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Why the municipal movement must be internationalist

31 December 2016, by **Kate Shea Baird, Enric Brcena, Xavi Ferrer and Laura Roth**

The ‘municipal assault’ that’s been launched in many cities in the Spanish state over the past two years has been dizzying. Neighbourhood assemblies. Electoral programmes. Codes of ethics. Party negotiations. Crowdfunding. Electoral campaigns. Coalition deals. Offices. The streets. Administration. Achievements. Contradictions. Mistakes. Lessons learned. It would be easy to get absorbed in the daily victories and defeats if it weren’t for the turbulent global context in which we live. The Umbrella Revolution. Oxi. Refugees. Nuit Debout. Brexit. Dilma Rousseff. The peace deal in Colombia. Trump. Le Pen. As urgent as the everyday tasks in our neighbourhoods may be, the municipal movement has the responsibility to reflect on our role beyond our cities and the borders of the state.

Just over a year ago, Barcelona en Comú began to explore this question. First, in reaction to the enormous interest generated by our election victory across Europe and the rest of the world. From occupied social centres in Naples and Rome to think tanks in London and Berlin, we quickly realized that our experience had become a model of political transformation. The figure of Ada Colau, with her activist background, combined with the deeply collective process of Barcelona en Comú, and the international profile of the city of Barcelona, have captured the attention of many people who are searching for new responses to the economic and political crisis. In addition to these factors, many of the struggles of the city hall and social movements in Barcelona are also taking place in other cities. For

example, controlling mass tourism, guaranteeing the right to housing, and remunicipalizing basic services. The municipalist movement that emerged in 2014 represents, for many people, the possibility of a real alternative.

While we’ve been contacted by many organizations, it’s the exchanges we’ve had with other municipalist movements, whether they’re in government or not, which have been the most productive and inspiring. As well as sharing our goals, these movements share our ways of working. They put concrete goals above partisan interests; they focus on doing rather than sterile, theoretical debates; they communicate with everyday, emotional language; they are feminists and are working to feminize politics by prioritizing everyday practices and care work; and

they build from the bottom up, using collective intelligence. In short, the activists in municipalist movements are both radical and pragmatic; they're people with whom we want to imagine and build the future.

In this regard, in Barcelona we're mapping municipalist experiences around the world and working with them to think about how to work together and support one another. Thanks to this process, we've developed a hypothesis that seeks to put the international context in the centre of municipal debates and municipalism in the centre of global debates. And we've reached the conclusion that the way forward is to work as part of a global municipalist network.

Why a global municipalist network?

To explain this idea, it's important to underline that by 'network' we mean a way of working, rather than a formal structure. And we are not referring to an institutional network of cities. Rather, we mean a political space made up of movements and organizations that may be in government, opposition or not participate in electoral politics at all. Obviously, our city halls should work with its counterparts in other cities to achieve shared goals. The agreement between Barcelona and Paris to collaborate on the issues of tourism, public water management and historical memory is a good example of this, as are the networks of refuge cities or of local governments who oppose the TTIP. But there are still very few city halls outside of the Spanish state that are governed by political parties that share our goals and ways of working. We must create a political space so that we can work with others to challenge, with greater strength and from more areas, the democratic deficit imposed by states and markets.

If there was any doubt, the first year and a half of government of the 'Cities of Change' in Spain has shown that the capacity for local

government intervention is strongly determined by global forces and trends. We see how the rents in our city rise exorbitantly as a direct consequence of companies like Airbnb that speculate with housing, ignoring local regulations. We get ready to welcome refugees who never arrive. We try to promote the social and solidarity economies in a context of insatiable global capitalism. Given that we face adversaries who cross borders, our response must also be transnational. We must be aware that our ability to restrain the excesses of gigantic multinationals like Airbnb in Barcelona will depend on the success of struggles for the right to housing in San Francisco, Amsterdam, New York and Berlin.

At the same time, the collapse of social democratic parties and the inability of the traditional left to reinvent itself are opening up a political vacuum in Europe. If bottom up, feminist and radically democratic movements like our own don't step up to the plate to occupy and organize this space, others will do so. The macho, intellectual left will try to appropriate the symbolic capital of bottom up processes without adopting the practices that define us. Or, what's even worse and more likely, it will be the authoritarian far right that will capitalize on this opportunity, using its discriminatory and racist conceptions of sovereignty and 'the people'. Yet, at the risk of being provocative, the slogan 'Take Back Control' of the Brexit campaign or the 'Forgotten Man' of Trump are not concepts so far removed from the 'Real Democracy' of the indignados or the '99%' of Occupy: all speak to the desire for a break with the political Establishment and an unfair economic system. The fact is that framing these desires using the nation-state makes it easier for racist and xenophobic ideas to become attached to them. Whereas locating sovereignties at local level makes this association more difficult and opens up other possibilities. Cities are diverse, places of meeting and cultural exchange; and if political and economic alternatives are constructed at local level, based on neighbourhood, rather than ethnic, identities, through face-to-face interaction, we can create a space of

trust in which our rights don't depend on our origins.

Ideas for global municipalist action

Once we set ourselves this challenge, the question becomes: what to do? We've identified four areas of action. The first is related to strengthening the idea of municipalism through communication and training. In order to internationalize our movement, we have to communicate with the rest of the world, explaining our values and practices and the policies that are being implemented by our city hall. This means producing materials in different languages for an international public, as we do through our weekly Facebook posts?#InternationalSundays -, our international Twitter account?@BComuGlobal?and our municipalist guide. But we also have to introduce the international context within our organizations through debates and workshops that involve our neighbourhood assemblies, committees and policy groups in global debates.

The second area of action is that of strengthening the network itself. The more we are and the greater the capacities of each node of the network, the stronger we will be. So, we must continue to find movements similar to our own, get to know them, and build trust. The citizen municipal platforms in the Spanish state, with our organizational and institutional experience, can be especially useful in this process: our lessons learned (both our good moves and our mistakes) can help others who are considering setting off on the same path.

The third area of action is policy-based. As municipalist movements we share priorities in areas relating to local democracy and urban life, such as the right to housing, the use of public space, the management of the commons. We can harness our knowledge by learning from one another, reflecting together and develop shared strategies on these issues.

Finally, perhaps the most important action for a political network is that of providing political support, both to celebrate our achievements and express solidarity in difficult times. In this regard, Barcelona en Comú has already given support to the struggle against urban speculation in Belgrade, to detained Kurdish mayors and to the No campaign in the Italian referendum; in all three cases at the request of our municipal contacts on the ground.

It is true that we already have a lot of

battles to fight, and that adding the international dimension requires an important investment of time and energy. But there is a lifeline: internationalism is a powerful motivator. Today, over 70 activists participate in the International Committee of Barcelona en Comú, many of whom have signed up in the last few months. There is no doubt that our activists are dyed-in-the-wool internationalists; they know that we can't shy away from the responsibility we took on when we stood for

election. For good or for ill, we're the focus of international attention. In the face of those who have an interest in the failure of our project, there are many more who want, and need, us to show that a democratic alternative is possible. Our example can and must serve to motivate other municipalist movements to take the step to build, from the bottom up, an unstoppable global revolution.

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Fighting Back for Survival

30 December 2016, by [Against the Current](#)

Instead of the widely anticipated result, which for progressive hopes would have been dismal enough – the stagnant neoliberalism of a Hillary Clinton administration – a con man with a well-earned frightening reputation, uniquely unfit to hold any responsible office, will now assume power on January 20 as probably the most reviled incoming U.S. president in history. The shock waves from the electoral result continue to reverberate, if anything magnified by the bestiary lining up for Cabinet and high-level White House appointments and the prospective rightwing packing of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Drain the swamp? Trump's actually digging a deeper Wall Street-military-corporate cesspool. If one appointment is representative of the lot, it would be Secretary of Education nominee billionaire-heiress Betsy DeVos – a voucher-and-charter-school lobbyist and the architect of Michigan's empire of disastrously failing charters, whose only connection to public education or the teaching profession is her commitment to destroying both.

Contrary to premature and superficial prophecies of its demise, the Republican Party will control the presidency and both houses of Congress. What does this portend in a

new period where, in fact, both corporate parties find themselves in low-level internal civil wars, where regional wars are raging across the world – and where capital is at war against nature itself, with incipient mass extinction as planetary collateral damage?

First, what happened? The result is in part a fluke, but also the culmination of certain trends both internationally – including Brexit and a rightwing nationalist tide in much of Europe – and in the United States. Even if the voters favored Clinton over Trump by a pretty substantial margin of close to two percent, the Democrats got smashed in areas they once dominated – swamped by a revolt against the neoliberal, free-trade “new economic order” to which the Clinton-Obama-Pelosi leadership attached itself.

Second, on a closer look, it's highly dubious to call the election a “populist working class revolt.” As Kim Moody's analysis in this issue of *Against the Current* shows, it's much more an uprising of the affluent. (See other election articles in this issue.)

Nonetheless, in those closely fought battleground states that produced the Electoral College result, a declining overall working-class vote and a swing by white workers were decisive

factors. A New York Times post-mortem analysis concisely nailed how the Hillary Clinton Democrats managed to lose:

“(A)s the dust settled, Democrats recognized two central problems of Mrs. Clinton's flawed candidacy: Her decades in Washington and the paid speeches she delivered to financial institutions left her unable to tap into the anti-establishment and anti-Wall Street rage. And she ceded the white working-class voters who backed Mr. Clinton in 1992. Though she would never have won this demographic, her husband insisted that her campaign aides do more to try to cut into Mr. Trump's support with these voters. They declined, reasoning that she was better off targeting college educated suburban voters...” (Amy Chozick, “Clinton's Campaign of Hopes and Missteps,” NYT special section Election 2016, November 10, P1.)

