressed his exasperation by cancelling a meeting with the Philippine president. The Philippine elite has close historical ties with the United States, the former colonial power; so has the army. For the United States, southwest of Japan, no country can replace the Philippines. Duterte is playing a game of tension, but in a region that is already subject to a high degree of geopolitical tension.

This is a high-risk game.

Positions on the left

The panorama of the Philippine left is being transformed and new developments are underway. Let us try to get an idea of what is going on, without being exhaustive.

Akbayan

This party was formed in 1998 from the regroupment of currents coming from the Christian left, the CPP and the NDF, the "old" Communist Party (PKP), Marxist personalities and independent socialists... Despite its links to the social movement, from the moment in 2009 that Akbayan decided to stop being an opposition force represented in the Lower House, but to join in a presidential coalition, the electoral terrain has quickly established its law. Allied in 2010 with Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III, it joined the government. Despite the proliferation of scandals, it never broke ranks. [34]

In 2016, for the first time, Akbayan managed to get Risa Hontiveros-Baraquel elected to the Senate (but only one MP in the Lower house). This could be a pyrrhic victory. This party is now politically identified with the disaster of the outgoing administration. Its leadership grouped itself around Bisig, becoming an electoral machinery; it no longer represents the arc of currents that participated in its foundation. However, the evolution of the currents in the trade-union and social movement which are or have been linked to Akbayan remains a question to monitor closely.

The Communist Party of the Philippines

When the CPP realized that Rodrigo Duterte could win the election, it supported him, although it had first rather campaigned for Grace Poe. For years, the guerrilla forces of the party have concluded a kind of agreement of non-interference with the "Mayor of the death squads" in the province of Davao.

Jose Maria Sison tutelary figure of the party living in Utrecht (Netherlands) -

particularly welcomed the man who was once his student, thinking he would perhaps be the first leftist president in the Philippines [35]. Dissensions arose within the party after the elections of May 9, Sison responding favorably to the offer of dialogue launched by Duterte, others denouncing the elitist character of the new presidency. A (temporary?) agreement seems to have been made to participate in government and open a new round of negotiations.

The CPP has supported the policy of "war on drugs", even offering to contribute to it. [36] In a recent statement, Sison mentions the criticisms on the violation of human rights, but without himself supporting them. In the next paragraph he denounces the use Obama has made of this issue. From that starting point, he casts suspicion on all those who attack Duterte on these grounds. [37]

The couple Benito and Wilma Tiamzon embody the leadership "of the interior" of the CPP. Arrested in 2014 and now released to participate in the Oslo negotiations, they bring their support to the presidency in an interview ("the overall trajectory is clear"), simply hoping that Duterte will take practical steps to implement his policy of independence vis-À-vis the United States [38].

It is not clear that in the social domain Duterte will give much grist to the mill of ministers who are close to or members of the CPP. However, it is probably the issue of the Oslo talks that will be decisive. The new president must convince the army that he knows what he is doing in beginning them. He needs results. He thinks perhaps that in some regions at least, the guerrillas, declining, are seeking a way out after more than fifty years of fighting; and he must be following with interest what is happening in Colombia (the agreement with the FARC). For now, of course, the delegation of the CPP in Oslo is camped on classic positions, namely a policy of political negotiation without ends.

Seen from the left, the dynamics of the negotiations certainly constitute one of the main concrete questions of the situation opened up by the victory of

Rodrigo Duterte.

In the opposition: human rights and democracy

All the left currents are aware that with the present crisis of the regime windows of opportunity have opened in various fields. [39] They are all trying to take the opportunity of winning real gains for workers (against precarious contracts...), local people (against the mining companies...), farmers (a revival of agrarian reform...), the poor (social protections...), the Lumad (rights over their ancestral domains...), etc. This requires a combination of firmness, flexibility and political independence.

However, a cleavage runs through the non-CP left (NGOs, POs and political) on the issue of human rights and democracy. For some, in the name of social objectives, we must not condemn the government on human rights issues (the war on drugs) and democracy (the spectre of martial law). For others, on the contrary, such questions are far too serious to keep silent about. Very quickly, on the initiative of Walden Bello in particular [40], a range of organizations declared themselves in opposition to the new government, while seeking to mobilize to obtain concrete victories as long as the situation remains fluid.

Many forces are also coming together to denounce Duterte's decision to bury the remains of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos in the National Hero's Cemetery. [41]

iDEFEND

Since then, the democratic protest movement has continued to grow. A coalition named iDEFEND, constituted on August 12, has conducted a frontal battle on the issue of human rights. It is becoming broader and hardening its position as and when the situation deteriorates. In its last statement, it says in particular:

"Democracy is under threat today. On Sept. 4, the President has put the whole country under a State of Emergency (...), indefinitely. Recently, we witnessed the most vivid manifestation of the failure of

democracy being the Malacanang-directed ouster of Senator de Lima as head of the Justice Committee. This is the latest move of the Executive to gain total control of Congress. (...) [T]he whole country witnessed how he angrily threatened to declare martial law when the Court asserted its authority in the investigation of judges that Malacanang had linked to drugs. Forty four years ago today, Marcos declared martial law. Today, we face a similar if not a greater threat to our lives, liberties, and democratic rights". [42]

Stop the War Coalition

The "Stop the war" coalition is intervening on a much broader range of themes than its name indicates. It has published one of the first critical analyses of the Duterte regime. [43] It denounces the debt inherited from the Marcos dictatorship (a debt that Duterte has not put in question) and fights against climate change (which Duterte does not want to hear about). It does not want US domination to be replaced by that of China, the new world power.

Partido Lakas ng Masa (PLM)

PLM (Party of the Strength of the Masses) in a statement dated September 7, " calls for a stop to the mass killings of suspected drug users and pushers in the urban poor communities. The campaign against drugs could simply be an intensified police operation, targeting the biggest drug lords and their protectors." [44]

Partido Manggagawa (PM)

The leaders of the PM (Workers Party) stated on September 21: "On the 44th anniversary of martial law, the struggle for human rights and democracy for all remains as relevant and critical as ever. (...), civil liberties and democratic freedoms are under clear and present danger (...)The extra-judicial killings done in the name of the war on drugs have now spilled onto slayings of human rights defenders." [45]

Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa - Mindanao (RPM-M)

On June 12, the RPM-M (Revolutionary Workers Party -

Mindanao) stated " We declare a unilateral ceasefire to CPP-NPA as an organization and to its members, if this development means victory for the democratic forces in the country and a push for a more dynamic and renewed revolutionary movement in the Philippines.". [46] The Mao-Stalinist Communist Party has in fact attacked the cadres of other revolutionary organizations such as the RPM-M, which hopes that the present situation may help to bring an end a conflict that it considers fratricidal.

In a text published on September 4 after the attack by Abu Sayyef in Davao, the RPM-M and the People's Revolutionary Army (RPA) express " We stand of the same rage against terrorism and illegal drugs, but we have reservations on the formal declaration of State of National Emergency. As experienced in the country, massive deployment and mobilization of military and police

personnel have resulted to massive curtailment of civilian civil liberties. This can be used also by the militarist group within the Duterte's government and imperialist interests of foreign powers in the name of anti-terrorism campaign and nip in the bud the nationalist initiatives within the ruling power of the new government.(...)"

" The war against drugs, criminalities and terroristic activities shall not be a threat to peoples' and communities' civil liberties instead, it must encourage more spaces for comprehensive and proactive efforts involving the peoples' and communities themselves." [47]

Third way

The debates within the Philippine left sometimes take an ultimatum and binary turn. Either you are behind Duterte, or you find yourself in the

"yellow" camp (yellow being the colour of the Aquinos).

The Philippine left as a whole is weakened today, although it remains one of the most vibrant in South-East Asia. Since the 1980s, it has not been able to regain the political initiative in a durable way and it finds itself periodically hostage to the conflicts within the ruling classes.

The present regime crisis may favour a recomposition of the left, providing an impulse for a new radical and unitary dynamism. This will not happen by it aligning itself on the Duterte presidency (nor, of course, on the ruins of the former administration). The situation is complex and opportunities must be seized - but the new presidency is legitimising in the eyes of the population arbitrary power and the use of death squads. A deadly poison.

September 25, 2016

Spanish State: A perfect storm in the PSOE federal committee

18 October 2016, by Josep María Antentas

Reasons of state (governability in the name of financial power and faced with the "threat" of Catalan independence) clash, without those responsible knowing it, with the rationale of party, the fruit of the blindness of leaders who, accustomed to assimilate and to confuse, have not understood that their party no longer plays the systemic role it did previously, who have not realized that in the era of permanent austerity these rationales collide, inevitably pushing the social democrats to a brutal confrontation with their own social base. For a time state and party were the same thing for the PSOE. But that period is now behind us, so that saving both the political system and the party that was its principal plank is not possible.

Just as it is possible that corrupt politicians like Rita Barbera or Miguel Blesa genuinely do not understand why they are accused and why what they have done all their lives has now become a reason for scandal and reproach, Felipe Gonzalez and those around him assume that they can act as before, and push their party onto the path of self-immolation. Gonzalez and Diaz are to political strategy what Barbera or Blesa are to ethics. [48] Although, to tell the truth, they do not lag behind in that area either. The reason in both cases is the same: that 15M took place. [49] Anyone who has not assimilated this and has not been able to read its meaning wanders like a ghost through Spanish politics...at least on its left.

Gonzalez, Diaz and the entire faction

behind the coup symbolize the worst of all possible PSOE's, as right-wing as it is authoritarian, as Spanish centralist as it is stale, as arrogant as it is outmoded. Anything more sinister is inconceivable. They embody a past which is reluctant to fade, that imprisons the present and darkens the future. They are the undead who zombify everything they touch, everything they bite. They are splinters of a dark and rotten past that terrorizes and pollutes the present with its legacy of pestilence.

Felipe Gonzalez, with his licence to conspire, represents a past that refuses to go away, and blocks the possibility of the PSOE developing a policy for the present to guarantee a future. "A miserable prisoner of the powerful" as he was masterfully

defined by the former editor of *New Left Review*, Robin Blackburn, in the 1990s - an expression that Miguel Romero, founding editor of *Viento Sur*, rescued and reformulated some years ago as a "prisoner of power". A prisoner of power that became its slave, chained in the bowels of the state and osmosifying with it. Susana Diaz simply embodies a layer of leaders (in which reasons of state and party are mixed with personal ambitions) that has arrived three decades after its time, a kind of timeless and anachronistic repetition of the generation that won in 1982, but in a scenario in which their project already has no material bases for sustained success and lacks a narrative and political credibility. Deluded by their election victories in Andalusia, they forget that these are not transferable to the Spanish state as a whole and thus avoid any understanding of the historical decline of the PSOE.

(2) The PSOE has been shown to be the weakest link of bipartisanship. This is logical. 15M, despite its transversal nature and its break with fixed positions, in the first instance impacted on the people of the left. And the political-electoral channelling, which was not automatic or mechanical, of the great indignation expressed in the squares in 2011, came through an option, Podemos, that also emanated from the left, despite having the intention, correctly, of going beyond it and the strategy, incorrectly, of doing so by issuing confusing messages and an increasingly empty project.

In the elections of 20 December 2015 and 26 June 2016, Sanchez was able to withstand the onslaught of Podemos and Unidos Podemos. Against all odds he resisted the *sorpasso* (electoral overtaking of the PSOE by Podemos) that would have condemned the PSOE to slide along a path never travelled and into a dead end. But, despite this, the party was seriously injured and pushed into a unique situation in which it was no longer an option of government, lacking the necessary votes because its social base contracted. But neither can it be an opposition party, because the crisis of bipartisanship, of which the crisis in the PSOE is the principal feature,

prevents the traditional turn of alternation. Neither government nor opposition, the PSOE has ceased to perform its normal function and is torn between two possibilities that, for different reasons, collide with the vision it has of itself and with the role it has played from the Transition: first, becoming a complement of the rightist block, today the strongest bastion and guarantor of systemic stability in turbulent times; second, preserving at any cost its independence, at the expense of all the parliamentary instability that could generate, hoping that the social base of Unidos Podemos becomes partially discouraged over time and it will thus be able to reassert itself, in spite of everything, as the main electoral alternative to the right-wing Partido Popular (PP). The first option entails self-destruction in the medium term, caught between the wall of the PP and the onslaught of Unidos Podemos, while the second means prioritizing the interests of apparatus over governability, but without being able to offer a clear alternative to the PP in the short and medium term and therefore acting as a party without any functionality.

The substantive problem for the PSOE is that the only real option for being an alternative government in the here and now, forming an alternative majority with Unidos Podemos and Catalan, Galician and Valencian confluences (mostly the Catalans for reasons of parliamentary arithmetic), is impossible, unless Unidos Podemos reduces its demands to a derisory and self-destructive minimum. The problem of the PSOE is very simple: it has no alternative to austerity and cannot lead an anti-austerity government - despite part of its (declining) electoral appeal being attributable to appearing distinct from the right - since to do so would mean breaking with its *raison d'Être* and its historical function since the Transition.

Sanchez ruled out the first option for obvious reasons. It involved going to the stake for a not very heroic cause. His destiny was clear: to go down in history as the person who sank the PSOE and facilitated another Rajoy government, to fry for two or three years in Congress by directing a group

of zombies abducted by Brussels and the PP, and to be removed without mercy just before the next election for another leader who was less grilled. A regrettable future, without doubt. Difficult to imagine a darker and more ridiculous political career.

He therefore tried to cling to the second option. Not to fall under the yoke of PP and to win time and more time. His plan was clear: (a) Seek a public negotiation to form a new government, (b) take soundings, even with little hope, as to whether a broken and internally weakened Podemos would be willing to lift him into the presidency in exchange for almost nothing, (c) to blame Unidos Podemos and Ciudadanos in the event of the failure of the negotiations, and (d) to risk going into a third election with a left and unitary profile in which he hoped not only to keep ahead of Unidos Podemos, but perhaps expand a little on his advantage. This would have paved the way for the medium term, because a bad result for Pablo Iglesias would only serve to increase the anger in Podemos and make its next Assembly, the long-awaited Vistalegre II, a meeting of high risk for the formation, which lacks a culture of real political debate or inclusive management of differences. Frankly, it was not a bad plan for a cornered apparatus, without any project other than survival.

Make no mistake. Sanchez did not embody any left wing in the party. In other words: Diaz and Gonzalez represented in crystalline form the right of the PSOE, but Sanchez did not personify the left, but simply a fraction of the PSOE that knew how to read the situation better and which does not live in an unreal fantasy world. This has been a battle within a right wing party overtaken by the time it has had to live through, against an apparatus without any project but with desire, tenacity, and a true sense of how to survive. At least enough to understand that it is in the struggle with Unidos Podemos that the game lays. Paradoxically, Sánchez basically felt the same nostalgia for the PSOE that was and is no longer as Gonzalez and Diaz, the same longing for a regime that is now in crisis. But the two sectors differed in the answer to give to their own decadence.

(3) The crisis of the PSOE is another chapter, albeit with special characteristics, of the crisis of social democracy in Europe. The most visible manifestation of this is the drastic fall in electoral support, but this is the consequence of a crisis of identity, strategy and project, in the framework of a context of oligarchic attacks on democracy, involution and decomposition of the traditional mechanisms of political representation.

The coup shows crudely the nature of contemporary social democracy: the PSOE is no more than a party embedded in, and at the service of, economic and financial power, although with an electoral and to some extent an activist base, which in part identifies the left, in a context where to serve and to form part of the nucleus of economic-financial power is incompatible with the most minimal policies favourable to the interests of the bulk of society. The collision between social democracy and its own social base thus becomes inevitable.