There's one point to add. Beyond the fact that the Democratic neoliberals saw no need to address much of the working class – white, Black or Latino – is the reality that they have nothing to say to workers whose jobs, communities and lives have been damaged by industrial flight and deteriorating wages and job security. Donald Trump had something to say to

them: We'll bring back those jobs by cancelling "bad trade deals" and building that "big, beautiful wall" to keep out those Mexicans.

It was both racist and pseudo-populist, of course. These promises, despite the sound and fury over "saving" those several hundred Carrier jobs in Indiana with a big tax giveaway, are a "huge" fraud that can't and won't be kept. The Trump/Republican game plan is to make those folks feel "great" about being white again, even while their real lives continue to stagnate.

How they will respond when their expectations are betrayed — whether by turning against Trump as the fraudster he is, or becoming more virulently nationalist and racist — is one of the great open questions of the new period. Precisely because the Democrats' abandonment of working people's concerns is one of the main tendencies that have come to fruition in this election, it's up to the independent left and social movements to present an alternative.

Rightwing Agendas

Both parties are sorting themselves out after this election. The Obama/Clinton/Pelosi Democratic "center" is mobilizing to ward off the "progressive" challenge for control of the Democratic National Committee, while much of the Bernie Sanders movement's leadership undertakes the perennial, ever-failing crusade to turn the Democrats into a "people's party."

On the Republican side, the internal divisions are actually greater — and it was the GOP, after all, which was supposed to be going into crisis in the wake of Trump's hostile takeover. Relations between the "Trump party" and Republican establishment will remain tense, but the advantages that power confers will help bridge them at least for a while. That's why the comforting conventional platitude that the responsibilities of government should "moderate" the party's hard-right edge is more likely to prove radically false in this case.

Tactically, to be sure, the need to

"replace" and not merely "repeal Obamacare" means that the Affordable Care Act probably won't disappear all at once. But on the whole, the Republicans will not be gradualist. A set of overlapping reactionary agendas, even if partly contradictory, will be pursued with all the more vigor since the ideologues in power know that these next few years might be the only chance to ram them through. Those disparate elements of the Republican coalition — Wall Street and big business, the religious right, and the extreme racist-nationalist elements — can hold together only while each of them feel they're getting something from the new dispensation.

Paul Ryan's scheme to enact huge tax cuts to benefit the rich, and to starve and wipe out most of Social Security and Medicare, is definitely on the table even though Trump promised not to touch these programs. That such tax-cutting policies, to say nothing of the promised massive increases in military spending, would balloon the budget deficit and cause ultimate economic damage as well as absolute social disaster, is a problem to be cleaned up down the road — perhaps when neoliberal Democrats next take over, according to the usual alternating pattern. A national "right to work" assault is also pending.

As these measures hit some of Trump's own working-class voters, the Republicans meanwhile need to consolidate their 2016 electoral good fortune by permanently tilting the scales against Black and Latino voters. Jeff Sessions' nomination for Attorney General means a Justice Department hostile to the Voting Rights Act, which can be effectively dismantled through all of the Grand Theft Election voter-suppression and gerrymandering techniques perfected in rightwing state legislatures.

The same goes for women's right to choose, as states' assault on abortion will now be abetted by the federal government and ultimately, quite likely, the Supreme Court. Heavily militarized police forces — a product of both the George W. Bush and Obama administrations — will be further emboldened to smash protests and racially profile civilians. The

election result has also encouraged the extreme racist "Alt-Right" to emerge from its hole, as Angela Dillard's discussion of events at the University of Michigan shows.

The very idea of "registering" Muslim residents smacks of classic fascist technique. The wave of fear sweeping through immigrant communities will intensify, whether or not mass workplace raids and deportations materialize. One hopeful sign is the open statements of refusal by several large city administrations to cooperate in such atrocities — both as an act of principle and a defense of their own economies that (notably in the case of New York City) are already threatened as people hunker down and stop spending.

Imperial Contradictions

Global strategy is trickier as it involves imperial dilemmas, real risks and potential conflict with adversaries that can actually fight back. Trump's boastful pledge to "smash ISIS and take their oil" (as if it were "theirs" or "ours" to take) is likely to produce little more than a continuation of president Obama's drones-and-special-forces strategy. The new president's peculiar elective affinity with the likes of Vladimir Putin is a wild card that troubles some militarist conservatives even as it sits well with more neo-isolationist America-First types.

For the Palestinian people, as bad as the Obama presidency has proven to be, the Trump and rightwing ascendancy will be even worse. The U.S. election result has emboldened the Netanyahu government and the even more extremist Klan-type Israeli settler forces.

There are open questions. Would Trump really "tear up" the crucially important nuclear deal with Iran, sabotaging the United States' main strategic allies — Britain, France and Germany — and pushing the Iranian regime into the protective embrace of Russia? If motivated by the interests of American business, would he want to mess up the commercial aircraft industry's sales opportunities in Iran (or for that matter, the already

lucrative opportunities for business with Cuba)?

No one knows what, if anything, Donald Trump actually believes about any of these issues, or whether he'll be driven by profit or ideology. It may be best to avoid further speculation at the moment, except to say that all those wars that president Obama inherited from George W. Bush, and the new ones that he entered, will rage on under the new administration.

Bitter Neoliberal Legacy

It is still difficult, and will remain so for some time, to grasp the concept: President. Donald. Trump. The anachronistic peculiar institution of the Electoral College has played a particularly nasty trick this time – and we are in the midst of a political upheaval that will reverberate for many years. Although we can't yet

know whether this reality will turn out to be problematic for U.S. capital, it will certainly be brutal for the working class, oppressed and immigrant communities, women and civil rights.

Resistance is critical – and it's underway. The flood of contributions to Planned Parenthood and the American Civil Liberties Union, the upsurge of people (many from the Sanders upsurge) signing up with socialist groups, the flood of activist volunteers heading to Standing Rock – all these are among the positive signs.

But amidst the horror over Trump, it would be remiss to overlook the pernicious role played by the present administration in paving the road to reaction. When Barack Obama took office eight years and so many broken dreams ago, who thought that the Guantanamo prison, which he announced on his first day would be closed, would remain open so that a Republican president could plan to

expand it and revive waterboarding “and much worse” torture?

Who imagined then his deportation practices would be so vast that the new president will be hard-pressed to match them? Or that after 15 years in Afghanistan and 13 years after the invasion of Iraq, the U.S. military would remain deeply entangled in both, with no end in sight?

A proper assessment of the Obama presidential era requires a separate treatment, but as we head into a period of escalating reaction and confrontation, it would be wise not to become overly nostalgic for it. There can be, in any case, no going back. The truly sinister menace that Donald Trump represents will be defeated by defiance and mass action, by movements in the streets and by a vibrant genuinely progressive political agenda, not by the resuscitation of a dying Democratic neoliberalism.

[Against the Current](#)

Canada's State of Reconciliation

28 December 2016, by **Gayatri Kumar**

Many non-Indigenous Canadians have stood in solidarity with Indigenous peoples at marches and rallies organized across the country – Manitoba, Montreal, Hamilton, Toronto – to protest the pipeline and the major Canadian banks financing it: TD subsidiary TD Securities has given a project-level loan of \$360 million to the pipeline, while RBC and Scotia Bank finance the Energy Transfer family companies. [1] (Canadian energy company Enbridge is also directly financing the Dakota Access Pipeline.)

The Treaty Alliance Against Tar Sands Expansion – an alliance of 85 First Nations and Tribes from all over the North American continent, including the Standing Rock Sioux – has pledged to stop the expansion of the tar sands through all proposed pipeline, tanker and rail projects

through their lands and waters.

This includes the proposed Kinder Morgan Transmountain pipeline in British Columbia, which the Liberal government has just approved along with Enbridge Line 3; as well as Energy East; Northern Gateway which the government has rejected; and Keystone XL which was rejected by the Obama administration but may be revived under Trump. [2]

Ambiguities of “Reconciliation”

In 2017, Canada will mark the 150th anniversary of confederation. As part of its sesquicentennial celebrations, the government is funding a few national initiatives on reconciliation with First Nations as signature

projects. The 4Rs Youth Movement: Possible Canadas and Reconciliation in Action: A National Engagement Strategy are both Indigenous-led initiatives focused on creating cross-cultural dialogue.

The Toronto District School Board now requires all schools to start their day with a land acknowledgement, and the province of Ontario marked its first ever Treaties Week from November 6 to 12, to raise awareness of treaty obligations and offer teachers a recurring opportunity to plan lessons around the history and importance thereof. [3]

On the surface, the Canadian government's reconciliation process seems to be making strides in the right direction. One of the aims of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was to make the horrors of the

residential school system [which generations of Native children were forced to attend after being taken from their families â€” ed.] a matter of public record, and the conversation among the non-Indigenous population finally seems to be pivoting.

Gord Downie, frontman of a hugely popular band The Tragically Hip and an artist with a massive following who's battling terminal brain cancer, is dedicating his last days to promoting reconciliation. Downie's latest solo album "The Secret Path" is dedicated to Chanie Wenjack, a 12-year-old boy who ran away from residential school in Kenora, Ontario, only to meet a tragic end hundreds of kilometers from his home.

Downie is not the first artist to work in the space of reconciliation â€” Indigenous artists have been tackling the issue for years â€” but he is, as Jesse Wente points out, the one most likely to reach the largest number of people, and consequently foster an increased interest in the work of Indigenous artists and activists. [4]

But as of September 30, 2016, 94 First Nations communities in Canada have been under 139 drinking water advisories. [5] Some, like Neskantaga in northern Ontario, have been under boil-water advisories for upwards of 20 years.