The savage pro-capitalist management of the crisis by European social democracy thus culminates a long history of integration into capitalist political and economic structures, but in a context where there is no longer a material base to offer material progress or the illusion of such to their social base. In the 1980s, the PSOE implemented a capitalist modernization project firmly, conceived as a project of "progress", a veritable recurrent historic fetish of the years of *felipismo* [50], whose objective and legitimizing narrative was abandoning the traditional backwardness of the country inherited from Francoism and becoming like other European countries, through a mixed ideology of parliamentary democracy, consumerism, economic growth, Atlanticism and cultural change. Around this, the PSOE articulated its national project and its own idea of Spain, with a rhetoric that combined in an unbalanced manner a defence of "plural Spain" with a strong pre-eminent Spanish nationalism.

The generalization of the consumerist model, social modernization and consolidation of a small welfare state,

within a scenario of decomposition of the labour movement and growing depoliticization and individualization of social relations, gave a solid hegemony to the PSOE for a whole decade, connecting with the expectations of the urban middle class without losing the support of a majority of the working class. The Gonzalez era ended in 1996 because of the economic crisis of 1993 and the outbreak of serious corruption scandals, without forgetting the depoliticizing impact of the deep social transformations resulting from the capitalist modernization project itself that facilitated the shift to the right of segments of the middle and working class. The PSOE of Zapatero returned to power in 2004 with a policy proposal that emphasized a traditional progressive profile in the social and cultural fields, which largely served as an alibi in order to camouflage its lack of differentiation with the PP in the economic area. But this project ended up pulverized by the economic crisis and its acceptance of Euro-austerity in a second term that ended with the cry of "they do not represent us". [51] In retrospect, the entire project of capitalistic modernization embraced by social democracy appears as an endless *fuite en avant* by way of a veritable strategic (and identity) bubble in which the social democrats linked their destiny to that of neoliberalism itself, in a kind of empty high risk Ponzi scheme.

(4) The consequences of the triumph of the coup fraction in the PSOE are still impossible to calculate. The design, implementation and content of the coup against Sanchez displayed an impressive harshness and coarseness, the best exemplification of what this party really is. It is rare for an organization to expose itself in this way.

The problems experienced on 20 December and 26 June will multiply exponentially after the dismissal of Sánchez. The electoral base of the PSOE, at its historic minimum, runs the risk of contracting much more, increasing its two major structural problems. First, the aging of their voters and the loss of connection, to the benefit especially of Podemos, with young and middle-aged voters.

Second, the growing territorial and geographical disarticulation of its electoral support. Very much weakened in Catalonia, in the Basque Country and in Galicia (although to a lesser extent there), and without a breakthrough in Madrid, it runs the risk of becoming a semi-regional party, in the broad sense, pivoting around Andalusia and Extremadura, and unable to embody a credible project for the state as a whole. A high-risk situation for a party that in the 1980s worked in permanent symbiosis with the specific idea of hegemony in what Spain then was.

The crisis in the PSOE immediately benefits the PP, which will finally be able to form a government and will continue to concentrate votes leaking from Ciudadanos. But in the medium term, the PSOE crisis represents a decisive blow to a bipartisanship that had already disappeared in its classic form on 20 December but without being yet replaced by a new party system. The implosion (beyond the final magnitude that it will take on) of the PSOE is the implosion of the political system and the governability of the Regime of 1978. And vice versa.

In a certain way the PSOE has put its own destiny in the hands of the PP. Although it is not easy to justify, if Rajoy acts exclusively by reason of short term party interests he could try to go toward a third election, which would leave him strengthened at the expense of the PSOE and Ciudadanos, but at the price of facilitating the *sorpasso* of Unidos Podemos, thus inflicting an accurate blow to the systemic *turnista* alternation. If, on the contrary, as is likely, he prioritizes reasons of state, he will not opt for a new election that would wreck his systemic rivals, but boost those who play outside the rules, Unidos Podemos. In this case he would "limit" himself to imposing draconian conditions on a PSOE without any negotiating capacity for its own self-sabotage.

The immediate future of the PSOE is very complicated. To go toward new elections under post-coup conditions would be tantamount to an imminent shipwreck imminent. Facilitating a Rajoy government would involve a political immolation and strong

internal turmoil, and perhaps feed the expectations of a Sánchez attempting to reconquer the leadership (an option which, paradoxically, would be the only one that could in some measure bail the party out). Paving Rajoy's way toward the Moncloa [prime ministerial residence] implies not only an abstention. One way or another governability will have to be assured and the adoption of the whole package of measures, of "reforms", which the new government will carry out in obedience to Brussels, must be facilitated. Euro-adjustment policies have been half paralysed for two years: first, in 2015 when there was a need to give oxygen to Rajoy so as not to pummel him before the elections and propel Podemos; later, in 2016 by

the interim in the Moncloa. But in 2017 the time lost will have to be made up. The machinery will be launched at full throttle. And the PSOE would be dragged by it, thus leaving the field of opposition free to Unidos Podemos. This is when the real effects of the coup against Sanchez will be felt.

The political processes are uncontrollable. Once put into motion they have their own unpredictable political dynamics beyond the control of their protagonists. They open cracks that can cause unexpected earthquakes in the short and the long term. Those who orchestrated the rebellion against Sanchez did so

thinking they would save both the governability of the state and their party. But the effect achieved could be the contrary. Paradoxes nestle at the heart of political activity. And these days even more so: the strongest opponents of Unidos Podemos within the PSOE may have created the conditions for the *sorpasso* that the latter could not perform alone. Which, in other words means that, if under the baton of Felipe Gonzalez and Susana Diaz, the PSOE is on a one-way path to self-destruction, it may be that Gonzalez and his cronies end up making a sudden, unexpected and invaluable contribution to the forces of the rupture that they have rejected, feared and fought throughout their lives.

Left-wing political parties key to counter society's militarisation: AWP

17 October 2016, by **Saher Baloch**

KARACHI: As political parties associated with the government or the opposition here are right-wing in their thoughts and practice, left-leaning political parties are essential in an environment of growing religious fundamentalism and militarisation of society, said general secretary of the Awami Workers Party (AWP) Farooq Tariq on Saturday.

He expressed these views in his welcome address at the second federal congress of the party held at the Arts Council.

Speaking to workers, he highlighted the need for a "counter narrative" to the right-wing narrative of both the government and the opposition. According to him, the only hurdle is that "we are not taken seriously amid a growing perception among the people that there will be no political change in the country".

Earlier as part of an "Anti-War Train March", around 300 AWP workers from across the country travelled to

Karachi by Awami Express. Most of the workers belonged to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Rahim Yar Khan, Quetta and parts of Sindh. The AWP general secretary said the purpose of the train march was to highlight issues such as finding a peaceful solution to the ongoing conflict with India and asking military and media not to promote or tolerate warmongering.

"Religious parties are usually the happiest whenever relations between India and Pakistan go for a toss. We should not tolerate warmongering at any cost," said Mr Tariq.

AWP President Abid Hassan Minto with general secretary Farooq Tariq and chairman Fanoos Gujjar presided over the two-day congress of the party being held at the Arts Council. The first congress of the party was organised in September 2014 in which its leaders discussed and finalised its constitution.

The party was formed with the merger

of three parties "Labour Party Pakistan, Workers Party Pakistan and Awami Party Pakistan" in November 2012, said Mr Tariq. Presenting a two-year report of the party, Mr Tariq said the AWP had its presidents in 56 districts of Pakistan apart from Gilgit-Baltistan, Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Kashmir. He then spoke about some issues the party raised in recent years including protests against the privatisation of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) and repression of peasants at the Okara Military Farms by the Pakistan Army.

While welcoming the workers, veteran union leader of railway workers Manzoor Razi said: "The railway trade union is still alive; the movement is still alive. The number of people you see here is testament to our presence in the country."

A.R. Saraba, party's UK chapter organiser, said the AWP did not believe in hereditary politics of existing political parties in Pakistan.

“To ensure that it doesn’t happen, we should focus more towards balancing the internal democracy of our party,” he added.

Kaneez Fatima, secretary general of Pakistan Trade Union Federation, recalled her struggle for labour unions in Karachi. Slightly criticising those at the helm, she said: “The left leaning parties need to strengthen its core if they want to revive it [...] people need

to come together if they want to see results.” Senior AWP vice president Akhter Hussain presented the party manifesto with necessary corrections. The party has a federal congress, federal committee, federal executive committee and similar structures in provinces and districts. It was decided that like-minded individuals would be included in party’s additional group whose expertise would be sought on political, economic and social issues. At the same time, it was decided that a

member, whether on a federal, provincial or district level would not be eligible to hold office for more than two terms. However, Mr Hussain said this was being done in some sectors due to lack of office-bearers in some divisions. He said although Tariq was aware that the party’s revival or left-wing politics in general “does not hold an immediate chance; yet we have decided to be consistent and practice what we preach.”

Starving Yemen

16 October 2016, by **Helen Lackner**

Most of us are glued to our visual media watching the nightmare unfolding in Aleppo and the systematic bombing and killing of a besieged population in the city while the world’s politicians are debating allocation of responsibility in New York between meals at expensive restaurants. Meanwhile, as we are watching Syria, other tragedies are unfolding in the region, Libya and Iraq.... But I will focus on Yemen. For a year, the UN has been predicting famine in the war-torn country. Some of us have pointed out that Yemenis, unlike people elsewhere, don’t go out and starve to death in public. They have a different culture and do it at home and in private.

These horrors are caused by war, they are not climate change “natural” disasters. They happen because politicians (is that the right word?) pursue their narrow interests and objectives at the expense of the welfare and lives of millions of their people. Are these men (at the moment few women are involved here) completely deprived of any sense of humanity?

Many of us wonder what answers we will give the next generation when they ask how we could sit and watch these tragedies and do nothing, just as we asked our parents how they allowed the Nazi holocaust to happen.

And this time, there is no way we can answer that we don’t know. Why are we so helpless? Is there really nothing we can do? Just write, read, watch, turn up at demos in front of embassies and be ignored? Is that the best “democracy” can offer?

Visible suffering in hospitals

While many die at home some Yemenis, particularly children, do die in hospitals and their suffering is visible. Two journalists have just reminded us of this. On channel 4’s *Unreported World*, [Yemen: Britain’s unseen war](#), Krishnan Guru-Murthy shows us harrowing scenes from hospitals in Sana’a and camps in the northern Tihama coastal plain near one of the war’s fronts. Nawal al Maghafi’s film [Starving Yemen](#) was filmed in Hodeida itself and in Beit al Faqih, 60 km south on a major asphalted straight road in the flat Tihama plain.

The UN tell us that 14 million Yemenis are “food insecure” and 7 million of them “severely food insecure”, in other words malnourished or starving.

Both films were made about two months ago, and in areas relatively easy to reach. Since then the situation has only worsened. In both films, we

see children dying of starvation and the diseases associated with malnutrition; they also explain the role of war-worsened poverty in the suffering. The children we see here have some access to medical facilities, despite the constraints on supplies and power, but they are still starving and dying. Both these films clearly demonstrate that famine is no longer a remote possibility for the future, but is happening now. Yemenis are dying of starvation now.

What of all the children further afield? What about the adults? What about the millions who live in remote mountain villages and less remote towns in the hinterland, many days’ drive on collapsed tracks and across destroyed bridges, how do they get food? Highland staple is bread, and 90% of Yemen’s wheat is imported. Although the rains have been good this year and the sorghum, millet and maize crops should be good, they are by no means sufficient. Highland rural families at best satisfy 20 to 30% of their food needs from their own production, urban ones are totally dependent on purchased food. The UN tell us that 14 million Yemenis are “food insecure” and 7 million of them “severely food insecure”, in other words malnourished or starving.

Food

Why is neither food aid from the WFP nor commercial food reaching them? Some blame the Saudi-led coalition's blockade. This is supposedly no longer a problem as the coalition and the internationally-recognised regime have given the UN authorisation to implement a Verification and Inspection Mechanism to speed up the docking of ships at Red Sea ports under the control of the Huthi-Saleh faction. It has approved the landing of almost one million tons of food, and 923,000 tons of fuel since May this year and checked 149 ships. However, the earlier Saudi-led coalition planes' extremely precise and efficient targeting of the cranes in Hodeida port disabled them, thus slowing down all unloading, and extending ships' waiting time to dock.

This explains the shocking image in Murthy's film of a warehouse full of 45,000 tons of decaying wheat flour which was unsuitable for human consumption by the time it was unloaded; it could have fed 45,000 people for a month. A further question: how come crucial crane cabins were so precisely and efficiently targeted when apparently incompetent targeting resulted in strikes on 5 MSF facilities, 4 of which are hospitals?

Disease

Malnourished people are more vulnerable to all diseases. So the overall worsening of medical services is a further contributor to a death toll which, up to now, has been systematically under-estimated by the UN. Recently raised to over 10,000, as Dr Ashwak Muharram, the doctor in Starving Yemen says, "they only count those killed directly and ignore those who are killed for lack of medication, electricity in hospitals, or starvation. Do you have to be killed by an airstrike to count? What about the rest?"

Estimates of total deaths to those directly associated with military action vary widely, but the lowest figure is that as many people die of indirect causes. This would mean that the

current death toll in Yemen would be over 20,000. Many observers, particularly those with experience of the medical situation, think this is a considerable under-estimate.

There is little doubt that the medical services are unable to cope with the situation. First they are starved of supplies, whether medication, consumables, or equipment. Second most of them lack electricity as most public electricity networks are not functioning, many generators are destroyed, and fuel is expensive and hard to come by. Thirdly, damage and destruction of medical facilities has had a major impact. According to a World Health Organisation survey, published end of September, 274 health facilities have been physically damaged by the war, and as many as 1900 out of 3507 are either not functioning or only partially functioning. In 267 districts[2] surveyed there is not a single doctor. In those hospitals which are functioning, the first services to reduce operations under stress are operating theatres and intensive care units: this almost certainly ensures that those with most acute and urgent problems will die.

Paralysed Central Bank

Importers of essential commodities have faced considerable difficulties on the international markets in recent months due to increasing constraints in the banking system and restrictions on letters of credit essential for large consignments. This situation is about to worsen dramatically because of the decision by the coalition-supported, internationally-recognised government to effectively paralyse the Central Bank (CBY). This was the only remaining and operating joint national institution in a country in practice divided between the area under the control of the Huthi-Saleh alliance and the areas surrounding them, which Hadi's internationally recognised government claims to control. The CBY had remained neutral and been as well managed as it could be in the circumstances. Its reserves have melted in recent months due to a lack of income while it continued paying

salaries. The Hadi government decided to 'move' the bank to its temporary capital Aden, and disavow the Bank's governing body based in Sana'a, thus ending the truce prevailing on its functioning. This is the precursor to greater disaster for the people of Yemen.

Taken with the approval of the new 'Gang of four', a group established on 25 August in Riyadh and composed of the US, Saudi Arabia, UAE and the UK, this decision will certainly cause much more suffering for the Yemeni people everywhere. Although the Gulf Cooperation Council states leading the coalition promise to support the new CBY based in Aden with substantial funds, observers are allowed to wonder whether and how promptly these promises will be kept; salaries of most military/security personnel in some parts of the 'liberated' areas are paid with very considerable delay. Both military and civil personnel on government payrolls are demonstrating daily demanding their salaries throughout Yemen, in areas controlled by both sides. The effective paralysing of the Central Bank will only worsen the humanitarian crisis, as it will make imports of food and medical supplies all the more difficult. It may even prevent remittances from reaching the thousands of families who are only kept above extreme poverty and starvation by the support they get from relatives out of Yemen.