The announcement of the "historic" federal budget in March was met with disappointment by Indigenous leaders, who once again saw the chronic underfunding of First Nations, M tis and Inuit housing and infrastructure projects, education, language revitalization, healthcare and child welfare. [6]

Across the country â€” in Newfoundland, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia â€” Indigenous communities have been protesting the government's support for energy projects that will leave devastating environmental impacts in their wake. Grassy Narrows First Nation is still fighting to have mercury cleaned up from its river; after the Dryden Chemical Company dumped poisonous waste into the waters in the 1960s and â€”70s more than 90% of the population now exhibit signs of

mercury poisoning. [7]

Attawapiskat First Nation in northern Ontario was forced to declare a state of emergency in April after a spate of suicide attempts in the community â€” over 100 attempts since September 2015. All this, then, is the state of reconciliation today â€” driven by state interests, riven with contradiction, and slow to effect systemic change.

Nation-to-Nation

In the October 2015 election, Justin Trudeau's Liberal party ran on a platform that promised "a renewed nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous peoples, based on recognition, rights, respect, co-operation and partnership."

The Liberals also pledged to implement all 94 calls to action in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, starting with the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which the report sees as crucial to the work of reconciliation: "The Commission is convinced that a refusal to respect the rights and remedies in the Declaration will serve to further aggravate the legacy of residential schools, and will constitute a barrier to progress towards reconciliation." (TRC Report, 137)

What then would a renewed nation-to-nation relationship entail? It's worth unpacking the meanings and constraints of sovereignty, a legal-political concept most closely associated with nation-states.

The executive summary of the TRC's report returns time and again to two sets of legal principles that should form the basis of the Canadian state's relationship with Indigenous nations: the treaty rights of Indigenous people and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). The treaties made between the settler colonial powers, Britain and then Canada, starting in the late 18th century have become central to ongoing land claims as well as the question of reconciliation.

Treaty-making as it relates to the Canadian state stretches back to the Royal Proclamation of 1763, when the British empire, realizing that the colonization of Canada west of the Great Lakes would entail expensive military expeditions, decided instead to make agreements â€” treaties â€” with Indigenous peoples.

For a brief period before the onslaught of European settlers, treaties represented a recognition of Indigenous nationhood and sovereignty, and honoring of a longstanding feature of Indigenous social and political systems.

Treaty-making was already a well-established historical practice among Indigenous nations; Anishinaabe scholar and professor Hayden King writes that "[a] treaty is not merely a document. Certainly not to First Nations. Treaty is a practice. A practice that endures over time." [8]

Activist and scholar Chelsea Vowel speaks of the need to move away from a rights-based framework toward a framework of "reciprocal obligation" in understanding what it means to live as treaty people. [9]

Treaties also did not entail cession of indigenous lands; the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet in Nova Scotia, for instance, made Treaties of Peace and Friendship with settler authorities which maintained their title to the land as well as rights to trade, hunt and fish. [10]

Treaties, and the framework of mutual obligation within which they function, are a challenge to the settler colonial legal system â€” they offer a way to highlight Indigenous sovereignty on Indigenous terms, without bowing to Canadian law.

The British empire, and later the Dominion of Canada following confederation, both tended to treat treaties as mere transactions at best, an exchange of money for land, eschewing any understanding of treaties as long-standing agreements of mutual support, obligation and friendship.

No "transactional" understanding of treaty-making, however, could

encompass the brutal and systematic attempts at eradicating Indigenous peoples through residential schools, relocation and legislation; these were and continue to be a violation of treaty rights.

Fighting for Rights and Justice

The Royal Proclamation, and the numbered treaties that followed, are undoubtedly colonial instruments “documents that acknowledge the rights of Indigenous peoples to their lands, but often with the intent of eventually purchasing or otherwise taking over the land for colonial interests.

Many Indigenous scholars have made the point that First Nations do not need a Royal Proclamation to recognize their claim to the land; yet the realities of appealing for justice in a settler colonial context have made appeals to Canadian law unavoidable and even necessary.

When the Canadian constitution was repatriated in 1982 [i.e. freed from the vestiges of British control, a process involving a struggle over Quebec’s political status in confederation “ed.], several Indigenous activists fought to have Aboriginal title to land recognized in the constitution. Section 35 of the Canadian constitution now recognizes existing Aboriginal rights, although it does not define the substantive content of those rights.

Indigenous peoples have fought to have the contents of these rights recognized in Canadian courts, with varying degrees of success. In *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* in 1997, the Supreme Court refused to rule on the issue of land ownership but made several statements acknowledging the responsibility of the Crown to consult with First Nations on issues concerning “Crown” land.

In *R v. Marshall* in 1999, Donald Marshall, a Mi’kmaq man, successfully argued that treaty rights exempted him from fisheries regulations. [11] The court later clarified its ruling to state that treaty rights did not extend to all natural resources, and that the government could restrict these rights “in the interest of conservation.” [12]

More recently, the Federal Court of Appeal overturned the previous (Conŀservative) Harper government’s approval of Enbridge’s Northern Gateway pipeline, citing lack of adequate consultation with Indigenous peoples. [13]

On the whole, however, it has been difficult to insist upon treaty rights in Canadian courts, or to pursue justice through the courts for indigenous women who have been abused by the Canadian police. Moreover, recourse to the settler legal system continues to treat Indigenous communities as “wards” of the Canadian state, reinforcing the colonial paternalism of the state.

The tension between demanding justice from the institutions of the state and questioning the legitimacy of those very institutions is reconciliation today writ large.

A Renewed Relationship Needed

A renewed nation-to-nation relationship would free Indigenous communities of their reliance on the Canadian legal system by respecting their rights to self-determination and sovereign governance, including reinstatement of Indigenous systems of law and recognition of treaty rights, often including the right to derive economic benefits from the land and make decisions concerning education

and healthcare.

While the language of negotiating nation to nation is undeniably important, it cannot resolve the question of power that looms over the discussion. Indigenous peoples are contending with a state apparatus that has been responsible for the destruction of their systems of law and governance, and the decimation of complex societies. What might self-determination and autonomous governance look like when the Canadian state delimits the structural conditions within which this can happen?

When the Liberal government promised to adopt the principles of the UNDRIP into law, it seemed that the “free, prior and informed consent” of First Nations to decisions concerning their land “which would amount to the right to veto government initiatives “would be enshrined in Canadian law. But in July, the Liberal government reneged on its election promise of adapting the UNDRIP into law, with Minister of Justice Jody Wilson-Raybould asserting that the implementation of the 42 principles would be “unworkable.”

As things stand, the Trudeau government continues to approve controversial development projects across the country in direct contravention of the demands of Indigenous communities. The government has issued construction permits to the Site C dam in British Columbia, the Nalcor Energy dam project in Labrador, the LNG pipeline in BC, Enbridge Line 9 carrying crude from Alberta to Montreal “the list goes on.

As Mi’kmaq lawyer and activist Pamela Palmater noted in a recent piece for the Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives, the Canadian government still assumes that it can make a unilateral decision regarding the fate of unceded Indigenous lands; it cannot legally do so.

“More than resisting, the left must re-exist”

27 December 2016, by Francisco Louçã, Marcelo Freixo

Francisco Louçã: What balance sheet do you draw from the municipal campaign in Rio de Janeiro?

Marcelo Freixo: It was a very beautiful, very strong campaign; we say that it was a sunflower in the asphalt, because we are experiencing a very serious crisis of the Brazilian left. It's the end of cycle, of the era of the Workers' Party (PT), whose origin is not only the coup d'état, but also the errors committed by the PT when it was in government. This crisis affects the left as a whole, not just those who participated in government. We are in a process of crisis all those who identify with or are attracted by a left image, whoever they are.

The left has paid very high price at these municipal elections. These elections have great importance in Brazil, we have more than five thousand municipalities and as life is increasingly urban, the context of the elections in the towns has a considerable impact on national politics. Here in Rio de Janeiro we have made an alliance with the Partido Comunista Brasileiro [14] and the social movements: Movimento Sem Teto, Movimento Sem Terra, Levante and so on.

FL: With all this, and despite all this, Rio de Janeiro has something very special: it is the only big city where the left got through to the second round.

MF: Exactly.

FL: There must be a difference there; the left here has succeeded in emerging as an alternative, which was not the case in other cities.

MF: There were some good campaigns in other cities, but they didn't succeed

in getting through to the second round. I think what differentiates the left in Rio de Janeiro from that in other cities is that we have done a lot of work at the base; I think that there has been a left alliance. This was not an alliance between political parties to have more speaking time in the official campaign on television, there was a left alliance made with the social movements on the basis of a programme.

So here in Rio we worked at the base, and I believe that this resulted in the possibility, even with a minimum time on television – in the first round, we only had some 11 second spots in the official campaign – we beat the PMDB, we had 18% of the vote and we went into the second round with a great activist strength [15]. In the second round, we doubled our score and we got 40% of the vote, but that wasn't enough to beat our opponent Crivella. We spent a year and a half debating “If the city was ours”, the name we gave to our programme of municipal government. It is a programme in which more than five thousand people participated, giving their opinion on the city. It is a programme which has been debated in all the favelas, neighbourhoods, and milieus, it is a democratic, broadly debated programme. We have created a large scale work at the base, I believe that the Brazilian left had lost this in a certain sense. I think that the PT governability in a certain way hindered work at the base. One thought rather to the electoral strategies of the big parties with agreements at the top rather than work at the base.

FL: In fact, in the second round, you faced the parties of government, since Crivella had been a minister in the PT government, he is a bishop in the Universal Church of the Kingdom

of God and is a representative of the right. How can you characterize him, how would you describe him?

MF: It's difficult, Crivella is one of the bosses of Rede Record, the second biggest television channel after Rede Globo [16]. He is one of the main leaders of the Universal Church, with Edir Macedo, whose nephew he is [17]. He is a senator, was a minister under Dilma, and in the second round he obtained the support of the PSDB, and the Tucanos, he was supported by the PSD, and the whole spectrum of the right, including the support of the PMDB itself, of Anthony Garotinho (the former governor of the state of Rio de Janeiro). He had the support of all the conservative forces [18].

And the Universal Church does considerable work at the base. We had strong support among the religions of African origin, we had strong support among Catholics, several Catholic priests campaigned for us, in violation of the directives of the archbishop, but more than 85% of evangelists voted for Crivella. This remains a challenge for the left, to debate on what exactly this work at the base is, especially among the poorer milieus of the city.

The Universal Church works with a utopia, with another utopia, which is not ours, but it also works with a utopia and I think we have to pay more attention to that. But we had a beautiful campaign, a campaign which organised several milieus, many youth, different neighbourhoods, the areas we had the strongest growth were the northern and western neighbourhoods, that is the poorest suburbs of Rio de Janeiro. We grew in the popular electorate and I believe that is important.

FL: Is it possible to win against a leader who is populist,

charismatic, religious, who has a discourse which is not immediately transposable on the political terrain, because it appeals to religion? How can you beat religious fundamentalism?

MF: The first week of the campaign, we lost time. In fact, we didn't know if we would get beyond the first round. We understood that we would reach the second round only on the evening of the election. We were not prepared for this second round in advance and suddenly we had ten minutes of television, we needed to find more money, so we lost a week of campaigning to structure ourselves for the second round, and this was a week when we suffered many attacks on the social networks linked to Crivella. Attacks at a very low level, with lies, on the networks and on whatsapp, on the telephone networks, this was a particularly disgusting, infamous campaign led by the allies of Crivella.

Here again, it is a campaign that we took some time in countering, these were attacks to which we did not know how to respond, ignoble attacks, going so far as to say that we were linked to drugs trafficking. It was necessary to take legal measures, but with this we lost a week of campaigning and I believe that this was a decisive week, I think that with a week more of campaigning we would have got very close to them.

In any case, there are some lessons remaining about this work at the base, the discussion with the evangelists, about a campaign structure which should be improved. Crivella spent ten million in his campaign [2,700,000 Euros], so it was a very costly campaign, with many resources, many allies. We don't have that, we won't have that, but we should structure ourselves better.

We succeeded much more than we failed and we got 40% of the vote, one million two hundred thousand votes. We nourished the idea that the left is not dead, that another left exists, that there is another way of being left. The collective financing of the campaign exists, we have had fourteen thousand donors during the campaign, we had a collective financing and a collective programme. It was another way of

doing politics at a time of crisis for the left.

FL: The Brazilian left is in a situation of crisis, after a palace coup, the defeat of Dilma, and the Temer government, which has quickly begun to be very aggressive from the economic and social viewpoint, but which has a majority in Congress, so can decide practically anything it wants. How do you see the two coming years and the importance of this campaign in Rio de Janeiro for the formation of a new left pole, in the transformation of the left?

MF: This right wing cycle in Brazil was more or less inevitable, we will see a rise of the right, which has already begun, this has been a very hard, very violent blow against Brazilian democracy, a coup which tries to structure itself, at least in the medium term. At this moment, they are trying to adopt a PEC [constitutional reform] which freezes all investment, in particular in public health and teaching for the next twenty years, it is a very hard coup d'état.

It is a way of confronting a crisis of revenues, but by cutting expenditure in the areas where it is most needed, and this has in a certain way led the left to come out onto the streets, to organise in the public places, and I think that its good, but this shows that the line of the federal government in the coming years will be a line of recession, and this will be a line of considerable loss of rights for the labouring classes. I have not the least doubt that rights are being challenged, that we will pay the bill.

Today there is an erosion of the left, a very high erosion of the PT, because all the indications of crisis are attributed to the PT's management. That is what the media do, that is what the PMDB itself does, but after a certain time this doesn't hold, from now on the bill will be presented to the PMDB, it will come to the Temer government. The big question which remains is: what will the left do now, how will it re-establish itself, how will it reorganise? Because if the left comes back in two years and presents

itself in the same way, with the same errors as now, this will not advance much.

The work at the base, the work of relating to the demands of the poorest sectors is fundamental. I stress very much what we have done in Rio de Janeiro, to relate the debate on the left to a debate on human rights (different to what it is in Europe), the debate on human rights here is a debate on the very entrails of the city. Cities are born by creating walls to protect themselves from what comes from the outside, including in Europe. Today, Brazilian cities create walls to protect themselves from those within. It is a contradiction in the model of the city. Today, the cities protect themselves from the poverty they themselves create.

The Brazilian left must hear this message, that very often the contradiction of big capital and labour is no longer found at the door of the factory, but at the door of the favela, it is found in the increasing precariousness of work, it is found in the poor and black youth who kill themselves, there is a genocide underway in Brazil. There is a slogan, the left must understand that for the class struggle it must re-exist. I have often said this: more than resisting, the left must re-exist. The left should reorganise in its slogans, by listening more than it talks, by being more democratic internally. I think that here, in Rio, we have shown that it is possible and that it is near to happening.

FL: To conclude, do you see a similarity between the victory of Trump and this emergence of fundamentalisms, of religious ideas, of political fanaticism, of a right wing conservative mentality, of aggressive liberalism?

MF: It is impossible to escape such a comparison, we have seen it here in Rio de Janeiro, a lot of caricatures of the Cristo Redentor taking the Statue of Liberty in its arms and saying "I understand you", there are many jokes in the midst of a scenario which is not funny, which is very sad. I don't believe that Trump was elected solely thanks to the horrible things he said, but he was not beaten, despite these

horrors, I think it is important to think about this. What was a joke, what was laughable, has become the reality.

Rio de Janeiro has never treated Crivella as a theme for jokes like Trump, but he is something very

threatening, as dangerous as him. It is very difficult to predict what the Trump government will be, as it is very difficult to predict what the Crivella government will be, what the relationship of the Universal Church will be with the exercise of

government, of the government of a city like Rio de Janeiro, it is hardly encouraging. The left must reorganise and re-exist in its practices to be rapidly stronger.

27 November 2016

Eyewitness at Standing Rock

26 December 2016

Against the Current: Please describe what you saw, especially how the protectors were organized, and what happened.

Rebecca Kemble: We arrived there on Sunday, October 9th, and slept in the car with our dog. Early next morning October 10 – Indigenous Peoples' Day – there was a sunrise prayer ceremony organized at the camp. My friend Patricia Hammel, an attorney on the legal support team, and I attended a prayer ceremony, along with 300 people from camp. There were Lakota pipe carriers, mostly grandmothers, and also singers and drummers as part of the ceremony.

After the ceremony there was an announcement that there would be another ceremony based on the Eagle and Condor prophecy [an ancient Amazon people's prophecy – ed.] that would take place on the pipeline site a couple miles away. At the ceremony there would be Indigenous youth from Argentina representing the south, and Indigenous people representing the North. Patricia and I, in a convoy of 60-100 vehicles) drove to the pipeline site.

There was a teepee structure erected on the site with 16 poles and prayer ties wrapped all around it, and that's where the dancing and ceremony happened. As I was getting out of the car, Patricia put on a green National Lawyers Guild observer's hat. I said that I had legal training and had my camera, so I also got a green hat. I went there not to participate in the ceremony, but to keep my eyes and my camera on the police.

As the ceremony concluded, the master of ceremonies announced that the police were moving in. I saw and filmed the police moving in. He said: If you are not ready to risk arrest, go back up to the cars. Sixteen people were prepared to engage in civil disobedience by sitting peacefully under the teepee structure.

ATC: So they sat under the teepee?

RK: Yes, in a circle. Grandmother Theresa Black Owl, a Lakota grandmother, a pipe carrier, was among them, and she began conducting another prayer ceremony with the pipes.

Now as people were trying to leave the site, which was maybe 100 to 150 yards off the road, many dozens and dozens of police in military formation came into the area in different groups, blocking people's ability to leave.

No "no trespassing" signs were posted, and I didn't hear any "disperse" order from the police. What I saw in one of the first lines was all Wisconsin State patrol – Dane County Sheriff's deputies, from my county – who formed a line close to the road, kettled people in and stopped them trying to leave even though they were trying to leave.

Another line was formed by North Dakota officers from local counties. There were also some from Marathon County, Wisconsin in that line. So we were blocked.

My thought process was that I was going to document arrests of people in

the teepee. I stayed back from the police, but close enough to see people in the teepee. All of a sudden from that line of police an officer with a megaphone, who I later found out was from Cass County, North Dakota said: "If we touch you, you are under arrest" – just this shocking statement.

I was trying to back up but was hemmed in by pipes that weren't installed yet – very large – with two lines of police hemming us in on the other side.

Next thing I knew, the officer with the megaphone, whose name I know now is Jesse Jahner, a Cass County Sheriff's deputy, ran at me, accosted me, grabbed my arm with my camera in it and dragged me back toward the teepee.

He was putting my arms behind my back. I was trying to protect my camera and close the view finder and turn it off. He yelled at me: "Now I'm arresting you for destruction of evidence."

So I'm facing four charges: destruction of evidence, criminal trespass, engaging in a riot, and resisting arrest. Those are state charges, with a penalty of up to two years in jail.

ATC: How long were you held?

RK: I stayed overnight in jail. I was strip searched, many of us were barefoot; we were not given socks or shoes; we got no blankets or food until late in the night.

One of the Morton County deputies said, when we kept asking for things: This jail was only built for 40 people and there are 80 people now. So they clearly weren't prepared to handle us.

ATC: Is there a trial date?

RK: Yes, January 12th. My attorney is going to file motions to dismiss, within the next week or two, so we'll see how that goes.

ATC: Obviously you've been following this since then, as things have become even more intense. How would you describe the situation now with what's going on and what's at stake?