Meanwhile, war and the arms trade

Meanwhile the war goes on. The usual fronts have seen more violent fighting since the breakdown of the peace negotiations in early August. The Saudi-led coalition air strikes have intensified. The military stalemate has certainly been a factor in the decision to end the truce on the Central Bank, a decision guaranteed to worsen suffering. The death toll mounts, from strikes, from malnutrition and starvation. The decision makers, whether Yemeni on both sides, or their supporters now focused on the new Gang of four, continue to show total contempt for Yemeni citizens' lives and welfare.

The Saudi-led coalition air strikes

have intensified.

At long last there seems to be some public momentum to put pressure on the British and US states to stop their sales of weapons and ammunition to the leading state in the coalition, Saudi Arabia. Opposition is growing. Both the British Parliament and the US Congress are witnessing moves to stop the arms sales; they have been unsuccessful up to now but at least they are showing concern. It is unlikely that our governments will prioritise the lives and welfare of millions of Yemenis over short-term profits for the arms trade from sales to Gulf Cooperation Council states, and

the 'jobs' they provide. High tech jobs which could be re-cycled into more peaceful and useful sectors. Britain will see a Judicial Review of the government's arms sales policy next January.

Can we achieve more? Readers are urged to write to any officials of their choosing, demanding an end to the arms sales, demanding that their government call for a more even handed resolution at the United Nations Security Council which might make peace negotiations more likely to succeed, calling for an end to this pointless war. You can also help by

informing as many people as you can of the situation, so Yemen stops being the 'forgotten' war. Donations to Medecins Sans Frontières or an alternative NGO of your choice active in Yemen will certainly be used to alleviate the suffering of a few people at least. Each of these small actions has a minimal impact, but if enough of us do enough of them, who knows? We may be able to answer our children that we put an end to some of the horrors of the second decade of this century.

4 October 2016

[Open Democracy](#)

Global Reclaim Power 2016 October Days of Actions in the Philippines

15 October 2016

This is part of the nationally coordinated actions for Global Reclaim Power 2016[i]. The Reclaim Power 2016 October Days of Actions kicked off with a sign-on statement to demand all governments of the world to make a swift and just transformation of energy systems — "from fossil fuel and dirty energy dominated systems, towards clean, renewable and democratic energy systems that ensure universal access for people and communities."

The Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (PMCJ) issued the following statement:

**COAL IS NOT THE ANSWER
DEVELOPMENT NEED NOT BE
DIRTY**

Today, October 10, while various countries around the world will mobilize for the Global Reclaim Power, the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice is also mobilizing in major cities in the Philippines to call the attention of the Duterte Administration that the continuing policy of coal as fuel for development

contradicts with the change the Filipino people would want. This kind of development is unsustainable and runs against the welfare of the people. In fact, it will eventually kill many Filipinos. Let us be reminded that the country's right to develop stipulates the responsibility that this development must be also sustainable, equitable, and ensures the common good of its people.

As we are asserting our collective rights today, our rights for clean air and water, our rights for sustainable future and a stable climate, the world climate system has already echoed a resounding alarm that it has already passed the 400 parts per million (ppm) of carbon dioxide GHG concentration in the atmosphere. Some scientists said that it will definitely stay at that level at a longer period of time. It will have devastating consequences for many countries all over the world for it would mean exacerbation of climate impacts like droughts and strong typhoons as known manifestations of extreme weather events, sea level rise, and destruction of biological and biodiversity systems. These will have

extreme consequences in agriculture, health, and environment, and all other earth's processes. Alongside this news are death and destructions happening in various parts of the world due to climate change. In the Pacific, hunger and drought followed the most intense El Niño year. The intensification of El Niño due to climate change has triggered long and extreme droughts in the Philippines resulting to billions of pesos of crops damage, hunger, and death. The other extreme, typhoons Megi and Meranti, some of the strongest in modern weather history, lashed Taiwan, China and the Philippines' Northern Islands, precipitating landslides and causing the dozens of deaths.

Other countries in the world have its share of devastations. In Indonesia, twenty were killed as torrential rains hit Java. In Nepal, seven people lost their lives in torrential rains and subsequent landslides. Scientists have warned of the sinking of the Mekong Delta. At least 133 people were killed, and over 107,000 people displaced after flooding in North Korea, while in Russian Siberia, which has been

affected by major forest fires, residents have petitioned the Russian President, complaining of severe carbon monoxide poisoning. In India, water riots have broken out in drought-stricken regions and four environmental defenders were killed as police opened fire on a protest against a coal mine in Hazaribagh. Ajit Tyagi, the President of the Indian Meteorological Society, warned of the risk of further heat waves in India, asserting that heat waves claim over 3,000 lives a year.

In the African continent, in the country of South Africa, drought has led Kruger National Park to cull 350 hippos and buffalos citing concerns over the animals' suffering. In Mozambique, up to 1.5 million people face food insecurity as a result of drought.

In North America, Greenland's ice cap is disappearing far more rapidly than previously estimated and open water is nearing the North Pole—a symptom of a rapidly warming Arctic. And in the Caribbean, Hurricane Matthew became a record breaking category of five, smashing into Haiti and soaking Colombia. NOAA scientists have reported a "massive die off" of coral reef in the Gulf of Mexico.

The year 2016 is another intense year of climate impacts. The only different it has of the previous year is that the climate impacts are more pronounced and widespread and almost all the perceived impacts are happening all at once. This is now the consequence of unabated carbon emissions which science has already forewarned that emissions have to be immediately cut. At the heart of this problem is the continued burning business as usual of fossil fuel particularly coal.

We, the Filipinos know too well the impacts of climate change. Living in a country being visited with an average

of 19-22 typhoons a year, and unprecedented droughts, any global temperature increase will always be disastrous for the Philippines and all vulnerable countries. This urgency of survival for the vulnerable country is strongly linked to the aspirational call in the Paris agreement to exceed 1.5 degrees Centigrade the average global temperature increase. It is the only scientifically achievable average that any vulnerable countries may survive. However, with the year 2016 now at 400 ppm, the chances not to breach the 1.5 have become narrower and shorter.

There is too much dilly-dallying of most countries to seriously commit to ambitious emission cuts. Burning of coal, at the rate of building coal-fired power plant still continues business as usual. While Europe and US are starting to shut down coal plants, Asia on the other hand has become the epicenter of coal expansion of the world. Investments on coal development have only transformed the region into a global coal furnace unperturbed of the climate crisis. Irresponsible lending and financing still characterizes the capital market in energy development. Various international financial institutions (IFIs) led by World Bank, local banks, export credit agencies (ECAs) still invest in coal. In Southeast Asia, the Philippines sits in the powder keg of coal expansion with no less than 36 coal plants with 63 boilers are now in the pipeline. World Bank has been funding 20 coal plants in the Philippines

The Duterte government no longer has any profound bases of continuing coal power plants. What it has is a deep moral obligation to its people not to continue those in the pipeline and lead the country to shift to renewable energy. Coal is the most dirty and harmful energy. It is the number one GHG emission and the cause of global warming. All over the world,

communities living near coal plants suffer from health and environmental hazards. The Filipino communities living near these coal plants wanted all these plants stopped. They have no place to go and their history are in these places. The communities have already felt the observable impacts these plants have caused. According to the Harvard University led study on the impacts of coal plants in the Philippines on the health, the study evaluated 13 operational coal-fired power plants in the Philippines with a combined installed capacity of 3,799.10 megawatts (MW), as well as the potential impacts of plans to build 29 new coal-fired power plants with a total capacity of 11,700 MW, which could dramatically increase levels of sulfur dioxide (SO₂), nitrogen oxide (NO_x) and PM_{2.5} emissions. If the new power plants are to be developed, premature deaths may rise up to 2,410, or more than double the current number of people dying from coal-related pollution in the Philippines. Also, the fear of these coal plants becoming stranded assets will surely affect the future energy security of the country.

The Duterte Administration stands now at the crossroads of the health, environment, country's energy security and the climate crisis these coal plants will trigger. While it is true that it has inherited the coal dependent energy development program from previous administrations, yet it does not mean that he is bound to continue this ill-fated energy policy. He can do better than his predecessors. He is the most powerful official in the government today and given the people's mandate, he can extricate the Philippines from the looming doomsday if he chooses to do so. If he is truly serious that his platform serves the interest of the people, then continuous use of coal is not the answer.

[Focus on Global South](#)

On The Allies We're Not Proud Of: A

Palestinian Response to Troubling Discourse on Syria

14 October 2016

We are concerned by some of the discourse that has emerged from progressive circles with regards to the ongoing crisis in Syria. In particular, we are embarrassed by the ways in which some individuals known for their work on Palestine have failed to account for some crucial context in their analysis of Syria.

The Syrian revolution was in fact a natural response to 40 years of authoritarian rule. The Assad regime, with the support of its foreign financial and military backers, is attempting to preserve its power at the expense of the millions of Syrians whom the regime has exiled, imprisoned, and massacred. We believe that minimizing this context in any discussion of Syria dismisses the value of Syrian self-determination and undermines the legitimacy of their uprising.

We also believe that an important consequence of all foreign interventions, including those purportedly done on behalf of the uprising, has been the setback of the original demands of revolution. The revolution is a victim, not a product, of these interventions. It is imperative for any analysis of Syria to recognize this fundamental premise. We cannot erase the agency of Syrians struggling for liberation, no matter how many players are actively working against them.

Though we maintain that the phenomenon of foreign aid demands thorough critique, we are concerned by the ways in which foreign aid has been weaponized to cast suspicion on Syrian humanitarian efforts. Foreign aid is not unique to Syria; it is prevalent in Palestine as well. We reject the notion that just because an organization is receiving foreign aid, it must follow then that that

organization is partaking in some shadowy Western-backed conspiracy. Such nonsense has the effect of both undermining humanitarian efforts while simultaneously whitewashing the very crimes against humanity that necessitated the aid in the first place.

Furthermore, we object to the casual adoption of “war on terror” language. Enemies of liberation have historically used this rhetoric to target humanitarians, organizers, and community members. From Muhammad Salah to the Midwest 23 to the Holy Land Five, our community is all too familiar with the very real consequence of employing a “war on terror” framework. Therefore, we reject a discourse that perpetuates these old tactics and peddles harmful and unwarranted suspicion against Syrians.

Along these lines, it is our position that any discussion of Syria that neglects the central role of Bashar Al-Assad and his regime in the destruction of Syria directly contradicts the principles of solidarity by which we abide. We have reflected on our own tendency to heroize those who advocate on behalf of the Palestinian struggle, and we fear that some members of our community may have prioritized the celebrity status of these individuals over the respect and support we owe to those Syrians affected most directly by the war, as well as those living in the diaspora whose voices have been dismissed as they have watched their homeland be destroyed.

We will no longer entertain individuals who fail to acknowledge the immediate concerns of besieged Syrians in their analysis. Despite reaching out to some of these individuals, they have shown an unwillingness to reflect on the impact

of their analysis. We regret that we have no choice left but to cease working with these activists whom we once respected.

We would like to encourage others who are guided by similar principles to do the same.

13 October 2016

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Tasneem mujahid,
Tawfiq Mousa,
Tawfiq Kayyali,
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Yazan Meqbil,
Yousef Y,
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The political lefts in the picture

13 October 2016

1. The origins of the left

Promising beginnings

After the first world war, left reference points only really existed among a minority of the population of European origin. [52] This left was located in the extension of the European and above all French socialist tradition. In 1920, the majority of the Socialist Federation

supported the Russian Revolution and became the section of the Communist International, favouring Tunisian independence in 1921. [53]

Simultaneously, a significant number of indigenous employees began to organise in trade unions. Finding no place for themselves in the local extension of the French CGT, or in the Tunisian nationalist movement of the period, in December 1924 they founded own trade union federation, the Confédération Générale

Tunisienne du Travail (CGTT - Tunisian General Confederation of Labour), including notably dockers, and rail and tram workers. Immediately the CGTU and the Tunisian Communists gave them full support, including their spokesperson Jean-Paul Finidori. The road was opened to the development of a radical left converging references to Communism, class struggle trades unionism in the French tradition, and an embryonic Tunisian trades unionism of nationalist orientation.

But two major obstacles rapidly emerged to derail this nascent process:

- Colonial repression saw the founders of the CGTT and their French supporters thrown into prison, including the spokespersons of the CGTT and CGTU, who were then exiled.

- The abandonment of the demand for independence by the Communists, who took on the name of the Parti communiste tunisien (PCT - Tunisian Communist Party) in 1934, aligned to the turn in this area made by the French Communist Party (PCF) and the Stalinised Communist International.

A supplementary step was taken in 1945 when, in the context of the French government in which the PCF participated, the Communist leaders opposed the idea of independence, favouring instead autonomy inside the French Union. This explains why the left identifying with Communism and the national movement followed separate paths for some decades. The same was true in Egypt.

From the 1930s onwards - political leadership passes into the hands of the Neo-Destour

The party founded by Bourguiba in 1934 did not seek to break with colonialism but to reform it. [54] Nor did it seek to break with capitalism, instead hoping to introduce certain improvements. This party became hegemonic inside the national movement and most of the indigenous trade union activists joined it. In 1946 the latter founded their own trade union under the name of the Union générale tunisienne du travail (UGTT - Tunisian General Union of Labour). The latter played a decisive role in the struggle for independence and subsequently absorbed what remained of the trade union structures founded by the French. This was a major and lasting difference with Egypt where trades unionism was lastingly eradicated in the early 1950s.

It isn't astonishing in these conditions that a symbiosis existed after independence (1956) between the Neo-Destour and the trade union

movement. Thus there was an alternation of periods of cooperation and of conflict between the Destourien regime and the UGTT.

The trajectory of the Socialist and Communist parties

After independence the parties of the left were in a pitiful state.

- The members of the SFIO, who were almost all European, left Tunisia and this party disappeared,

- As for the PCT, the departure of most of its French and/or indigenous members of Jewish origin was partially compensated for by increased support from young Tunisian intellectuals.

The marginalisation of the political left facilitated the installation of an authoritarian regime. Between 1963 and 1981, Bourguiba's party was the only one authorised. The only real counterweight was the UGTT with whom the regime alternated phases of seduction and repression. The margin was then narrow for the construction of an alternative left policy.

Banned in 1963, the PCT was legalised again in 1981. It then experienced an evolution comparable to that of the former Italian Communist Party. Starting from 1993, it no longer identified with Communism but rather the centre left, and took the name of Harakat Ettajdid (Movement of Renewal). Its opportunism towards the regime continued. In 1999, the general secretary of Ettajdid said: "We maintain the best relations in the world with President Ben Ali. We have gone beyond the conception of an absolute and Manichean duality between power and opposition. Because we are dealing with a national regime which is realising great reforms, under the reforming impulse of President Ben Ali. Today we are for both support and criticism"... "I support Ben Ali, so I would never be a candidate against him, I claim my support and my participation in the national consensus, and I consider that there is no alternative to President Ben Ali". [55] It should be said that after its 2001 congress, Ettajdid took its distance from the regime and presented a candidate at the

presidential elections.

2. The emergence of radical lefts from the mid-1960s

As in Egypt, a new generation which had not really lived through the struggles for independence became active from the mid-1960s onwards. It was the product of a break with, on the one hand, Bourguibism, and on the other the PCT.

These new lefts had as a common matrix "Perspectives" which was launched in 1963. This current, born at the time of the Vietnam War and the development of the Palestinian resistance, became increasingly Maoist from 1967 onwards. After university activism, the former students began to work and some became trades unionists, in particular in teaching the banks, the post office and health sectors.