RK: I would describe it as war: The state is at war against the Standing Rock tribe and all of their allies who are peacefully attempting to protect the water, which they see as threatened by this pipeline that is going to go under the Missouri River, and is already going over 200 streams and tributaries, and threatens the drinking water of 17 million people downstream.

What was alarming and new about attacks this past Sunday night (November 20) was that the police did not seem to be interested in making any arrests or in controlling the situation. What they seemed to be interested in doing was hurting people — that's what they wanted to do.

The vicious attacks went on for seven hours, using chemical weapons, tear gas, concussion grenades, pepper spray, and water cannons, in below freezing 20-degree weather.

The state of North Dakota is not even pretending to protect the rights of people; they are protecting the financial investments of the global elite in the Dakota access pipeline and they are prepared to injure, maim and

possibly even kill people to protect that investment.

ATC: What has the Obama administration done in this escalating crisis?

RK: Nothing — effectively nothing. They have "requested" the pipeline people to slow down construction, but with no enforcement, and the companies doing the construction have ignored that request.

Obama said he would give it a few weeks "for things to play out" — a crass, heartless statement to make, when people are under attack by state forces. How many more people have to get hurt, and do people have to die, in this "playing out"?

ATC: If people want to go, what should they prepare for?

RK: I would tell them to prepare to do several things:

• Be humble, and accept the guidance of the elders at camp.

• Go there ready to work.

• Bring everything you need to be self-sufficient; don't strain the resources of camp for the people who are living there.

• The camp is steeped in prayer and ceremony, so be respectful of what is happening; participate if you can, and if you can't, be respectful and allow other people to do their prayer and ceremony.

The historical resonances of this struggle are strong. These are the descendants of people who dealt the U.S. army its only defeat on U.S. soil, who vanquished Custer and the 7th Cavalry in the Battle of Greasy Grass or the Little Big Horn.

This is the place where the U.S. army set up the forward operating bases to

conduct the Indian wars, which have never stopped and are now coming back full circle. They changed from military assaults to economic, to cultural (boarding schools), now back to full-scale military assault on the Indigenous people of this land.

Standing Rock people understand this, and so do their tribal and non-tribal allies. Many are prepared to die to protect land and water. This needs to be understood by North Dakota, by the federal government, and by anyone who would go there to support them.

POSTSCRIPT: Following the December 4 Army Corps of Engineers announcement denying the final pipeline permit, ATC asked Rebecca what had happened with the Dane County personnel at Standing Rock, and how she sees the new situation.

RK: Dane County Sheriff Mahoney recalled his 13 officers after they had been deployed for one week, due to community pressure.

Energy Transfer Partners don't care about the law or legal orders, as evidenced by their press release today?. They just care about not alienating investors and creditors. That's what their recent merger with Sunoco Logistics was all about — spreading the really bad risk that DAPL has become.

The only real hope for stopping DAPL has been to delay the completion long enough so that the investors pull out and creditors start calling in their debts. If the Army Corps is unwilling to physically force them to remove the drilling rig and dismantle the military compound around it in order to enforce this decision, DAPL construction will continue.

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Should Greens go local?

25 December 2016, by **Steve Early**

Despite fielding Jill Stein, a presidential candidate who was substantive, social media savvy, a good fund-raiser, and experienced at running for office, the Greens received about 1% of the popular vote, based on tallying so far. That's several million less than in 2000, when Ralph Nader was their candidate, although twice as many as Stein got during her first presidential run four years ago.

While conducting a spirited, if much ignored, campaign this time around, Stein had to endure the slings, arrows, or lamentations of leftists justifiably worried about Trump beating Clinton. Writing for *In These Times*, Kate Aronoff was one of many who chided Stein and her party for "putting too much emphasis on the presidency." According to Aronoff, the Greens invest only "meager resources" in local politics and "that's not where the party's heart is."

Trying A New Model?

After Tuesday's national results, the Greens might want to re-think where their heart is or should be. One model for becoming more effective, at the municipal level, can be found in the biggest city ever to elect one of those 57 Green mayors. As I describe in *Refinery Town: Big Oil, Big Money, and the Remaking of an American City* (forthcoming from Beacon Press in January), a Richmond, CA. group founded by Greens has fielded 16 candidates in local "non-partisan" races since 2004. Candidates for mayor or city council backed by the Richmond Progressive Alliance (RPA) have won ten of those contests, a success rate far better than the Green Party's local-election track record during the same period.

On Tuesday, this year's RPA standard-bearers—Melvin Willis and Ben Choi—placed first and second in a field of nine running for Richmond council seats. In January, the 7-member council will have an

unprecedented progressive "super-majority" of five. In addition, the RPA's coordinated "Team Richmond 2016" campaign helped pass rent control by a strong margin. Rent regulation has been a longtime goal of local housing activists; in several other Bay Area communities where the same issue was on the Nov. 8 ballot, the combined spending of the landlord lobby and real estate industry defeated this reform.

Progressives have succeeded, as an electoral force in Richmond, because they built a political organization which functions year round, not just at election time. The RPA has a dues-paying membership, a multi-issue organizing program, and elected leadership that includes both individual activists and representatives of allied labor and community organizations. Instead of branding itself, narrowly, as a Green Party branch, the Richmond Progressive Alliance (RPA) welcomed progressive independents, left-leaning Democrats, and socialists, along with voters registered as Greens or members of the California Peace and Freedom Party, a relic of Sixties' radicalism in the state.

Like Greens elsewhere, founders of the RPA backed Ralph Nader's presidential run in 2000. Post-election, they went local, creating a group initially called the Richmond Alliance for Green Public Power and Environmental Justice. They launched a series of single-issue campaigns with broad appeal in a largely non-white city of 110,000. They challenged Richmond police misconduct and harassment of Latino immigrants in traffic stops and day laborer crackdowns. They helped block a new fossil-fueled municipal power plant that would have added to neighborhood pollution and pushed for alternative energy solutions instead. They won passage of a stronger industrial safety ordinance to reduce the risk of refinery fires, explosions and chemical spills at Chevron, the city's largest employer.

When Alliance leaders like Gayle McLaughlin shifted to electoral politics 12 years ago, they distinguished themselves by refusing to accept business donations, while welcoming the support of progressive unions. The RPA steadily expanded its grassroots base through volunteer recruitment, door-to-door canvassing, and well-targeted voter turn out efforts. The group developed campaign management expertise and a reliable network of small donors who have helped its candidates qualify for public matching funds since Richmond adopted that key campaign finance reform.

During her two terms as mayor (from 2006 to 2014), McLaughlin promoted continuous synergy between her activist city hall leadership and on-going grassroots organizing in Richmond. When she was up for re-election six years ago, Richmond still had less than 500 registered Green voters; nearly 70 percent of the city's voters were Democrats. Nevertheless, McLaughlin was able to defeat two business-backed Democrats, who ran with heavy funding from the local building trades council, police and firefighter unions, Chevron, and other business interests.

Attracting Labor Support

To counter the political weight of organized labor's conservative wing, it helps to have other unions on your side. That's been a challenge that few Green candidates, at any level, have met. In 2000, Ralph Nader's presidential campaign won the backing of just two small left-led unions, the California Nurses Association and the United Electrical Workers; this year, even they ignored Stein. In Richmond, however, the more ecumenical approach of Greens, like McLaughlin, has led to strong RPA ties with the CNA, Local 1021 of the Service Employees International Union (which represents Richmond

city employees), the National Union of Healthcare Workers, and locals of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees and Amalgamated Transit Union, both of which have members living or working in Richmond.

In 2014, Chevron pulled out all the stops to defeat the RPA with \$3.1 million worth of “independent expenditures” against McLaughlin and her city council running mates. She invited Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, then weighing a presidential run, to come to Richmond and help counter this post-Citizens United spending blitz. Sanders raised money for the RPA and its candidates, speaking at a pre-election Richmond rally, which pre-figured West Coast events held on his own behalf less

than a year later (with crowds 40-times larger).

While Greens elsewhere “and anti-Sanders socialists allied with them” objected to Bernie running as a Democratic candidate, RPA activists jumped into his California primary campaign. Breaking with Green orthodoxy, McLaughlin voted for Sanders in June and urged her Richmond supporters to do so as well. This fall, the Sanders connection paid off again. Bernie’s post-campaign organization, Our Revolution, endorsed Willis and Choi (along with 100 other candidates around the country), raising \$5,000 for each with a single email blast to past Sanders’ donors.

In an interview earlier this Fall, Jill

Stein reported that the Greens are finally “exploring the idea of being a membership party where members are expected to support the party with dues” so its candidates can be more competitive in local races and “participate in social movements with real organizational and financial resources.”

That sounds like the right kind of Stein campaign follow-up. But if Greens really want to go beyond “protest vote” campaigns and actually win more elections to help build progressive movements locally and nationally, they should consider the path taken by their Richmond counterparts more than a decade ago.

November 10, 2016

Source [*Beyond Chron.*](#)

“The gift of God” - coup d’État, dictatorship and Islamo-nationalist union

24 December 2016, by **Uraz Aydin**

A live coup d’État

News of the occupation of Istanbul’s bridges linking the two continents by military tanks and low altitude fighter plane flights in the capital made the public aware that an attempted coup was underway.

A communiqué on the armed forces website indicated that the general staff had taken power, then on the state television channel, occupied by soldiers, a military group calling itself “The Council of Peace in the Country” announced it had taken power so as to restore liberty and democracy and re-establish the secular republic and the values of Atatürk in the face of systematic attacks on the constitution by the government. It was thus indicated that this was a putsch from outside the chain of command, as was evident also from the news circulating that the army chief of staff had been taken hostage, as well as other high

ranking officers.