Perspectives split in the mid 1970s. Three durable currents then emerged. That led by Ahmed Néjib Chebbi broke with Maoism and gave birth in 1983 to the Rassemblement socialiste progressiste (RSP - Progressive Socialist Rally) which in 2001 became the Parti démocrate progressiste (PDP - Progressive Democratic Party) around which Al Joumhouri was constituted in 2012.

It should be noted that a small Trotskyist current initially chose to be active inside the RSP before founding the OCR (Organisation communiste révolutionnaire - Revolutionary Communist Organisation) in the 1980s. Broken by repression, this current survived from 2002 to 2011 under the form of an informal network.

The two big currents of the radical left: Watad (Patriotes démocrates - Democratic Patriots) and the PCOT

Two big currents originating from Perspectives explicitly identified with Marxism-Leninism:

- Cho'la (The Flame), which then gave birth to the Democratic Patriot (Watad) movement;

- *Al Amel Tounsi* (The Tunisian Worker), a newspaper published in Arabic from 1969 onwards, from which the PCOT (Parti communiste des ouvriers de Tunisie - Workers' Communist Party of Tunisia) emerged in 1986 - this took the name of Parti des travailleurs (Workers' Party) in July 2012.

Some divergences between these two currents were of an ideological nature, with Watad identifying with Mao's China and the PCOT with the Albania of Enver Hoxha. Other, more lasting, divergences were linked to different positions at the trade union level. In January 1978 a general strike was murderously repressed, and this was followed by a wide scale attack on the UGTT. Bourguiba arrested its general secretary, Habib Achour, then replaced him with a trusted crony, seeking to pull the federation into line.

Watad activists demanded the return of Habib Achour and fought for the resumption of trade union life on legitimate bases. They published 6 clandestine issues of the newspaper *Echaab* (The People). This courageous attitude explains to a great extent the significant weight of the Democratic Patriots inside the UGTT for some decades. [56]

Those who created the PCOT in 1986 are sometimes accused of not having acted in the same way at the time, and of having continued to work inside union structures which had been totally annexed by Bourguiba. This would be one of the reasons why the PCOT subsequently had less influence than Watad inside the UGTT.

A third divergence concerned whether or not to maintain a party political form under the dictatorship. In the 1980s, the Democratic Patriots effectively dissolved their party, hoping thus to insert themselves better in the trade union milieu and rebuild the UGTT on a clandestine basis. The current then represented by the PCOT chose rather to maintain its clandestine party structure after 1986, come what may.

In 2005, a part of Watad decided to return to the party tradition by founding the PTPD (Parti du Travail Patriotique et Démocratique - Democratic and Patriotic Party of Labour). Among its main leaders were Abderazak Hammami (who died in 2016) who moved towards the centre-left, and Mohamed Jmour, who was in 2012 among the founders of the PPDU and the Front populaire.

One of the divergences between the PTPD and the PCOT concerned the alliances the two political families had concluded during the last five years of the dictatorship. The PTPD and PCOT had separately oriented towards parties located to their right.

The PCOT worked inside the coalition of October 18, 2005 which demanded democratic rights, including the end to repression against the Islamists. This included Ennahdha, the PDP, the FDTL, and the CPR led by Moncef Marzouki. It should be recalled that in Egypt links also existed from 2001 to 2010 between the Revolutionary Socialists (Trotskyists close to the British SWP) and the Muslim Brotherhood. [57] Meanwhile the PTPD participated in the "Alliance for Citizenship and Equality" formed in 2009 with Ettajid (ex-CP) and the FDTL (social democratic). This sought to negotiate a reform of the regime with Ben Ali.

Although the radical political left managed to survive underground, it remained numerically weak and poorly structured (except for the PCOT) and marked by sectarianism. A part of this left tended to drift towards the centre, like for example a wing of the PTPD and the PSG (Parti socialiste de gauche - Left Socialist Party) which split from the PCOT in 2006 [58]

The appearance of a current identifying with social democracy

In 1994, the FDTL (Forum démocratique pour le travail et les libertés - Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties) was founded under the leadership of Moustapha Ben Jaafar, a former activist in the MDS (a split from Bourguiba's party). Legalised in 2002, the FDTL was not represented in the Assembly. It sought in vain to negotiate a reform of the

regime with Ben Ali, together with Ettajid and the PTPD. The FDTL simultaneously participated in the Coalition of October 18, 2005 with the PCOT and Ennahdha.

Before 2011, the FDTL only had observer status in the Socialist International: the official section was the PSD of Bourguiba then the RCD of Ben Ali (In Egypt, Mubarak's PND was also a member of the Socialist International!).

3. The revolution of 2011 and afterwards

The left and the new activist generation

In Egypt, the revolution was carried out by youth, and they continued to be the locomotive until July 2013. If the same was initially true in Tunisia, activists from the preceding generation quickly got involved. Many of them belonged to the left wing of the trade union and associative movement, and some were also members of left organisations.

In contrast to Egypt, a political and associative continuity stretching back several decades existed in Tunisia, to a great extent due to the protection afforded by the existence of the UGTT. Often teachers or lawyers, the leaders of the political left who had for a long time been active under the Ben Ali regime rapidly came to the forefront in 2011. They brought their capacities of analysis and organisation, but also their habits acquired from their time underground of turning inwards, sectarianism and fragmentation. In other words generational renewal proved problematic for the left, as did its feminization.

After January 14, 2011, there was an expansion of political organisations, on the radical left notably:

- A second Democratic Patriot organisation was set up around Chokri Belaïd in March 2011 (MOUPAD),

- A small Trotskyist organisation was founded in January 2011 by former OCR activists under the name Ligue

de la gauche ouvrière (LGO – Workers’ Left League).

Alliances in flux

With the installation of democratic liberties and the end of the persecution of Ennahdha the aims of the coalition constituted on October 18, 2005 by the PCOT with Ennahdha, the PDP and the FDTL were fulfilled. The break between the left forces and the Islamists was then definitive. [59]

After January 14, 2011, the dialogue with Ben Ali advocated by the “Alliance for Citizenship and Equality” coalition set up in 2009 by Ettajdid, the PTPD and the FDTL was no longer relevant, and the PTPD broke with Ettajdid and the FDTL, who participated in the transitional governments led by former Ben Ali supporters.

The disruption of these two alliances opened the way to a regrouping of the political forces who had long worked together to overthrow Ben Ali and who rejected any compromise with the remnants of the old regime. From January 20, 2011, a first attempt at regrouping was made under the name of the January 14th Front, including the PCOT, several Watad currents (including the PTPD), the LGO and several Arab nationalist organisations. In Egypt, a left regrouping also emerged following the fall of Mubarak. [60]

But after the peak reached with the fall of the second Ghannouchi government on February 27, 2011, the mobilisations dropped off. Essebsi, a former cadre of the Bourguiba regime and the early Ben Ali era, used the carrot and stick with aplomb. He notably succeeded in replacing the “National Committee for the Protection of the Revolution” with a “High Authority for the Realisation of the Objectives of the Revolution of Political Reform and Democratic Transition”. This brought together the commissions set up by the Ghannouchi governments and personalities from a wide range of political, trade union and associative networks (including the Ligue tunisienne des droits de l’Homme (Tunisian Human Rights League) and the Association tunisienne des femmes démocrates

(Tunisian Association of Democratic Women).

The January 14 Front broke up over what attitude to take towards the High Instance:

- The PCOT refused to be involved with it, saying its goal was to torpedo the National Committee for the Protection of the Revolution.

- For Watad, Mohamed Jmour (PTPD) and Chokri Belaïd (MOUPAD) participated in the High Authority.

- Simultaneously, the pendulum which had pushed the Watad forces leftwards began to swing the other way: in April- May 2011 they participated in preliminary negotiations with centre forces with a view to constituting a “modernist pole” in the elections then planned for summer. Even if this centre-left alliance project had collapsed by June, these different approaches explain to a great extent the break-up of the January 14 Front.

The tradition of sectarianism then came to the fore. Each of the main left organisations became persuaded that it would realise a breakthrough at the elections and impose its hegemony on the others. At the October 2011 elections, Chokri Belaïd and Mohamed Jmour were candidates in the same constituency!

In these October elections, Ennahdha won 41.5% of the seats with 37% of votes cast. A certain demoralisation then affected the live forces of the revolution. Left political activists who had fought for years were all the more bitter that their organisations had obtained such dreadful results.

The hard search for political independence

The need to unite faced with the violence of the Islamist offensive again pushed the left organisations to seek unity. Such a coalition would have no meaning without the participation of at least the two main currents, Watad and the PCOT, and at least some of the Arab nationalists. Several obstacles had first to be overcome, notably:

- The distrust which existed towards

Watad following their ambiguities in relation to the centre-left, as well as the accusations of bureaucratism made concerning some of their trade union leaders;

- Distrust towards the PCOT because of:

- a supposed desire to impose its hegemony, all the more so since it was the only left force having a real party tradition,

- its alliance with Ennahdha between 2005 and 2010 in the context of the October 18th Coalition,

- a trade union orientation privileging the construction of its political current to the detriment of the mass character of the trade union,

- a tendency to confuse agreement with compromise at the trade union level,

- its propensity to treat union leaders it disagreed with as bureaucrats, notably those from Watad. [61]

- its mistrust of activists identifying with authoritarian Arab nationalist governments.

- the difficulty of the main organisations in dealing with smaller forces - such as the LGO, Tunisie verte or the RAID-ATTAC association, as well as independents, on a basis of equality;

- the limited capacity of the existing organisations to allow youth and women to play a full role.

At the level of political orientation, a decisive political clarification came in summer of 2012 with the breakup of the PTPD. The left wing of the PTPD (Jmour), which rejected any alliance with Nidaa, then merged with Chokri Belaïd’s MOUPAD inside the PPDU (Parti des Patriotes démocrates unifiés – Party of United Democratic Patriots). The right wing maintained the name of PTPD and oriented towards the centre-left.

A new attempt at a left regrouping was now on the agenda. Opposing Ennahdha, while refusing also to ally with any forces originating from the old regime, most left and Arab

nationalist forces united in October 2012 to form the "Front populaire pour la réalisation des objectifs de la révolution (Popular Front for the Realisation of the Objectives of the Revolution)" whose slogan "neither Ennahdha, nor Nidaa" summed up their position. Participants included the Democratic Patriots of the PPDU, the PCOT, the LGO, two Arab nationalist organisations, the ecologist group "Tunisie verte" and RAID (Attac and Cadt in Tunisia). Some founding organisations subsequently left the Front, such as Tunisie verte, the MDS and the small Democratic Patriot current often designated under the name of Revolutionary Watad. The social democratic current Qotb joined the Front in June 2013.

The Popular Front has since October 2014 been the third biggest political force in Tunisia, with 15 deputies as against 5 previously for its constituent organisations. However, the Front only has 6.9% of deputies with 3.6% of votes in the parliamentary elections and 7.8% at the presidential vote. The situation is very different from Egypt, where the left organisations remain numerically weak and have not succeeded in building stable coalitions. After the seizure of power by the Egyptian military in summer of 2013 the left has been subjected to an intense repression which has left it with less influence than before 2011.

Since its creation, the Front has been periodically subject to the temptation of a centre left orientation of alliance with Nidaa. This was reflected after the assassination of Mohamed Brahmi by participation in a Front de salut national (FSN - National Salvation Front) alongside Nidaa during the second half of 2013, which led to great discontent inside the Front and some resignations.

Starting from January 2014, the Front renewed its initial orientation. This was reflected notably by the following successive positions:

- On January 29, 2014, the refusal of its deputies to vote confidence in the neoliberal Jomaa government which succeeded that led by Ennahdha.
- On December 11, 2014, the affirmation of the need to combat both

Nidaa and the Marzouki-Ennahdha duo in the second round of the presidential election.

- Refusal at the end of 2014 to vote for the 2015 finance law and the subsequent budget.

- Refusal in January 2015 to vote confidence in or participate in the Nidaa-Ennahdha government.

- Refusal in June 2016 to participate in the national unity government proposed by Essebsi.

But the positions of the Front are still not exempt from oscillations and ambiguities. The Front deputy Fathi Chamkhi says, for example: "There was in 2014 an intense debate inside the Front populaire around the question of electoral alliances: a part of the Front participated in the "useful vote" wave and was favourable to a broad anti-Ennahdha electoral alliance". [62]

The small social democratic current "Qotb-Le PÅ´le", which has no deputies, argued in October for a positive response to the advances of Nidaa (26). A part of the PPDU, which has four deputies, had the same position. The deputy Mongi Rahaoui said for example: "We are disposed to work with those who take into consideration the most important elements of our programme". [63] A similar debate broke out in June 2016 with Essebsi's proposal to constitute a "government of national unity". Contrary to the position of the Front, Mongi Rahoui notably stated that he wanted to become a minister in the government led by Nidaa and Ennahdha, before finally backing down.

Although from the beginning of 2014, the Popular Front has progressively returned to its initial position rejecting both the Islamist right and the right led by the remnants of the old regime, this has not been done without turbulence and tension. In late 2014, the Front had for example been close to a split: the two LGO deputies had announced in advance that they would not vote confidence in the government led by Nidaa or vote for its budget, whatever decision would be taken by the Front. In the end, Nidaa having

opted for a governmental alliance with Ennahdha, the Front was able again to decide unanimously in favour of independence from the government.

Following the defeat in August 2016 of the manoeuvre by President Essebsi seeking to have the Front participate in the government led by Nidaa and Ennahdha, an intense media campaign was launched against the Front, fed by the incessant statements of Mongi Rahoui. Despite its organisational weaknesses and its difficulty in establishing a programme, the Front is the only left political force which has a real existence. All attempts to construct a force to its left have failed.

The impasse of policies of allegiance to the dominant parties

- **The Parti du travail de Tunisie (PTT - Party of Labour of Tunisia).** This party was set up in May 2011 around two UGTT notables, Abdeljalil Bédoui and Ali Romdhane. The PTT, which proclaimed its wish to become the political extension of the UGTT, rapidly disappeared from circulation.

- **Ettajdid (subsequently Massar).** In line with its previous attitude, Ettajdid (which had succeeded the PCT in 1993) did not call on January 14, 2011 for the fall of the regime, but rather an honourable exit for Ben Ali under the form of a negotiated transition. After January 14, Ettajdid participated in the two governments of Ghannouchi, Ben Ali's former prime minister (alongside the PDP of Chebbi and the FDTL of Ben Jafaar).

After March 17, these three parties participated in the High Authority. Ettajdid then set up a "Modernist Pole" with Mustapha Ben Ahmed (a trade union official who would later join Nidaa Tounès, then split from it in December 2015), the PSG (subsequently the PS, a small rightist split from the PCOT which in 2012-2014 allied with Nidaa inside the Union pour la Tunisie), the Parti républicain (which merged in April 2012 with Chebbi's PDP to form Joumhour), Riadh Ben Fadhel (who joined the Popular Front in June 2013 with a small social democratic current, "Qotb"). Preliminary negotiations to include the PTPD and the MOUPAD broke down in June 2011. At the

elections of October 2011, the “Pôle démocratique (Democratic Pole)” elected 5 deputies then broke up in the following months.

Ettajid then launched, on April 1, 2012, a new formation called “La Voie démocratique et sociale” or “El Massar” together with a part of the PTT and independents from the “Modernist Pole”. In 2013-2014, Massar participated in the Union pour la Tunisie grouping led by Nidaa (together with the PTPD, the PSG and briefly Jomhouri). However, Massar obtained neither deputies nor ministers in October 2014.

Following the same orientation, Massar responded favourably in June 2016 to the proposal to enlarge the

coalition government led since February 2015 by Nidaa and Ennahdha (31). Massar thus finally obtained a minister in August 2016.