Via a connexion by smart phone on the CNN Türk channel - which would also be occupied later - Erdogan called on the people to go onto the streets and protest against the coup. A call relayed through the night by the imams of the mosques. Violent conflicts occurred throughout the night, mainly in Ankara and Istanbul, between the soldiers (apparently numbering 5,000 out of a total of 675,000) and the police loyal to Erdogan supported by the defenders of the regime. Thousands of civilians went onto the streets to cries of “Allahu Akbar”, demanding the reintroduction of the death penalty and opposing the tanks, representing mainly the AKP’s activist base [19]. The attempt was finally defeated by the morning, after around 340 deaths (about a hundred of them putschists, the others being civilians and police) and 2,800 wounded.

The Gülen confraternity: from alliance to war

Erdogan announced after the coup that it had been led by military followers of the confraternity of Fethullah Gülen, the former AKP ally who has become his sworn enemy. A wide scale operation was then launched in the army, the judiciary (including the arrests of senior judges), the police and other branches of the state apparatus. If the Gülenist cadre obviously orchestrated the coup attempt, other military groups opposed to the regime were apparently supposed to participate in it initially; otherwise an attempt with such limited forces would be hard to explain. This is argued by the critical journalist Ahmet Sik, who in 2011, during the AKP-Gülen coalition, had been incarcerated for a year because

of his book (before its publication!) revealing Gülenist infiltration of the police apparatus. Sik believes the Gülenist soldiers were betrayed by their allies who abandoned them once the coup was underway, probably following negotiations with Erdogan. It is highly plausible that having been alerted some hours before, Erdogan would have negotiated with some of the putschists so as to isolate the Gülenists.

Since 2013 Erdogan has been at war with his old friend, now known as the “Fethullahist terrorist organisation/parallel state structure” (FETÄ-), a hyper-organised and hierarchical Islamic confraternity - with which all governments have flirted - which has been infiltrating the state apparatus for thirty years. It has recruited mainly among the pauperised youth of Anatolia, above all through its “houses of light” where these youths have been fed and prepared for university examinations and in particular for military school and police examinations (where the questions are usually distributed in advance thanks to previous infiltration).

Coming to power in 2002, the AKP, having no framework in the bureaucracy, had formed an alliance with the Gülen community to fight the secularist-republican hegemony in the state apparatus and to domesticate the army. The 2007-2010 trials against soldiers accused of being involved in putschist conspiracies (in the context of which people like the former army chief and the above-mentioned journalist Ahmet Sik were arrested, for example) rested virtually entirely on false evidence fabricated and installed by the Gülenist police. The high ranking officers responsible for the recent coup attempt are mainly those who had succeeded in obtaining higher grades after the elimination of republican soldiers during these trials. Nonetheless this coalition weakened because of the huge power of the confraternity in the bureaucracy, in particular after the attempted arrest of the head of information Hakan Fidan (Erdogan’s “box of secrets”), suspected of “supporting the PKK” by judges and police who were members of the confraternity - opposed to the talks - because of his role in the

negotiations with the Kurdish leader Ä-calán. The vast anti-corruption operations launched in December 2013, based on telephone recordings, which affected four ministers, businessmen close to Erdogan, as well as his son, were guided by this confraternity. It was starting from this date that the break was consummated and Erdogan launched sweeping operations above all in the police and legal apparatus, but also against the financial resources and media of Gülen. These operations seemed to have put an end to the power of the Gülenists. But apparently not.

The left and the coup

It should also be noted that no secularist republican and/or left force, including those in the Kurdish movement, came onto the streets to resist the coup. It might seem strange that the left, which was the preferred target of previous military interventions, particularly in 1971 and 1980, did not mobilise to oppose this attempt. In the absence of detailed objective analysis on the question, we can offer some elements, based on personal observations, so as to highlight the state of play on the republican-reformist left and the far left. First, it seems that, taking account of the level of political-cultural polarisation in society, the dictatorial administration of the country by Erdogan, Islamicization, the cycle of suicide attacks, the atmosphere of civil war and so on, the feeling of “anything but Erdogan” contributed to the non-mobilisation of republican sectors but also that of left activists. All the more so since the communiqué of the putschists asserted republican values and respect for democracy and the Constitution. The coup protagonists had moreover thus probably relied on the emergence of civilian and military support in the course of events through a snowball effect. Which did not happen, the people detested Erdogan enough not to oppose the tanks but not enough to acclaim them.

On the other hand, the manipulations of the regime (like for example when, after the elections of June 7, 2015,

Erdogan was ready to provoke chaos and a situation of civil war to win back nationalist votes) allowed a conspiracy theory (produced spontaneously) - according to which this was a “theatre”, a “super-production” set up to realise Erdogan’s dictatorial ambitions - which found a broad echo in the early hours. It is true that the regime now benefits to the maximum from this post-coup climate, but in the conditions where the government was consolidated at the elections of November 1, 2015 by obtaining nearly 50% of the vote, Erdogan had no legitimacy problem requiring such a stunt.

Finally, the mobilisation of Islamist and fascist activists and the police in defence of the regime did not encourage the radical left to go onto the streets alongside them, above all taking account of its limited activist forces, which prevented it playing an independent role. The deployment of the putschist military forces was mainly in the west of the country, so the question was not posed directly in Kurdistan, but given the conditions of war between the Turkish state and the PKK, even if the Gülen confraternity (which possesses a vast organisation in the Kurdish region and which opposes the process of negotiation) has been a privileged rival of the Kurdish national movement, the latter would have been far from defending the regime.

Also, the resistance against the putsch was followed by Erdogan’s call to stay on the streets, with festive rallies, marked by a high participation of the popular classes representing the electoral base of the AKP and the far right, organised on downtown plazas throughout the country (including Taksim of course) in what was in a certain sense a “revenge for Gezi”. The Gezi revolt of 2013 represented a first youth and civilian resistance to the Erdogan regime and had destabilized it. The resistance of July 15, with its battles against the tanks, its martyrs, then its “occupations of the squares” (with the support of the local authorities and public transport), its songs and so on, thus constituted “the “Gezi of the AKP” and has allowed the pro-regime forces to boast of their moral superiority for having fought in the streets.

State of emergency and dictatorship

Erdogan and the National Security Council responded to the coup attempt by declaring a state of emergency. It was initially supposed to be limited to a period of three months. But as any clear thinker might have guessed, it was extended for a second period of three months. It seems Erdogan is not inclined to put an end to it, going by his comments of November 13, 2016: "Some say the state of emergency should be lifted. Why should that be done immediately? When we came to power we lifted the state of emergency [in the Kurdish region]. But at that time the state of emergency had practically halted life. Today this is not the case. Everyone goes to their work calmly".

The state of emergency allows the government, among other things, to extend the period of detention to thirty days, to declare curfews, to forbid public rallies and above all to issue decrees with legislative force. Thanks to these decrees, which are controlled neither by Parliament nor by the Constitutional Court, Erdogan can lead the country as he pleases, without any hindrance. These measures presage fully the dictatorial regime which Erdogan intends to install through the presidential system.

Thus through massive purges, arrests, closure of media outlets and institutions, initially targeting the Gülenists but then extended to the Kurdish opposition and the radical left, Erdogan combines a fundamental restructuring of the state apparatus with an attempt to annihilate any possibility of opposition.

In the context of the anti-terrorist operations targeting the Gülenists as well as the Kurdish movement and those suspected of supporting the latter, 50,000 persons have been detained and 35,000 arrested. Among the latter nearly 2,500 are judges and prosecutors, 6,500 soldiers and 7,000 police officers. The total number of persons excluded from the civil

service (and forbidden from working there again) is 70,000 while 93,000 have been suspended. Nearly half of these were attached to the education ministry. 10,000 teachers who were members of the left trade union Egitim-Sen, mainly in Turkish Kurdistan, have been dismissed in one day. Thus the city of Diyarbakir lost a quarter of its teachers and Dersim half. In the public and private universities 3,600 teachers have been dismissed.

Among the thousands of institutions, foundations and establishments closed are a thousand schools, 35 medical centres and hospitals. Fifteen private universities and 19 trade unions have also been closed. All their capital, financial resources and property have been confiscated by the state. Erdogan has granted himself the right to name university rectors directly, without previous internal elections, so as to break the few places of cultural opposition which have until now escaped him. This process of direct nomination began last year with pro-Erdogan administrators having been named as the heads of enterprises confiscated from Gülen. With the state of emergency this measure was extended to the municipalities. The mayors of more than thirty municipalities accused of logistically supporting FETÄ- or the PKK have been replaced by pro-regime administrators. Most of these town halls were led by the Party of the Democratic Regions, sister party of the HDP in the Kurdish region [20].

The repression has also hit the media and thus the freedom of press and expression. More than a hundred media outlets (television channels, newspapers, press agencies, radio stations, magazines, publishing houses, internet sites) have also been banned as well as Kurdish language television channels. The intellectuals who responded to the repression of the pro-Kurdish daily *Ozgur Gundem* last year by each taking on the post of editor in chief for a day have been threatened with life imprisonment, accused of supporting the PKK. Other journalists and intellectuals have been incarcerated for transmitting "subliminal messages" supporting the idea of a coup. Ten directors, journalists and cartoonists for the

main centre left opposition newspaper *Cumhuriyet* have been arrested, suspected "of having committed crimes in the name of the PKK and the Fethullahist terrorist organisation without being a member of these organisations". The newspaper had attracted Erdogan's ire for having reported on the delivery of arms to the jihadists in Syria by the Turkish intelligence services. More than 140 journalists have now been imprisoned.

In the context of this unprecedented wave of repression, while Erdogan has made cabinet changes, he has avoided any crackdown on AKP deputies who have had links with the Gülen confraternity, so as to keep his large parliamentary majority. Given the level of the alliance between the AKP and the confraternity, the praise conferred on Gülen from the summit of the state and its organic intellectuals and the support for its educational work, the whole party as well as its leaders could be accused of having links with FETÄ-, if having opened a bank account with Gülen's Bank Asya is now enough to be dismissed. Hence a sort of "date limit" (which corresponds to the anti-corruption operations of December 2015) for links with the confraternity has been formulated. Erdogan has said of his years of coalition with Gülen: "We were wrong, may God forgive us". But that is only valid for the political and economic elites, not for the tens of thousands of ordinary people persecuted under the mere suspicion of having had contact with the confraternity (or its schools, universities, banks or student residences) once considered so legitimate by the regime.

National unity and Islamo-fascist coalition

Immediately following the coup attempt, the four parties represented in Parliament - the AKP, the far right MHP, the centre-left secularist CHP and the pro-Kurdish left reformist HDP - denounced it and celebrated the civilian resistance with a common declaration [21]. Conscious of the insecurity of his government, Erdogan,

parallel to the wave of anti-Gülenist repression, lowered the tensions with his political opponents in the CHP and the MHP in a context of “national unity”, while excluding the HDP which is still considered as terrorist. Thus the resistance led mainly by the AKP rank and file and the Islamist-fascist far right against the tanks was subject to a discursive reconstruction, being compared to the battle of the Dardanelles (when Ottoman troops fought British and French soldiers in the First World War), as a combat where “there were neither Turks, nor Kurds, nor Alevi, nor Sunni, but the whole nation facing those who wished to destroy us”. And this with slightly “anti-imperialist” connotations given that Gülen has sought refuge since 1999 in the USA – the idea that the US was behind the coup is broadly shared by the government and repeated incessantly. The extradition of Gülen has been demanded by the Turkish state and has taken on a major importance.

Faced with the level of violence of the repression the CHP criticised the authoritarian measures taken in the context of the state of emergency, rapidly placing itself outside the “national union”, but the MHP, the historic party of Turkish fascism, is fully involved. Their criticisms of the AKP concerning its policy of negotiation with Â-calán have fallen off with the resumption of the war. However the fact that Erdogan wages a pitiless war against the Kurdish urban militias, destroying entire towns, has deprived the MHP of its main argument (it shares the same conservative-religious-nationalist base as the AKP). Thus during the November 2015 elections it lost nearly 30% of its vote in relation to those of June 2015 (before the war) falling from 16.2% to 12%, whilst its number of seats fell from 80 to 41, putting it in fourth position in parliament behind the HDP, something which is unacceptable for the historic party of Turkish nationalism. A strong opposition has emerged inside the party, led mainly by Meral Aksener, a former interior minister from the conservative right (1996) who subsequently joined the MHP. The opinion polls show that if Aksener led the MHP it would get more than 20%, reducing the AKP vote. The coup

attempt came right in the middle of the MHP’s internal crisis. Its leader, Devlet Bahçeli, gave his support to Erdogan and denounced the opposition, accusing it of being guided by Gülen so as to exclude Aksener as well as other rivals. Today the support of the MHP – who in return obtained the promise to restore the death penalty – allows the AKP to get parliamentary approval of the proposal of a referendum on the project of constitutional modification to install a presidential regime custom made for Erdogan, destroying what remains of the separation of powers.

The Kurdish question

After the coup the repression of the Kurdish civilian movement has crossed a decisive stage. First the co-mayors of Diyarbakir, the most important Kurdish city, Gultán Kisanak and Firat Anli, as well as the former Democratic Party of the Regions deputy Ayla Akat Ata were arrested under the accusation of being members of the PKK. More than 20 mayors of Kurdish municipalities have been dismissed and replaced by new administrators identifying directly with the “Duce” of Ankara. The HDP co-chair Selahattin Demirtaş had correctly said that in designating as terrorists all those who did not see Erdogan as “their sultan”, the Turkish state took on henceforth the form of a “Hitlerian fascist state”, and was himself arrested with other leaders and deputies of the party, including its co-chair Figen Yüksekdağ.

The conditions of these arrest had been prepared by the lifting of parliamentary immunity in May 2016, with the contribution of the CHP – its chair, Kilicdaroglu, fearing that his party would be stigmatised as sympathetic to the PKK, had said that this measure was contrary to the Constitution, but that the CHP would nonetheless vote for it, because if this measure was not directly accepted by the parliament and subject to a referendum, the polarisation in the country would reach an extreme level. The lifting of immunity affected all deputies who had been arraigned before parliament, but it was obvious

that it targeted the HDP.

In the context of the parliamentary elections of June 7, 2015 which took on a plebiscitary character for Erdogan – like any election from now on – the campaign led by Demirtaş and the HDP around the motto “we will stop you being president” had provoked his ire. Realising that the process of negotiation had lost him nationalist votes, Erdogan had already decided in March 2015 to suspend the talks with Â-calán to adopt an anti-Kurd policy. Unhappy with the result in the June elections when the HDP obtained 13.1% and the AKP fell from 50% to 40.8% and could not thus form the government alone, Erdogan argued for new elections while the AKP affected to be searching for a coalition partner. However the weakening of the HDP was for the AKP the condition sine qua non of winning the next elections. It was thus that, in a strongly suspect fashion, the suicide bombing carried out by Islamic State in Suruç (where 32 young students who were going to Kobanê to contribute to the reconstruction of the town were killed) and the immediate reprisals of the PKK causing the death of two police officers – which the PLL first claimed then repudiated, saying it was the work of “local units” – provided the opportunity to resume the war against the Kurds and criminalise the HDP, and help the AKP to regain the initiative for the elections [22].

After nearly 16 months of blockade, curfew, massacres, forced displacement of population and destruction of towns, the civil resistance in Turkish Kurdistan seems weakened, to say the least. The extremely limited number of mobilisations in relation to what might be expected – moreover severely repressed – after the imprisonment of the HDP leaders attests to it. The “trenches” policy of erecting barricades and digging trenches in the neighbourhoods of Kurdish towns to declare autonomy – inspired by the experience of Syrian Kurdistan, although that took place after the withdrawal of the Syrian army – ended in a veritable bloodbath. These attempts at self-administration led by the youth militia of the YDG-H (Movement of Revolutionary Patriotic

Youth) and approved by the PKK (although the local populations were more reserved in their support), in a situation of an extremely unequal relationship of forces, without the militias having the ability to flee to the mountains, certainly showed the courage of the plebeian Kurdish youth, but constituted a dramatic defeat for the Kurdish movement. "We did not expect such a violent reaction from the state" said the strategists who have led the PKK for more than 35 years.

Military interventionism and expansionist policy

The main concern for both the Turkish government and the PKK is Rojava, the autonomous region now known as the "Democratic Federal System of Northern Syria and Rojava" led by the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the PKK's sister party in Syria. For the regime it is about preventing the consolidation of this autonomy at any price and preventing the two parts of Rojava (Djazeera and Kobané in the east and Afrin in the west) from joining up to form a Kurdish corridor along the Turkish-Syrian border. If the overthrow of Assad was the main objective of Turkey's intervention in Syria and in its support for the jihadists, the Kurdish question also has enormous weight here. But this adventurist stance - as well as its more authoritarian turn internally - has increasingly isolated the Turkish state at the international level. During 2016, Ankara attempted to break this isolation, on the one hand by trying to profit from the "migrant crisis" in relation to the EU by offering itself as

a rampart against the migratory flows, and on the other by renewing diplomatic relations with Russia and Israel. The ousting of Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu - the initiator of the foreign policy seeking to make Turkey the hegemonic pole and also the main advocate of military interventionism in Syria - gave a free hand to Erdogan to revise his alliances in the Syrian conflict. Also, after the attempted coup, this rapprochement with Putin and even a warming of relations with Damascus - including the acceptance of the idea of a transitional period with Assad - took on the form of an opposition to the western powers presumed to have supported the putsch as well as the PKK.

The regime thus tries to play a game with multiple facets, like everyone else in the region. On the one hand it tries to convince the US that it is a better ally than the Democratic Forces of Syria (FDS) led by the YPG (Units of Popular Protection), the armed wing of the PYD in the fight against Islamic State, while positing the alternative of its rapprochement with Putin. Ankara also benefits from the campaign against Islamic State (which Erdogan openly preferred to the Kurds as his neighbours on the border, before this became too encumbering, especially with the suicide attacks) to stop the FDS and force them back beyond the Euphrates. Meanwhile the operation led by Islamist fighters - under the name of Free Syrian Army! - with the support of Turkish military planes is called, very maliciously, "Euphrates Shield". The right for Ankara to overfly Syrian territory under the silence of Moscow and the moderate protests of Damascus has been paid for by the silence of the Turkish regime over the destruction of Aleppo. As for the battle to liberate the city of Mosul from IS, Turkey's desire to

participate was rejected by Baghdad, which had already opposed the Turkish military base in Bashika which Ankara refuses to quit. Seeking an image as the protector of Sunnis, Erdogan argues that the liberation of Mosul by Shiite militias alone will lead to a massacre of Sunnis, while to the Turkish public he defends the thesis that Turkey has historic rights to Mosul. But all these alliances and rivalries can change very quickly, taking account of the tactical pragmatism in the region, the irrational character of Erdogan and the election of Trump, whose international policy for now is only words.

By consolidating his hegemony afterwards and thanks to the attempted coup, there is henceforth a relationship of identification, rather than representation, between Erdogan the "Reis" (leader) and the "Millet" (nation, Turkish and Sunni, of course). It seems for now to be very difficult to open any breach in this hegemony. Apart from the coup, from the Gezi revolt to the electoral success of the HDP, via the revealing of the high level of corruption in the government and in Erdogan's entourage, any opposition to his authority is likened to an offensive seeking to undermine the development of the Turkish state, to betrayal of the country, supported of course by foreign powers.