- **FDTL-Ettakatol**. After January 14, the FDTL became the official section of the Socialist International, following the expulsion of Ben Ali’s party on January 17, 2011. In line with its hopes in 2009-2010 of negotiating a reform of the dictatorship with Ben Ali, the FDTL participated in the two transitional governments led by Ben Ali’s former prime minister, Mohamed Ghannouchi. It then hitched itself to the wagon of Ennahdha after the latter’s victory in the elections of October 2011. The President of the FDTL-Ettakatol became president of the Assembly, and its party had some

ministers in the governments led by Ennahdha in 2012-13.

- **The disastrous balance sheet of the vassal parties**. The balance sheet of the parties who allied with one of the two dominant parties is catastrophic. The party of Marzouki (CPR) and that of Ben Jaffar (FDTL-Ettakatol) governed with Ennahdha in 2012-2013. The result was that Marzouki’s party went from having 35 deputies in October 2011 to having 4 four years later. As for Ettakatol-FDTL, it went from 20 to 0 seats. The same goes for those who allied with Nidaa (led by cadres from the old regime): the PDP-Jomhouri’s 16 deputies were reduced to one in October 2014, and the lists supported by Ettajdid-Massar went from 5 to 0.

After Years of Tragedy, Pakistan Criminalizes Honor Killings

11 October 2016, by **Abida Choudhary**

A joint session of the lower and upper houses of parliament, broadcast live on television, approved the new anti-honor killing law, removing a loophole in the existing law that allowed killers to walk free after being pardoned by family members.

"Laws are supposed to guide better behavior, not allow destructive behavior to continue with impunity," said former senator Sughra Imam, who initially put forward the bill.

Some 500 women are killed each year in Pakistan at the hands of family members over perceived damage to "honor" that can involve eloping, fraternizing with men or any other infraction against conservative values relating to women.

In most cases, the victim is a woman and the killer is a relative who escapes punishment by seeking forgiveness for the crime from family members.

Under the new law, relatives can

forgive convicts in the case of a death sentence, but they would still have to face a mandatory life sentence.

Source 6 October 2016 [Telesur](#).

Standing Up for Qandeel Baloch brutally strangled by her brother

As women we must stand up for ourselves.. As women we must stand up for each other...As women we must stand up for justice. I believe I am a modern day feminist. I believe in equality. I need not to choose what type of women should be. I don't think there is any need to label ourselves just for sake of society. I am just a

woman with free thoughts free mindset and I LOVE THE WAY I AM."

Qandeel Baloch

Today, Qandeel Baloch was brutally strangled by her brother. From Farzana Iqbal in Lahore who was stoned to death by men from her family to Jyoti Singh who was brutally gang raped in Delhi, from transgender Alisha who was shot in Peshawar to Zeenat Rafiq who was burnt alive by her family in Lahore, Qandeel Baloch joins thousands about thousands of women in Pakistan and around the world who are brutally raped, mutilated and murdered by men. [64]

Qandeel Baloch was strangled because she refused to live the life he wanted her to live. When her family forced her to marry a man she did not want to live with, she ran away with her son to find sanctuary at Darul Aman. Here, she was forced to give up her only son, and found herself alone in a society that has no place for fierce

and independent women. In a hostile world, she put herself through school and worked day and night as a bus hostess before joining an entertainment industry that, like the rest of the country, remains hostile against woman. With the money she pieced together she continued to support the family that had pushed her out, paying for her sister's wedding and her parents home.

Qandeel Baloch was a feminist who defied the patriarchy. She was punished for transgressing the gendered norms that are fundamental to a brutal patriarchal order. She had already been threatened several times before her death, and had contacted the Interior Ministry to ask for protection—this protection was never given. Instead, an unethical and irresponsible Pakistani media published personal details including her real name, and information on her former husband and child. The

information put both her child and her person at risk.

Now, the Awami Workers Party fears that the same logic that punished Qandeel Baloch for transgressing gendered norms will attempt to justify the brutality of her death in vile and misogynistic comments.

The AWP demands justice. The government enact must immediately enact stringent laws against anti-woman killings, and ensure that perpetrators do not escape justice on the pretext of the waiver or compounding of the right of qisas by the wali of the victim. As long as these laws do not exist, the AWP demands that the government exercise its discretion under Section 311 of Pakistan Penal Code to refuse such compromises in cases of categorised as 'honour killing'.

The murder of Qandeel Baloch was not

motivated by honour, but by the fragile egos and insecurities of men who fear women who refuse to listen, who demand to be seen and heard. Qandeel Baloch was killed because she did not follow directions. She refused to live within the stringent confines of a patriarchal order, where women are not allowed to step out of line. She chose to live and love, sing and dance, laugh and play, as she pleased. In her embrace of herself, without regrets, she lived the life that she wanted to live, only to be punished for being herself. In this, she was radical: Radically different, radically bold, radically political. And in this, we, the Awami Workers Party, find a comrade and a fellow feminist, and we salute her for her bravery and courage.

In Solidarity, Qandeel Baloch. Rest in Power.

16 July 2016

India on Strike

10 October 2016, by **Kunal Chattopadhyay, Soma Marik**

On September 2, 180 million Indian workers participated in a massive one-day strike that extended across the country and engaged employees in every economic sector. Likely the largest general strike in world history, it demonstrated the power of the Indian working class, which is increasingly underpaid, casualized, and unorganized.

To understand such a strike, we have to ask a number of questions, among them: how successful was it? What kind of material impact did it have on India's ruling class? What was the relationship of India's union bureaucracy to the day's actions? What about the country's fractured left? Or Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party?

More broadly, to what extent has globalization shaped Indian class

struggle and politics for the past forty years? And what are the prospects for class struggle in India in the years to come?

On the Backs of Workers

Though Rajiv Gandhi initiated India's drive to integrate with the world market in the 1980s, that integration was only publicly announced in 1991. In that sense, 2016 marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of India's globalization strategy. In this period, much has happened.

The move toward globalization "which meant, in effect, ensuring that more and more wealth flowed from the poor to the rich" could begin only after the working class suffered strategic defeats. Three major events stand out.

In 1974, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi

used considerable force to end the All India Railwaymen's Federation strike. The union's weaknesses and inadequate preparation, as well as the Communist Party of India's (CPI) limited capacity, contributed to the defeat. But, above all, the state's decision to use violence, including calling in the military and using army engineers to run the trains, broke the strike.

In 1980, Bombay textile workers mostly moved out of their older unions and formed the Mumbai Girni Kamgar Union. Datta Samant formally led the new organization, but it enjoyed far greater working-class control and participation than is typical in Indian unions. The massive textile strike lasted a year but ended in the workers' defeat.

By 1991, the Indian left found itself in

utter disarray. The restoration of capitalism in the bureaucratized workers' states and the Indian government's pro-China reaction to the Tiananmen Square violence weakened their political position. While relatively left trade unions still had strength, left parties, in sheer numerical and parliamentary terms, had very limited responses.

The largest left party — the Communist Part of Indian (Marxist) (CPI(M)) — supported neoliberal policies when they were in power in West Bengal, and were voted out in 2011. Worse, they drastically lost touch with their traditional base.

Meanwhile, the number of workers led by the Central Trade Unions (CTUs) shrank. Between 1991 and 2006, almost nine hundred thousand jobs in the nationalized sector disappeared. Compounding this, India has not delivered a meaningful increase in the number of private-sector jobs either. The National Sample Survey Office data on jobs in 2011 showed that between 2004-5 and 2009-10, only one million jobs were added. Meanwhile, the economy was growing at a record average of 8.43 percent annually, and, shockingly, 55 million people joined the labor force.

The fable of trickle-down economics stands exposed for the lie it was from the start. For example, in its 2015-16 annual report, Reliance Industries — India's largest private-sector company, which even used Prime Minister Narendra Modi's face to launch their latest mobile phone service — announced a 2.9 trillion rupee (INR) (US\$43.5 billion) annual revenue and INR 27 billion (US\$405.6 million) net profit. For comparison, in 1991-92, their net profit only reached INR 1.6 billion (US\$24 million).

The trends in employment, productivity, and wages provide a clear enough picture if we read through the jargon. The Conference Board reported that, in 2014, productivity bounced back, rising one percent that year. "The recent increase in productivity growth," it goes on, "resulted solely from an increase in output growth . . . without any improvement in employment growth, which actually dropped

slightly, from 1.9 percent in 2013 to 1.8 percent in 2014."

The report recommended that India "recommit to its structural reform agenda by improving the flexibility of the labor market and opening up more sectors of the economy to foreign direct investment" "to realize its full productivity potential."

Finally, the report mourned "a severe lack of skilled employees" which produces "wage inflation, especially among the most highly skilled" and "underscores the need for productivity improvements."

To put it more simply: productivity increased because output grew while employment went down. Further, the scarcity of skilled workers meant some had to be given relatively better wages. Improving productivity, which increases output without hiring more workers, will further de-skill workers and drive down wages.

The Workers' Demands

The nature of labor conflicts has changed significantly. In 1970, strikes outnumbered lockouts nine to one and 1.5 million workers struck. By 1990, striking workers dropped to 804,000, barely more than half the number in 1970. Person-days lost in disputes came down from 20 million in 1970 to 12 million in 1990.

Since then, the most significant development has been the general strike. Over the past twenty-five years, Indian workers have held seventeen one- or two-day walkouts. This strategy reaches above individual owners, bureaucrats, and management, targeting instead the entire ruling class.

The bourgeois media and the government tend to portray them as the work of communists. But as time passes — and as the strength of the CPI and the CPI(M) continues to decline — the red scare becomes less effective and less believable.

Since 2010, general strikes have demanded a government-set minimum wage. During the first action after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in 2014, workers demanded INR 15,000 (US\$223.87) per month.

In 2016, the demand was hiked to INR 18,000 (US\$268.64).

Calculating a six-day week, this amounts to about INR 692 (about US\$10.33) per day with four paid days off each month. Both the India National Congress (INC) and the BJP have flatly ignored these demands.

The Minimum Wages Act of 1948 calls for the government to review wages every five years, but it rarely does. The construction sector last had a revision in 2009, and agricultural minimum wages haven't changed since 2005. The unions rightly rejected the government's offer — which came just days before the strike — to hike the minimum wage to INR 9,000.

Of course, wages weren't the only thing at stake. Workers also called on the government to stabilize prices — universalizing the public distribution system and banning speculative trade in the commodity market — to generate employment, to actually enforce the existing labor laws, and to punish those who break them. Alongside improvements to their working conditions, they demanded universal social security, including INR 3,000 monthly pensions, reinvestment in the public sector, and an end to foreign direct investment in railways, insurance, and defense. They also want the government to give organized labor more power by approving new trade unions, ratifying relevant International Labour Organization conventions, and discussing labor-law amendments with trade unions before enacting them.

A survey of food consumption and prices demonstrates how urgent these issues are.

A recent study showed that, in rural India — home to 833 million people — food consumption has dropped when compared over the past four decades. "On average, compared to 1975-79, a rural Indian now consumes 550 fewer calories and 13 gm [less] protein, 5 mg [less] iron, 250 mg [less] calcium, and about 500 mg [less] vitamin A."

It's even worse for children, who consume "80 ml of milk per day

instead of the 300 ml they require." As the survey states, "[t]his data explains, in part, why 35 percent of rural men and women were found to be undernourished, and 42 percent of children were underweight."

India's response to this uncomfortable data was to shut down the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau — the only source of longitudinal data on nutrition levels and food intake across the country. Now, this sort of macro-level data will not be easily available.

Between 2004 and 2013, food prices rose 157 percent. India is the second largest producer of vegetables in the world, but vegetable prices shot up by 350 percent. Milk prices rose 119 percent, and egg prices by 124 percent.

Food inflation has averaged 8.46 percent from 2012 to 2016. India's annual consumer price inflation accelerated to a near two-year high of 5.76 percent in May of this year, driven by surging prices of food products such as pulses and sugar. This explains why price stabilization and a universal public distribution system take center stage in the current strike.

Contract Labor

Recent studies show that contract labor is on the rise in India, as it is almost everywhere else. This trend denies casualized workers most of the rights and benefits permanent workers enjoy. Indian capitalists regularly complain that inflexible labor laws hold up growth. Of course, if wages are driven down, profits will soar. (This was one Modi's major achievements as Gujarat chief minister, which recommended him to the national bourgeoisie.)

In 2013, the labor ministry estimated that contract workers made up nearly 28 percent of India's 459 million-strong workforce. A more recent survey — with samples from eighty-two companies that employ 2.12 million permanent employees and 1.08 million contract workers — showed a vast difference across sectors.

In industrial companies, contract workers now take 46 percent of the jobs. The automobile industry —

where labor unrest has been more visible in recent years — contracts out 47 percent. But that number is higher in the energy and utilities sectors — 54 percent — and in cement manufacturing — 52 percent.

In the engineering sector, Larsen and Toubro Ltd (L&T) skews the total, thanks to its size and its preference for temporary workers. If L&T is excluded, the sector only has 22 percent contract workers, but including L&T's figures pushes it up to 75 percent.

Compared to industry, the service sector has a lower ratio of contract to permanent workers. Software and financial services still have relatively high levels of regular employees — thanks to the specialized skills needed and, in the case of banking, regulatory measures. But telecom stands out: 46 percent of its workforce is casual, the same share as the industrial sector.

Even in banking, the wide use and expanded functions of ATMs — they now print passbooks and change big notes for small ones, among other things — has pushed the industry toward contract workers.

Further, the 2007–8 Economic Survey found that 93 percent of India's labor force is unorganized. According to the World Bank, India had a total workforce of 496.9 million in 2014. This means — if the unorganized sector is still 93 percent — that 462.2 million workers do not belong to unions.

This low union density shows that the recurrent general strikes come from deep dissatisfaction mounting from within the working class — and certainly not from any trade-union bureaucracy's manipulations. The Strike Itself

It would be ideal to perform a province-by-province and sector-by-sector assessment of the most recent action, but we do not have full data on that. The unions themselves hesitated to mention specific figures. Not surprising, given that, in many areas, small independent or local unions — not connected to the CTUs — organized the strike.

However, the media came up with the figure of approximately 180 million striking workers. This would make it the biggest strike in Indian, and possibly international, history.

According to the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASSOCHAM), the 2013 two-day strike cost INR 260 trillion (US\$4.8 billion). ASSOCHAM estimated that this general strike would lead to INR 180 trillion (US\$2.7 billion, considering the fluctuating exchange rate) in lost revenue.

In some sectors, the strike was a thumping success. Banks and other financial institutions saw a complete shutdown. One estimate suggested some 500,000 bank employees went on strike, affecting transactions worth INR 150 trillion. Resistance from bank employees has been a vital element in slowing down privatization in that sector.

Coal and other mines also showed a considerable degree of success in the strike, although much of the worker's activity was shut down. Newspaper reports indicate that the Communist Party of India (Maoist) — which is quite active in the Dhanbad region — worked alongside traditional unions to promote the strike effort.

Actions spread across every province. In Gujarat, around 70,000 workers from anganwadis (rural healthcare centers) and accredited social health workers (ASHAs), most of them unorganized, joined the strike. Thousands participated in the demonstrations held at district headquarters.

Port workers in Bhavnagar (Gujarat), Gangavaram, and Kakinada (both in Andhra Pradesh) dropped their tools. Once again, these workers did not belong to any of the CTUs.

In Kerala, harbors and all industries were affected. In Karnataka, an estimated 5 million workers participated, and in the cities of Bengaluru and Mysore, the transport sector strike was total. In Bengaluru alone, 1.9 million workers joined the strike.

Haryana had huge participation and

repression to match. On August 13, the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union, which has been a militant section of the working class for many years now, gave management a strike notice.

The state responded quickly. Khushi Ram, a former Maruti worker who is now a member of Workers' Solidarity Center, which organizes automobile workers in the region, said, "We reached Manesar very early to start campaigning for the general strike but the police detained us six hours." They were distributing pamphlets for the national strike. The police took thirteen workers and union leaders into detention before 7 AM.

An estimated 1,500 automobile units including large manufacturers like Hero Motorcorp and Honda as well as smaller vendor companies in Manesar, Bawal, and Dharuhera were also affected by the strike.

The strike wasn't total everywhere. In Neemrana, Rajasthan, home to a Japanese manufacturing zone, 450 permanent workers at an air conditioner factory walked out. Manmohan, a former worker dismissed after an agitation in 2015 explained that "only the permanent workers in the plant were able to come out. . . , but nearly 2,000 workers who are on short term contracts could not, as they feared the repercussions."

In Telangana, the Telangana Rashtra Samithi Party-affiliated union joined the strike, and the labor wing of the ruling Telugu Desam Party (TDP) supported the strike.

The party, however, did not sign off on the action in in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh but worker-members joined anyway. In these two states, in fact, the strike was extensive, including even the transportation sector.

The transport strike in several cities and towns in Madhya Pradesh which is BJP controlled was total. Traditional markets also participated, affecting commercial transactions.

In many Maharashtra cities including Pune, Aurangabad, Nagpur, Nasik, Solapur, and Mumbai strike

participation was high, shuttering companies like Ceat Ltd, ThyssenKrupp, Samsonite India, Crompton Greaves, and disrupting the pharmaceutical, liquor, and textile industries. The strike was total among beedi and power loom workers in Solapur.

In Odisha, iron, manganese, and coal mine workers put on a total strike. Their casualized comrades also participated en masse. Road transport including auto-rickshaws was totally paralyzed.

In Punjab, road transport as well as a number of other industries remained shut. Unorganized workers participated in the thousands.

In Tamil Nadu, the ruling All Indian Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam Party (AIADMK) tried to use force to break the strike, but workers disrupted the Tiruppur garment industry. Coimbatore's heavy industry in both the private and the public sector was also affected.

Government employees nationwide had issued strike notices. A significant number of state government employees in the northeastern states including Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Meghalaya participated. Central government employees income tax employees and postal employees in particular also joined. Defense employees in several production units took part. Employees of the state-owned telecom company BSNL walked out, too.

In West Bengal, the rabidly anti-communist Trinamool Congress government led by Mamata Banerjee went flat out to stop the workers. They declared the strike a bandh, taking advantage of a legal technicality that makes bandhs illegal. The government also issued a notice that, except for specific reasons like illness or bereavement, no worker was allowed to be absent. The order included the workdays surrounding the strike as well. That this was intended to break the strike became obvious when the government granted extra leave for all workers who had attended on September 2. All over West Bengal, some two hundred people were

arrested, including the CPI(M) mayor of Siliguri Municipal Corporation.

One sector that drew back this time was education. In the past, teachers have taken part seriously, and with good reason. At all levels, full-time jobs have disappeared, and contract teachers "overworked and underpaid" have increased.

However, teachers' associations have been steadily moving away from militant struggle. Many of college and university associations are led by full-time faculty, who are well paid and are looking forward to the University Grants' Commissions announcement, which will raise starting wages to INR 50,000 (US\$746) per month. The highest ranking teacher can earn INR 200,000 (just under US\$3,000) per month. Meanwhile, part-time and guest faculty are paid as little as INR 4000 (US\$59.70) per month for teaching eight to ten classes each week.

Notions of gentility "we are not a trade union" and bureaucracy kept the academic sector from committing to the action; they only filed a formal strike notice. The biggest college teachers association in West Bengal and one of the backbones of the All India Federation, the West Bengal College and University Teachers Association, reported that only seventy-seven teachers formally took part in the strike. A large number did not work that day, but used ruses like medical or vacation leave.

Women Workers

Globalization has had a serious impact on women workers. They have experienced four apparently contradictory trends: a simultaneous increase in paid labor, underpaid labor, unpaid labor, and open unemployment.

Further, the drive for cheap labor has meant that even in the formal sector labor laws are seldom applied equally. The minimum wage fixed by the government is already abysmally low, but bribes to factory inspectors, or threats to close down factories, often ensure that employers can pay women even less.

Nurseries required by the 1987

Factories Act “ are often not maintained. In fact, the law needs serious reconsideration: it requires nurseries in workplaces with thirty female workers. Activists demand that this be changed to thirty employees, regardless of gender. The law also exempts the service sector from providing nurseries. Both nurseries’ absence and the insistence that they only appear in women’s workplace have obvious gender implications.

The 1976 Equal Remuneration Act is also often ignored. Women tend to suffer from pay differentials in numerous forms. Due to worse access to education and consequently fewer skills, women often end up in lower-paid jobs. In some cases, formal job designations produce legal wages gaps. But in the informal sector, a straightforward pay differential still exists.

Especially in Indian manufacturing, women work in the lowest paid and most vulnerable sectors. Between 1999 and 2005, women took 3.7 million of the 9.7 million new jobs, mostly in export-oriented sectors like garment making. However, starting in 2009, India’s manufacturing sector suffered from a variety of problems, including power shortages and an export slowdown. Between 2005 and 2010, 3.7 million manufacturing jobs disappeared, taking back the gains of the previous decade. More than 80 percent of those who lost their jobs were women.

The urban sector has seen growth in women’s employment, and this was initially hailed as a step towards equality. But, as disaggregation showed, this growth was fueled above all by increases in domestic service “ maids, cooks, and cleaners: hardly the most desirable or dynamic forms of work. These jobs accounted for 3 million more urban women workers in the period 1999 to 2005, far exceeding the increase in garments, leather, and IT-enabled activities. All across the economy, women’s jobs tend to cluster in the lowest paid sectors.

Women who participated in the strike added their perspective, whether or not these were taken up in the CTUs’ central charters. As Amarjeet Kaur, secretary of the All India Trade Union

Congress (AITUC), said, “The demand for minimum wages, pension, and equal pay for equal work apply to all sections of workers, whether male or female. But this does have a special bearing on women, since a majority of those working are in the unorganized sector.”

We have already mentioned the 70,000 unorganized anganwadi and ASHA workers who walked off the job. Both teaching and non-teaching staff of the National Child Labour Project joined the strike in Bihar, Maharashtra, and other area. Scheme workers, such as midday meal workers, also participated. In Karnataka, these workers stated that they were earning only INR 1,000 a month and demanded an increase to at least INR 7,000.

Jayamma, the general secretary of the Karnataka State United Anganwadi Workers Association, says that most infant healthcare workers are women, and that the government privatization of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) poses a huge threat to them. She explained, “In addition to the demands of a minimum wage of INR 18,000, and a pension of INR 3,000 per month, we want the government to stop handing the ICDS scheme over to corporates and cutting down the allocation of the budget for it.”

ASHA workers in Noida, part of the National Capital Region, have been agitating for job regularization and minimum wages, but also basic respect for the work they do. “We bring pregnant women to a dispensary and ensure nutrition for newborns. We tour villages and mohallas to take government health schemes from paper to the ground. Yet, we end up facing taunts from villagers and harassment from government staff. We demand equal pay for equal work and most importantly, respect and recognition for our work,” says Asha Rani, an ASHA worker from Dankaur.

The women claim they are paid only INR 75 (US\$1.12) per day. After the birth of any child, they have to perform house calls for the next forty-two days to check the newborn’s blood pressure and weight and provide vaccinations. They said they get just

INR 250 (US\$3.73) for this. “Even the reimbursement amount is not paid on time. If the amount comes to INR 1,500 we are paid only INR 1,000. The rest goes into the pockets of the bureaucracy,” alleged Kusum, from Dankaur.

Some 1.5 million tea-garden workers took part in the strike. While a significant number of women work in these gardens, they don’t join union leadership. As an activist from the Progressive Plantation Workers Union told us, developing a gendered charter of demands, with full participation from women workers, hasn’t happened, despite a high rate of women’s participation in the actual strikes.

In Delhi, nurses timed their strike to coincide with the general strike. Government-run hospitals employ around 20,000 nurses. They added specific demands to the general strike, including a higher entry-level pay scale and higher allowances. Nurses countrywide supported these actions in Delhi. The government responded by invoking the Essential Services Maintenance Act, which declares strikes in certain services illegal and allows police to arrest strikers.

The Political Significance

Indian workers’ continued struggles help explain India’s recent political history. Many scholars have pointed out the family resemblance between the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its web of organizations “ including its electoral arm, the BJP “ and classical fascism.

Traditionally, fascism arose and was supported by the bourgeoisie only because of the working class’s extreme strength, to stop the onward march of the proletarian revolution. German and Italian fascist regimes arose in a period of revolution and counterrevolution. And, indeed, so did the RSS. But it has had to contend with decades of a functioning bourgeois democracy. The assumption that the party would not adapt to these circumstances assumes that our enemy is stupid.

Not since the postwar period has the ruling class had to fear communism. As a result, elites have not often been

keen on a fascist solution, especially with the RSS insisting on an aggressive anti-Muslim component. But, pushed out of the mainstream, the RSS developed an alternative strategy: to build a long-term mass movement and to penetrate civil society deeply.

A good part of the Indian capitalist class shares the party's brahminical and Hindutva ideology. As a result, even when marginalized, it never had a symmetrical relationship with the radical left, which was hounded, arrested, tortured, and murdered. Those points of contact also meant that, when the INC's decline began, the RSS could push itself forward as an alternative.

In 2012-14, the Indian capitalist class decided to turn to Modi and the RSS. They abandoned their historic party, the INC, because it "though committed to globalization" was failing.

The INC was in power for the major part of 1991 to 2014. We cannot ignore the INC's single-minded devotion to the ruling class. During its reign, the Indian state cared for big business through tax breaks, through the creation of special economic zones, through excise and import duty concessions.

Indian companies pay an average of 17 percent tax on their profits, less than half the rate in the West. Consumer goods for the affluent "cars, computers, air conditioners, and so on" cost less in absolute rupees than they did a decade ago inflation notwithstanding.

The dividends of INC's policies are evident in the growth of India's high net-worth individuals, whose disposable income exceeds \$1 million. Their number grew from 61,000 in 2003 to 83,000 in 2005.

At the other end, of course, is accumulating poverty, the rising prices of basic food items, housing,

education, and healthcare, especially in relation to real wages.

This resulted in working-class fight backs. Contrary to the ruling class's hopes, the left parties' weakness "their submission to neoliberal capitalism and ultra-nationalism" have not ended working-class resistance. As Indian capitalism tries to climb the global capitalist pecking order, it cannot afford to compromise with labor militancy, especially as competition from China and the 2008 financial crisis have put extra pressure on it.

This explains why a far more ruthless regime was necessary "one that would try to finish off working class organizations for good. So the decision came to anoint Modi and the BJP.

A New New Left

These struggles have revealed the complex relationship between class and class organizations and between parties and unions. Since only a small fraction of the working class belongs to unions, the largest union is actually the RSS-affiliated Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh. It, of course, did not take part in the strike.

But the participation of 180 million workers indicates that the strike went far beyond union members. In that sense, it articulated popular anger from below.

At the same time, there is no doubt that the CTUs "especially left formations like the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU, affiliated with the CPI(M)), the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC, affiliated with the CPI), and the smaller United Trade Union Congress (UTUC, affiliated with the Revolutionary Socialist Party) and United Trade Union Congress?Lanin Sarani (UTUC-LS, affiliated with Socialist Unity Centre of India)" played a pivotal role. They brought numerous unions together, chalked out the demand charter, and

campaigns sufficiently so that other unions and non-unionized workers would come and join.

But the other side of the story is that the CTUs "including the AITUC and the CITU" have clearly reached a critical stage. Unlike political parties, the CTUs are based directly on the working class and cannot afford to have it entirely atomized. Nor can they ignore the pressure of the workers altogether.

This requires a more nuanced view than the ultra-leftism that only sees treason in their work. Instead, we argue that because trade-union bureaucracies rely on workers, they cannot accept the worsening conditions and increased casualization that have been developing for the last quarter century.

At the same time, their bureaucracy makes worker identification more difficult. This often appears as local agitations that bypass union leadership, as happened in the Hukumchand Jute Mills "one of West Bengal's biggest" last year.

And in course of their struggles, workers have been compelled to form alternative unions, some of which are led by smaller parties or do not have a party affiliation. Occasionally, these develop into militant and alternative national unions, like the New Trade Union Initiative.

While none of these have created a true alternative, their fights make it possible to continue working-class struggle even as electoral figures like to suggest that the class, in the form of the old left parties, is about to vanish.

This contradiction cannot exist forever. Either all parts of the Left come together with the militant class-struggle poles emerging at the base and form a new left alternative or the radical right offensive will smash down on the working class.

Source [Jacobin](#).

Homegrown Feminism in the Caribbean

9 October 2016, by **Amilcar Sanatan**

Caribbean feminism is not an ideological import. Our feminist theorizing is grounded in analysis of the experiences and conditions of women from the struggles for freedom since the establishment of the tyranny of the plantation economy. Dr. Gabrielle Hosein, head of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies, UWI St. Augustine Unit cautions against the discursive stretching of the word "Indigenous" to make the case for a "Homegrown Caribbean Feminism." To continually use the word "Indigenous" and not take into account the real lives of Indigenous people and their material conditions is to displace them in thought and practice.

In the early phase of Trans Atlantic Slavery, there was preference for black male labor from Africa. Later, it was seen as more propitious to introduce women into colonies that reproduced the slavery system naturally. From the onset of the plantation enterprise, female reproductive capabilities were central to the profitability of the plantation economy. Black women would face the task of fighting against the racist institutional and ideological order of slavery as well as the patriarchal gender ideologies by both white males and black males.

In the post-emancipation period, immediately after 1838, planters introduced a large-scale labor population of Indians as indentured to the Caribbean. The notion that Indian indentured women operated exclusively in the sphere of the household is false. Even when women's wages in indentureship were less than men, as was the case with their African female counterparts, women were involved in agricultural labour.

As a result of the disproportionate ratio of women to men on the plantations, there was a drive to have

"the right kind woman" in later stages of indentureship. In addition, the early policy of indentureship was against family emigration because the costs associated with maintaining non-worker women and infants were seen as counterproductive. This changed in later phases and set the ground for coinciding interests of the colonial state, church and Indian men. The nuclear family with the non-earning housewife was set up as the most appropriate model of family and economic unit within a patriarchal logic.

Today, a number of young women and men are not aware of the history of Caribbean women's struggles and movement building. The gains made by the movement are not only taken for granted but are sometimes denied or taken away with little resistance since the long history behind these gains are not well taught. During the anti-colonial and independence movements there were deliberate efforts by Caribbean women writers to re-engage historical arguments that either made women invisible and/or documented them stereotypically. When all is said and done, to understand the complexity of gender in Caribbean political economy and history a deep interrogation of masculinities and femininities is required.

In secondary school text books "history, geography and social studies" while there have emerged "gender modules" and increased references to female-authored scholarship, the topics still peripheralized feminist writing and critique and mainstream androcentric thought as the body of the curriculum. The deeper problem of the issue is that there has been a "historiography of neglect" (Beckles 2011).

From the 1970s, there was an emergence of a more radical movement of women in the region.

Picking up on the mood of the times in the hemisphere and wider developing world, self-determination and national liberation were priority areas for the feminist movement. During this period, the Caribbean was seen as a society that was made up of dependent capitalist economies with a colonial condition. This unique experience of the political geography of the Caribbean led to expressed distinctions from Euro-America liberal feminism, Black feminism (based in the U.S.) and Soviet-based conceptions of women's movements.

While the Caribbean feminist movement drew upon the inspiration and strains from extra-regional feminist conceptions, a Caribbean feminist perspective was asserted. This period also witnessed powerful South-South collaboration, perhaps best encapsulated in Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, DAWN, which advocated a Marxist-feminist critique of the state while promoting the developmental state to improve the material conditions and well-being of women in the Third World. Women's arms of political parties felt the radical feminist shock when the Women's Revolutionary Socialist Movement of the PNC was established in Guyana and the Women's Auxiliary of the PNP in Jamaica.

During the 1980s, there was a series of encuentros intra-regionally building transnational feminist networks between Latin America and the Caribbean. Accounting for inclusion and committing to 'making politics work' in encuentros, (compared to the deep ideological contestations and dogma that have characterized male-led Left and socialist international conferences), the space offers an example to a younger generation of Left movement builders that non-hierarchical, coalition-based, and inclusive conferences, with all its hard work and hand wringing, sustain in

the long-run and build greater solidarity.

The ideological terrorism that ensued in the heightening of the Cold War, CIA-backed military invasion that destabilized revolutionary governments in the Caribbean and Latin America and the widespread economic crisis of the 1980s broke down civil society and social movements in ways that retrospective papers and accounts could hardly describe.

By the 1990s, there was a shift from conferences on women to conferences engaging women's perspectives on globalization, environmental crisis, development, etc. The Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995 was a significant moment in Caribbean feminist movement building where there was both strong country representation and regional

collaboration that built a number of commitments that would shape discourses and practices nationally for a decade throughout the Caribbean.

This decade also marked a shift in feminist organizing around professional NGOs whose impact and policy measurements were valued over smaller, identity-based, social movement organizations which grew very critical of the finance and decision-making structures of international development agencies. This led to some friction among some feminist networks, especially on the Left, who felt that policy advocacy and donor finance replaced social movement building and critiques of the state. While some radicals of a previous decade found their voices legitimized in higher international offices, the popular movement and conscientization that defined the

movement a decade before dwindled.

Today, feminism in the Caribbean has organized and built theory around sexual identities, Indigenous, Afro and Indo-Caribbean feminisms, critical masculinities work, women and climate change and more visibly, online blogs that build dialogue within the region and the extra-regional diaspora. Women have always been in the front seats of the Garveyite movement, traveled as widely as any Communist Party organizer or socialist builder, women knocked doors, made sandwiches and deliberated on party platforms for independence parties and women picked up the slack of the debt-ridden state in the face of IMF misery. These women in our history have been ignored, not taken seriously, and erased by deliberate strokes of the pen. This feminism is we own ting! Claim it!

Calling for an end to intervention is not nearly enough

7 October 2016, by **Joseph Daher**

For some sections of the "left" and sections of the antiwar movement in the USA and Britain, the failure of the truce is a result of the internationalisation of the war in Syria. This is explained by [British Stop the War activist Chris Nineham](#): "The central problem is the internationalisation of the war. Syria has for years been a theatre in which regional and global powers have been pursuing their geopolitical interests - prolonging and intensifying the conflict. This process has been gathering pace recently and in the run up to the worrying US election there are growing calls for further western escalation".

Anyone reading the article will notice that not a single word is said about the destructive policies of the criminal and authoritarian Assad regime - the main source of nearly half a millions

deaths in the country, forced displacement of millions inside and outside of Syria and destruction throughout the country. This is not a simple oversight and this is why, as I will show, simply calling an end to all interventions, putting them on the same level, to reach peace in Syria as stated in Nineham's text is not enough and is simply wrong.

Firstly, the truce was far from being respected by the regime and its allies. Military clashes resumed violently few days before the official end of the truce, while the delivery of humanitarian aid to besieged cities was done only sparingly for the vast majority, except in the case of the town of Talbiseh in Homs province to which aid was delivered on September 19 the first time since July. The convoy brought in food, water and hygiene supplies for up to 84,000 people. But

most aid shipments envisaged under the truce have yet to go in besieged cities. The liberated areas of Aleppo (neither under the domination of the Assad regime nor Daech or Fateh al-Sham, former Jabhat al-Nusra), in which around 275,000 residents are again subject to a terrible siege and the military bombardment of the regime and its Russian ally after a brief interruption, have for example received no aid, while this was one of the priorities in the agreement concluded between Russia and the USA in the ceasefire.

Armed opposition forces to the Assad regime, including groups of the Free Syrian Army and various Islamic fundamentalist movements, announced a few hours before the end of the ceasefire that they were preparing to launch a new military offensive to break the siege imposed

on the liberated areas of Aleppo. Syrian or Russian aircraft - it still remains to be determined who were the authors of the raid - struck an aid convoy near Aleppo between the night of September 19 and 20. According to the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), this killed around 20 civilians, including the head of one of its local offices, Omar Barakat, and damaged at least 18 of 31 trucks in a U.N. and SARC convoy along with an SARC warehouse. The convoy was delivering aid for 78,000 people in the hard-to-reach town of Urm al-Kubra in Aleppo Governorate. At least 36 civilians were killed in Aleppo and its province in Syrian or Russian raids on Monday night.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights documented the deaths of 237 people, including 38 children, from air strikes on Aleppo city and the surrounding countryside between September 19, when the ceasefire ended, and 26. Of those documented deaths, 162 were in opposition held east Aleppo city.

Russia and the Syrian regime also accused the US of undermining the continuation of the ceasefire after the U.S.-led coalition bombed Assad regime forces in Deir ez-Zor, killing more than 60 soldiers, while allowing Daech fighters to capture Mont Thourda, which dominates the airport held by the regime. US officials said it was a mistake and apologized to the families of victims. It is interesting to note that once again Chris Nihman joined this particular version by writing "One thing is for sure, the bombing of Syrian army positions around Deir ez-Zour by western coalition forces, including the US, Britain, Denmark and Australia, which led to the deaths of 60 or more Syrian soldiers, will have been a major blow to the prospects of any ceasefire holding".

The Assad regime ultimately announced officially on September 19 that the seven-day truce period had ended and it accused "terrorist groups," a term the regime uses for all opposition groups, whether peaceful or armed, of exploiting the calm to rearm while violating the ceasefire 300 times, and vowed to "continue fulfilling its national duties in fighting

terrorism in order to bring back security and stability".

These accusations are attempts to hide the continuation of the war led by the forces of the Assad regime and its allies against Syrian civilians and opposition during the week of the ceasefire. Russian and Assad's regime airstrikes took place in various areas held by the opposition during the week of the ceasefire resulting in 26 civilians killed, including 8 children. On September 18, regime airstrikes targeted the liberated districts of Aleppo killing one civilian and eleven others in the province of Deraa after dropping explosive barrels.

Meanwhile the besieged district of Waer in Homs, the last bastion of the city controlled by the opposition and in which between 60,000 and 75,000 people live, is in the process of undergoing the same fate as the town of Daraya few weeks ago. An agreement was reached with the regime to transfer some of the residents and fighters in the region of Idlib, in the hands of Fateh al-Sham (former Jabhat al-Nusra) and Ahrar Sham. Homs Governor Talal Barazi said on September 19 that the evacuation would include 22 busses transferring around 300 fighters and their families, around 1,000 people in total.

The Assad regime has several times used this strategy of local agreements with cities and / or districts besieged and continuously bombed to forcefully displaced local population opposed to the regime to leave their homes for other areas under control of the opposition. These regions such as Idlib are still suffering, from Assad's regime and Russian airstrikes and lack often the sufficient means to welcome the newcomers, not to mention the political and social pressures sometimes imposed on them by Islamic fundamentalist movements in this area.

At the political level, this ceasefire was born to fail because it did not address the political roots of the problem in Syria: the Assad regime. The agreement provided for greater military coordination between Russia and the United States in the "war against terrorism" in Syria, targeting

the jihadist groups of the Islamic State and Fateh al-Sham, by the establishment of a Joint Implementation Center. The agreement did not denounce the interventions of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hezbollah and other various Shi'a fundamentalist militias alongside the Assad regime, while it was completely silent and did not mention any political transition to a democratic system and the departure of Assad dictator and his criminal clique. This political agreement concretely actually led to stabilization of the Assad regime under the so-called pretext of the "War against terrorism" for the political interest of the USA and Russia. That is why this agreement was rejected by large sections of the democratic opposition, whether armed or peaceful.

Meanwhile, the Turkish armed forces continued their progress in the Syrian border territories and their support to armed opposition groups (factions of the Free Syrian Army, Turkmen factions, and Islamic fundamentalist movements) to impose a form of Turkish "safe zone" cleansed of Kurdish PYD forces and Daech. In the city of Jarablus, conquered during this military intervention, the Turkish armed forces were attempting to impose a Turkmen council to govern the city, instead of another council, which has been established for two years and is recognized by the temporary government and the Aleppo province council, in addition to all Jarablus constituents, according to [Mohamed al-Ali](#), head of the current Jarablus council.

At the same time, the great majority of the Syrian Kurdish political movements, including the PYD and Kurdish National Council, were angered by the recent transition plan, proposed by the opposition's High Negotiations Committee for the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, as the plan did not envision any form of federalism in post-war Syria. The High Negotiations Committee for the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces proposed the principle of administrative decentralization in managing the country's affairs. The Kurdish National Council, which is

part of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces but which has failed repeatedly to recognize Kurdish rights with this latter or the previous Syrian National Council at the 2011 Tunis Conference and at subsequent conferences in Geneva and Riyadh, stated clearly that "this document is not part of a solution, but rather a danger to a democratic, pluralistic and unified Syria guaranteeing cultural, social and political rights to all its ethnic, religious and linguistic groups". They add "Whoever reads the document notes immediately that point 1 of the "General Principles" exclusively lists the Arab culture and Islam as sources "for intellectual production and social relations". This definition clearly excludes other cultures - be they ethnic, linguistic or religious - and sets the majority culture as the leading one. [As Syrian Kurds](#), we feel repulsed by this narrow perception of the Syrian people. The similarities between this definition and the chauvinist policies under the Assad regime are undeniable".

It is true that the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces has long lost any legitimacy to represent the aspirations for democracy, social justice and equality of the Syrian revolution and revolutionaries by its alliance with dictatorships and authoritarian regimes in the region, while collaborating with sectarian and reactionary forces (Jaysh Islam) or seeking more cooperation with them (Ahrar Sham and Fateh al-Sham). Just as its corruption and promotion of neoliberal policies, and rather poor consideration for democracy, in addition to its chauvinist and racist policies against Kurdish people, objectively oppose the objectives of building of a new Syria for all Syrians without discrimination. The hope for radical and positive change relies rather in the popular organisations and local councils still struggling for the initial objectives of the revolution, which we saw notably in February in the partial ceasefire, organising mass democratic and non sectarian demonstrations throughout the country. These people still exist and still struggle.

We agree with Chris Nineham's words "The anti-war movement needs to raise its voice and demand an end to the foreign interventions that are tearing Syria apart". All international and regional imperialist interventions occurred against the interests of the Syrian people and the objectives of the revolution for democracy, social justice and equality, while often strengthening sectarian and ethnic tensions in the country. This said, the interventions of Assad allies, notably Russia and Iran, have been much more significant and destructive at all levels. And contrary to what Nineham suggests or draws as two possible conclusions of the Deir Zor incident that "either elements in the western coalition are still conducting an unreported war against the Assad regime, or their claims about the limited nature of accidental killing as a result of their bombing are complete fantasy".

This first claim can completely be ignored, the constant policy of the US and Western states has not been to change the Assad regime in Syria, but to maintain it as showed in [previous articles](#). This has been done in addition to preventing any armed assistance to democratic groups of the Free Syrian Army. So we are quite far any "unreported war against the Assad regime".

This is however not enough and responsibilities should clearly be pointed out in the war in Syria. Imperialist manoeuvres have of course to be opposed as they are against the interests of the Syrian people and have destructive consequences, but it should not be limited to this, while ignoring the role of Assad's regime, at the risk of losing the objectives of stopping the war. In in this context, the continuation of the war by the Assad regime and its allies, Russia, Iran and Hezbollah, against the Syrian people make it impossible to end the war in the current conditions. One simple example of this is the campaign against medical personnel and facilities. There have been 382 attacks on medical facilities in Syria between March 2011, when the Syrian civil war began, and June 2016, according to data collected by Physicians for

Human Rights. Of those strikes, at least 344 "or 90 percent" were conducted by Syrian government forces or Russian forces fighting on behalf of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. These forces have also killed over 700 medical personnel in Syria, according to the group's statistics.

This is why any political transition to end the war and towards a democratic system must include the departure of the dictator Assad and his clique from power, otherwise the war will continue and provoke more catastrophes in terms of human lives. In this transition, all war criminals must be held accountable for their crimes, including and firstly Bachar al-Assad and his clique as they are the main force responsible for around 500,000 deaths and the forced displacements of millions of people since the beginning of the uprising in March 2011.

The end of the war is an absolute humanitarian and political necessity. The end of the war must lead to the end of the suffering of millions of people inside and outside Syria and give them the possibility to return to their homes. The end of the war is also a political objective because it is the only way for democratic and progressive forces to reorganise and once again play a leading role in the struggle for a new Syria for all without discrimination far from the dictatorship of the criminal Assad regime and the authoritarian practices of Islamic fundamentalist forces. At the same time, there is a need to empower the democratic popular movement and FSA democratic groups upholding the objectives of the revolution and uniting the various components of the Syrian people to challenge sectarianism and racism.

We should remember the action of activist Rima Dali in April 2012 who stood in front of the Syrian Parliament in Damascus holding a banner that read, "Stop the killing. We want to build a country for all Syrians", it remains indeed a priority and very much current in the context of today.

25/09/2016

[Socialist Resistance](#)

Aiding and Abetting Apartheid

5 October 2016, by **Stephen R Shalom**

Israel has already been the world's [largest cumulative recipient](#) of US foreign aid since World War II, having received more than \$125 billion, mostly in military assistance. Rice noted that the new aid commitment comes at a time of [belt-tightening](#) across the board, with mandatory sequestrations set to return in a few years, meaning further cutbacks in needed social programs. But this is worth it, said Rice, because of the "unbreakable bond," the "ironclad bond," "the unshakable commitment" between the United States and Israel. Israel will become the first foreign country in the world to receive the new, fifth-generation stealth aircraft, the F-35, and more generally the United States will continue to guarantee Israel a qualitative military edge over all its adversaries.

Wednesday's signing ceremony was clearly a play to the Israel lobby, with American Jewish leaders prominently in attendance and [Rice mentioning](#) that the deal was also in the interests of the United States only at the very end of her remarks ("Our security is linked," and "the deal will support American jobs.")

Actually, though, Rice was right. The deal is not just an election year gift to AIPAC. For decades, Israel has served as one of the key pillars of US policy in the Middle East, along with Iran (before 1979), Saudi Arabia, and Egypt (after 1979). These have been the means by which Washington has been able to challenge radical nationalism and threats to US oil interests. Israel's counterterrorism and intelligence cooperation, its repositioning of US military materiel, and its periodic interventions in neighboring countries, have served Washington well, and arming Israel generates weapons sales to Gulf allies anxious about Iran's influence and the general tensions in the region.

In Jerusalem, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu also hailed the historic deal, trying to undercut his

[political opponents](#) who claimed that his brazen interference in US politics last year (accepting a Republican invitation to denounce Obama's Iran nuclear deal before Congress) had weakened US-Israeli relations.

In fact, Netanyahu's critics were probably right that the prime minister's antics had undermined the Israeli position. Obama promised at the time of the Iran nuclear deal that he would increase military support to Israel and the Gulf States. Under the current ten-year agreement, which runs until 2018, Israel gets \$31 billion in military aid and another \$4.4 billion in congressional allocations for missile defense. Under the new accord, Israel will get \$38 billion, but this includes the \$5 billion in missile defense funds (\$500 million per year).

The totals are not very different. But given the inflation in the cost of advanced weapons systems, the new MOU actually offers Israel less per year in real dollars than it has been receiving under the existing ten-year agreement. Moreover, under the new agreement Israel is required to agree that it will [not ask Congress for, nor accept](#), any additional aid in the next two years except in the event of war. The memorandum also [discontinues](#) a provision of the current agreement that permits Israel, alone among US aid recipients, to use up to a quarter of its US military aid for purchases from its own manufacturers "thereby subsidizing its domestic weapons industry, making Israel one of the [top ten](#) arms exporters in the world.

US military aid and technology will enable Israel to react more recklessly towards its neighbors, and this will invariably have a severely destabilizing impact on the region. (Recall how alarming the situation was in the Middle East when Israeli officials were constantly threatening to [attack Iran](#) .) As far as the

Palestinians are concerned, however, the new weaponry won't have much direct effect. After all, you don't need fifth-generation stealth technology to blow up civilian houses in the Gaza Strip. Even the missile defense technology is basically irrelevant with respect to Palestinians since, as [Norman Finkelstein](#) has shown, it was not Iron Dome that led to such minimal Israeli casualties during Operation Protective Edge "it was the primitiveness of Palestinian rockets.

But the MOU will unfortunately have a profoundly negative impact on the prospects of achieving justice in Palestine. Washington did not just promise Israel \$38 billion in aid after Netanyahu personally intruded into US politics.

The \$38 billion came after Israel has done many things "any one of which should have disqualified Israel as a recipient of US aid. Consider:

"The [Leahy laws](#)" two laws named after their sponsor, Senator Patrick Leahy "prohibit US military aid to any foreign military unit that has engaged in gross violations of human rights. In 2012 [fifteen faith leaders](#) called on Congress to condition military aid to Israel on its human rights compliance. In 2015, [eleven US faith groups](#) presented evidence of probable gross violations of human rights violations against Palestinians by Israeli security and military units. In 2016, [Leahy](#) and several Congressional colleagues asked the State Department to look into whether Israel and Egypt were in compliance with the law.

"In 2009, [Amnesty International](#) called for a cutoff of weapons to Israel because of its attacks on civilians during Operation Cast Lead. In early 2014, [Amnesty](#) urged the United States and other states to suspend weapons transfer to Israel, given that the "Trigger-happy' Israeli army

and police use reckless force in the West Bank.”

â€œ In 2004, [all fifteen judges](#) of the International Court of Justice, including the [American judge](#), declared the Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem to be illegal, and fourteen of the judges found the wall illegal. The Court held that “all States are under an obligation not to recognize the illegal situation resulting from the construction of the wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem. They are also under an obligation not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation created by such construction. It is also for all States, while respecting the United Nations Charter and international law, to see to it that any impediment, resulting from the construction of the wall, to the exercise by the Palestinian people of its right to self-determination is brought to an end.”

â€œ [Human Rights Watch](#) , in its 2016 report “Occupation, Inc.,” called on states to “Avoid offsetting the costs of Israeli government expenditures on settlements by withholding funding given to the Israeli government in an amount equivalent to its expenditures on settlements and related infrastructure in the West Bank.”

So by signing a memorandum of understanding with Israel to provide it with \$38 billion in military aid, beyond the harm of the weapons themselves, Washington was giving its financial support to Israeli behavior: to its war crimes, to its human rights violations, to its occupation, and to its settlements. It is essentially declaring that it will not hold Israel to account, that it will prevent (through its veto) the United Nations from holding Israel to account, and that it will use its economic clout to block any attempt to put economic pressure on Israel to get it to comply with international law.

These, more than any specific military transfers, ensure Israeli freedom to crush Palestinian self-determination. Obama and his administration can repeat their commitment to a two-state solution all they want, but promising Netanyahu \$38 billion just days after he announces that anyone who wants the removal of the settlements (to comply with international law) is an advocate of ethnic cleansing ([offending even the Anti-Defamation League](#)) makes clear that Washington will do nothing to actually encourage an end to the occupation.

There’s some talk that Obama might now make one last push to get Netanyahu and the Palestinian Authority to the negotiating table. But what possible leverage would Obama

have? Commit war crimes, use excessive force against peaceful demonstrators, continue dispossessing Palestinians and expanding settlements: you still get \$38 billion in military aid. The message will be lost on no one.

After Israel’s horrendous bombardment of Gaza in August 2014, a detailed needs assessment [concluded](#) that it would take \$3.875 billion for reconstruction and recovery. Donor nations pledged \$3.4 billion, but less than half of that amount has been received to date.

The World Bank estimates that discriminatory Israeli restrictions in Area C of the West Bank, most of which are directly linked to Israel’s settlement and land policies, cost the Palestinian economy [\\$3.4 billion a year](#) . So under the new memorandum every year Washington will be giving Israel military aid equivalent in value to what Israeli bombs and missiles have destroyed in Gaza and to the annual cost of Israeli settlement policy to the Palestinian economy. The irony is palpable, and the consequences for Palestinians appear grim indeed.

[Jacobin](#)

The #czarnyprotest and Monday’s women strike might be a turning point in Polish politics

3 October 2016

Aleks, what will the proposed abortion law mean for women in Poland?

Aleksandra: If the new law is implemented, it will force women to give birth regardless of threats to life and health associated with it. Women

will be forced to birth seriously malformed foetuses the lives of which will end soon after, often in great pain. The proposal will also force victims of sexual violence to give birth regardless of psychological and physical harm it will cause. This will also affect underage victims who are

not biologically ready for pregnancy.

The proposal would introduce prison sentence of up to five years for those who terminate pregnancy, including pregnant women. Cases of abortion performed to prevent “direct threat” to woman’s life would be exempt.

However, the definition of ‘direct threat’ is likely to exclude chronic illnesses such as cancer, the treatment of which would be withheld during pregnancy.

Women who miscarry will be put under additional stress by formal investigation if circumstances are deemed suspicious by the authorities. The changes would, of course, affect the report rate of rape and sexual assault.

How did this movement against the abortion law start and what are the politics like?

Aleksandra: So when the right-wing think tank Ordo Iuris proposed to curtail abortion rights back in March-April, it sparked a massive women’s movement which resulted in, among other things, the creation of a group called Gals for Gals (Dziewuchy Dziewuchom). This had been by far the biggest movement focused on women’s rights in Poland ever.

The movement seems quite ‘good’ politically. For example, it accommodates the fact that it’s not only cis-women who may need an abortion.

Mikoaj: The #czarnyprotest campaign and the black Monday strike are actions against the new anti-abortion law discussed in the parliament. The petitioning has been immense. The initiative Ratujmy Kobiety (Save the Women) gathered more than 215,000 signatures under the civic legislation project however this project was rejected by parliament initially. Arguably, the wave of support for the liberalization of the current abortion law which has been in place since 1993 is quite substantial.

What is the role of the Catholic Church in all of this?

Mikoaj: The Polish Catholic Church doesn’t have a clear stance. At first, the Polish Episcopate openly supported the new abortion law and allowed for signatures for the ban to be gathered next to churches. But today the same episcopate has declared that women shouldn’t be penalised for having an abortion. It’s

difficult to say what motivates the Church. One explanation might be that they’re afraid of people – especially young people – turning their backs on them.

Could the strike feed into other social movements or is this a single issue campaign?

Mikoaj: It’s obvious that the current protests are officially directed against the new abortion law. But many women and other individuals who post photos of themselves dressed in black or show their support online openly talk about the right to choose.

The big question will be whether the campaign against the discussed anti-abortion law will turn into a new social movement or will aid the existing movements. Will it lead to the continuation of the fight for the liberalization of the abortion law in Poland despite the rejection of the civic project submitted by the Ratujmy Kobiety initiative? These are open questions.

What has Razem’s role been in the protests? Have other political parties supported the movement?

Aleksandra: The Razem party supports the initiative in itself. However, we are trying to channel the energy and activities towards organising localised actions. It’s not just about taking a day off work for the sake of being absent.

Mikoaj: There’s an important question in regards to the relationship between social movements and political parties, not only Razem. The black protest was initiated by the Razem party. Monday’s strike was declared by individuals associated with the KOD, the Committee for the Defence of Democracy (Komitet Obrony Demokracji), an independent social movement which campaigns for civic rights and the rule of law in Poland. KOD is openly supported by parties in opposition (Platforma Obywatelska, .Nowoczesna, Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe), some of whose parliamentary members have voted for the new abortion law and rejected the civic legislation project submitted by the Ratujmy Kobiety initiative. Believe it or not, the Euro-parliamentarians of Platforma Obywatelska even dared to

vote against the petition to discuss the situation of women in Poland in European Parliament.

It’s not entirely clear what the relationship between social movements, political parties and civic initiatives looks like when it comes to the current protests. But the dynamic already reveals that the question “where do you stand in the abortion debate” will become one of the most important fault lines in the political scene in Poland. Moreover, the relationship between the extra-parliamentary opposition and political parties – especially Razem – will be renegotiated on the basis of this question.

Have any labour unions supported the movement?

Mikoaj: The labour union which is active in the campaign is a small, but very militant, union “Inicjatywa Pracownicza” (“Workers’ Initiative”). It fights for workers’ autonomy and organizes precarious workers, workers in special economic zones and others not represented by major trade unions. Although the subject of women workers’ rights isn’t present in the current campaign, the comrades from Inicjatywa Pracownicza are very conscious of the control of the female body in the reproduction of capitalist social relations. They openly support Monday’s strike.

What have you done in London to support this on-going movement?

Aleksandra: Earlier this year in April, we in Razem Londyn co-organised a demonstration outside of the Polish embassy. More than 400 people came. It was the largest Polish people’s demonstration in Britain in decades. Only far-right protests have been able to compete with that.

For the moment pro-choice initiatives and women’s groups in London have been organizing the protests here in London. This weekend there’s a lot going on. We will be attending the events as individuals because they are in support of the National Women’s Strike which Razem criticizes because not everyone can take a day off work without consequences. The lack of access to union protection, as well as

being unable to take a day off, will affect especially the poor and those in precarious jobs as well as workers in certain industries such as health care.

Who are the key actors behind the strike?

Aleksandra: They are individuals who came together after the Ordo Iuris proposal was pushed through a parliamentary committee last week.

According to statements and proclamations, they want to recreate what happened in Iceland in 1975. But the crucial difference between the strike in Iceland and the one taking place in Poland on Monday is that Icelandic unions were involved in the organising of the strike. This is not the case with the National Women's strike in Poland. Thus, many public sector workers such as nurses won't participate.

Miko?aj: One of the key actors have been young people. It is important to highlight their politicisation. In recent

elections, young people overwhelmingly voted for conservative parties, including the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) and even joined right-wing movements. One of the reasons might be a lack of any alternative or a political symbol that would have mobilized high-school and university students to get engaged in left-wing initiatives and politics. In this context, the black protest might be a huge turning point.

An independent web analysis shows that the black protest campaign, initiated by Razem, has become the largest and most effective internet-based campaign started by a political party. Estimates suggest that it might have reached up to 10 million people on social media alone.

Can this strike and protest movement potentially defeat the bill?

Miko?aj: Hopefully the result will be a greater political consciousness among

young Polish women and men and a hegemonic turn in the discussion of abortion from liberal sphere (as a "cultural issue") to the register of leftist politics (as a "social issue").

Aleksandra: It's a difficult question whether the strike will defeat the bill or be effective. It's hard to predict what will actually happen. To be honest, it's already very popular and has made a huge impact on social media. Thousands are attending, even more are interested and continue to share it.

If it is effective on a local level it might result in some incredible actions. But unfortunately I doubt that it will actually stop the bill from being passed. If anything, it may lead to some alterations in the bill itself. For instance, they may keep the possibility of accessing an abortion if a woman's life is in direct danger (and the definition of "direct danger" may change). This is important!

Source [rs21](#).

Protests against new anti-abortion law spreads

2 October 2016, by Terry Conway

On Monday October 3 there has been a call for further action:

"Black protest in defence of the right to life and health of women in Poland. We demand access to reliable sex education, contraception and effective in vitro procedures. We oppose the further tightening [of] abortion laws.

"What can you do? Rather than go to work, go [to] a demonstration. If you have to be at work or at home: Dress in black, take a picture and post [on] social media with the hashtag #BlackProtest #CzarnyProtest to show solidarity. Talk to your mother, sister, cousin, friend, colleague. Tell them about the strike and the situation in Poland."

The organisers [Dziewuchy dziewczuchom \(Wenches to wenches\)](#) believe action will take place in at least 60 places in Poland and internationally solidarity is spreading.

Below we print an article from the [Kracow Post](#) covering demonstrations opposing the new law the weekend before:

Amid September sunshine, street vendors, and a public awareness campaign for heart disease, over 1,000 Cracovians gathered on the Main Square dressed in black. They were there to protest a law advanced by the ruling PiS party which would ban all abortions.

One of ten such gatherings around the

country (and more in major cities worldwide), the demonstration, #CzarnyProtest (Black Protest), was organized by [Dziewuchy dziewczuchom \(Wenches to wenches\)](#) and drew support from a variety of anti-PiS political groups like The Committee for Defense of Democracy (Komitet Obrony Demokracji, KOD) and fledgling political party Razem (Together). The feminist organization has put together similar protests since the bill was brought to the table earlier this year by a citizens' initiative backed by the Catholic Church.

The existing law, according to a poll this week by [Newsweek Polska](#), is supported by 74% of Poles and only

permits around 2,000 legal abortions per year - in the case of a life-threatening pregnancy, a pregnancy as the result of proven rape or incest, or a seriously malformed fetus.

This PiS-backed measure, however, does away with these exceptions and threatens jail time for women who break it. Furthermore, it would make it illegal to freeze embryos or to fertilize more than one egg at a time, measures aimed at curbing in vitro fertilization - a controversial practice in the largely Catholic country.

This past week, attempts to defeat it in the Polish legislature in Warsaw were quashed, and it has been sent to committee - the final stage before adoption.

The Krakow Post spoke with a few of the attendees to get their perspective: University Psychology professor Grażyna

"This new law isn't democratic, and it doesn't treat women right," the 79-year-old says. She believes the law should remain as it is and says this isn't her first protest in support of that.

Zusia, 20: "The things that are happening in Poland right now are sick... I'm here because I don't accept it." She says the new law could make the difference between her staying in Poland or moving to Western Europe after studies.

Karol, 20: "I think women should have a choice, especially in the case of pregnancy because of rape." He supports the current law and PO, PiS' chief rival party in the Polish government.

Semi-retired Biology teacher Jacek, the 68-year-old said that he has become more active in politics since his grown children moved abroad and

he started his pension, participating in groups that support not only women's rights but also those for refugees and sexual minorities - "people who have no protection from the authorities." He feels frustrated that women in particular are targeted for prosecution by (mostly male) anti-abortion lawmakers, as if the pregnant women "were all a bunch of Virgin Marys," and accused PiS of manipulating the public's emotions for political gain. Although he identifies as Catholic, he acknowledges that some in the Church might not say so because of his liberal views. Jacek expressed a wish that the members of the young national ultra-right - "these young men with shaved head and Polish eagles on their jackets" - would better learn their history and that doing so would open their minds. About this, however, he confesses, "I am not an optimist."

25 September

[Krakow Post](#)