A sinister horizon for the peoples of Turkey for whom democracy, justice, liberty and secularism constitute values which are not only desirable, but indispensable, categorical. It is time for a resistance without illusions for our rights and our liberties, for a struggle to drive back the Islamist and nationalist tide, and a struggle to say that we are here, we still exist and that we will not capitulate.

South Africa's Deprivations and Depravations Revealed in Jacob Zuma's Meltdown

23 December 2016, by **Patrick Bond**

But several contradictions have exploded in Zuma's face. Political opponents from across the spectrum, radical university students and his own party's establishment smell the blood, as Zuma's fabled patronage system is now in the spotlight, apparently in tatters.

Zuma just suffered two major legal defeats: a fumbled state attack on Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan which was humiliatingly withdrawn by an incompetent prosecutor on Monday following a national outcry, and Wednesday's release of the public protector's "State of Capture" report on the Zuma family's corrupt relationships, a report the president and two cabinet colleagues unsuccessfully attempt to quash.

Zuma loses his political grip while liberals and radicals gain momentum

While Zuma tried delay tactics, rumblings at the base have grown louder. The leftist Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) party and the centre-right Democratic Alliance (DA) both held anti-Zuma marches in the capital city Pretoria on Wednesday, with the former's leader Julius Malema clearly distancing himself from a third event – a "Save South Africa" meeting at the nearby Anglican cathedral with scores of notables from civil society and big business.

Malema told a crowd of many thousands, "A CEO will speak at that small church there, not Church Square. Let them speak there. Small churches are for CEOs. Only the EFF has the potential to collapse the ANC." The threat of EFF activists marching to occupy Zuma's offices at Pretoria's Union Buildings offices was deflected by police, but the red-shirted marchers took over much of the

capital city's central business district.

Prior to the 355-page "State of Capture" report, Malema's deputy Floyd Shivambu had written the most thorough analysis of the Gupta brothers' influence, and the EFF regularly refers to the network of state and Gupta cronies as the "Zuptas." The Gupta influence includes mass media (a newspaper and tv network), mining (especially exceptionally controversial links to the Eskom parastatal and its top manager) and provincial ANC leaders.

Other proletarian elements are also growing restless. One of the three most important trade unions still backing Zuma, the nurses (with more than 200 000 members – in the same league as teachers and mineworkers who have been Zuma's main labour backers), announced on Tuesday that they now want the president to resign. The largest union, the metalworkers with 350 000 members, did so in late 2013. But more recently, so too have scores of major ANC leaders, along with what seems to be nearly the entirety of centre-left and centrist civil society and the media commentariat.

As a former guerrilla fighter with no formal education, Zuma, 74, is a genius at maintaining not only talk-left walk-right ideological flexibility, but also membership loyalty within his Zulu ethnic group and the country's eastern and northern provinces (KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga, Free State, North West and Limpopo). Although in August municipal elections it lost 8% of the vote compared to the 2011 vote, the ANC won handily in most of these areas.

But for the first time since liberation, the ANC surrendered rule of the economic heartland of Johannesburg, Pretoria and the fifth largest city of Nelson Mandela Bay (Port Elizabeth) to what is sure to be a fleeting right-left alliance of DA and EFF. The second city, Cape Town, has been run by the DA since 2006, while third-largest Durban is safely pro-Zuma. Huge ANC patronage power

dissipated with the loss of the three metro areas.

Zuma himself is also being battered again by 783 corruption charges relating to bribery in a late 1990s French military deal. The infamous arms deal unravelled the ANC's liberation mystique even during Nelson Mandela's 1994-99 rule. As a result of a colleague's jailing on the same charges, Zuma was fired as Mbeki's Deputy President in 2005. He then won acquittal in a high-profile 2006 rape case. The (HIV+) victim – daughter of a former ANC guerrilla who was a close family friend of Zuma, Fezikile Kuzwayo – died in Durban last month, again reviving memories of his misogyny. Zuma, who has four wives and more than twenty children, claimed during the trial, "in Zulu culture, you don't just leave a woman," a stance Kuzwayo eloquently rebutted as she was forced into exile for several years by Zuma's manic supporters.

Until now, Zuma has kept dissident tendencies within the ANC's big political tent, in part by using divide-and-conquer patronage skilfully. But the day of reckoning is here because the Gupta family – three immigrant Indian brothers who became ostentatious tycoons over the past two decades – have been winning massive state deals and using alleged bribes to get even wealthier, as revealed in "State of Capture."

For example, the respected Deputy Finance Minister Mcebisi Jonas accused the Guptas of offering him \$45 million a year ago, if he agreed to become finance minister in an informal putsch, because his then boss Nhlanelo Nene had balked at airplane and nuclear deals favourable to Zuma's retinue. After Jonas forcefully declined, the subsequent firing of Nene and offer of the job to a political ingénue – Des van Rooyen – left the country shocked last December. Within four days, amidst a panicked currency crash, a business uprising led by three white bankers forced Zuma to shift the hapless Van Rooyen

over to the local government ministry and replace him with Gordhan, who had served in the same job to corporate applause from 2009-14.

But throughout 2016, Gordhan's stance became increasingly untenable, thanks to the economic downturn and repeated attempts by Zuma allies to prosecute him for what appear to be either nonsensical claims or relatively trivial misdeeds in his prior role in the tax authority. As the country barely dodged a recession, Gordhan's 2016 budgetary manoeuvres were also complicated by rising popular dissent – especially university students who demanded around \$2 billion in new funding to achieve “free, decolonised, quality higher education” in the #FeesMustFall campaign, as well as angry black communities denied decent levels of municipal services – and threats of a junk bond rating downgrade.

Credit rating threats and student demands

That junk rating has long been threatened by the local managers of three agencies: Moody's, Fitch and Standard&Poor's. But while Gordhan goes to great lengths to appease them and the financiers they front for, the three agencies are so often so spectacularly wrong (e.g. with AAA ratings for Lehman Brothers bank and IAG insurance in 2008), and so apparently biased towards the prejudices of western banks, that in Goa last month, the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa economic alliance pledged to introduce their own.

The neoliberal financial elites in the BRICS machinery ensured, however, that the wording for such an agency's mandate emphasised “market-oriented,” so as with the BRICS New Development Bank and Contingent Reserve Arrangement, there would logically be no difference with existing institutions. And as with Brazil and Russia which were also given junk status recently, South Africa pays a 9% interest rate on its now dangerously high \$135 billion foreign

debt, which indicates that the markets already de facto consider South Africa to have junk status.

With those three agencies firmly in mind, on October 25, Gordhan revealed his latest budget in parliament. At the time, 16 of the country's 25 universities had been forced by student protesters to temporarily close down, in the activists' attempt to raise national pressure on the government. Though valiant, and though 600 students were arrested and around \$80 million in damage done by protesters to their campuses, neither Zuma nor Gordhan gave in.

On October 25, several thousand furious university students met Gordhan for a talk at parliament's gates before the budget speech, but then after being attacked by police, began violently protesting throughout central Cape Town. They were then heartbroken by Gordhan's decision to offer only \$420 million in new funds, following more than a year of intense social debate and student protest, in the wake of a legacy of university underfunding by Gordhan's predecessor, the famous neoliberal Trevor Manuel who now works for Rothschild. And they were infuriated by yet another heavy-handed police clampdown.

But the students should not have been surprised. Gordhan did after all signal divide-and-rule budget politics during a New York interview amidst his last investor road-show, on October 5: “We have a solution which will meet the needs of the poor students, and the so called missing middle as well, and it's important that students who understand the calculations, who understand the trade-offs that we need between student fees being subsidised on the one hand, and housing and welfare and health and other issues being paid for on the other hand, that they should be part of a constructive conversation.”

Across South Africa, #FeesMustFall had rejected that “solution” when it was proposed by Higher Education Minister Blade Nzimande – who also leads the SA Communist Party – two weeks earlier. They well understand that state subsidies provided 50% of university income in 2000, but steadily

fell to 40% today, with students covering the bulk of the shortfall.

On October 25, Gordhan again told them to borrow more – he offered \$670 million – in order to pay for their undergraduate education. The National Student Financial Aid Scheme's extremely low repayment rates (\$1.5 billion out of \$1.8 billion in outstanding debt remains uncollected) reflects how that strategy is working. Adding household debt is usually only a short-term salve, as demonstrated by the ratio of South African borrowers whom the National Credit Regulator deems “credit impaired”: still in the unsustainable region of 45%, barely lower than the 2008 high.

Importantly, a report by Nzimande's 2012-13 commission on fees-free education was covered up until its findings were leaked in 2015. Nzimande's spokesperson Khaye Nkwanyana had explained, “It is a public document, but due to the nature of the report, we decided not to make it public. Obviously we would have been setting the Finance Minister [Gordhan] up against the public if that decision and report was released.”

Gordhan's neoliberal bias

The choices Gordhan made last month necessarily set him against the public. For example, his February budget provided a mere 3.5% nominal increase to foster care providers (who play a vital role given the catastrophic AIDS orphan rate) and a 6.1% rise for mothers of many millions of Child Support Grant recipients. While old-age pensions are not increasing, the extra \$0.75/month he offered to the latter – up to a tokenistic \$27/month – brings the child grant's overall increase this year to 7.5%.

However, inflation for poor people will likely exceed 10%, due to a 15% rise in basic food costs, Eskom's 9.4% electricity price increase and higher transport expenses. Reflecting the gap between Pretoria's conscience and society's hunger, the poverty rate (for food and necessities) is now an excruciating 63%. But South Africa

has the fifth lowest social spending rate amongst the 40 largest economies (half that of Russia and Brazil).

Instead of targeting social spending, Gordhan could instead have referenced the \$17.3 billion in annual overcharging within Treasury's \$45 billion procurement budget. Treasury's lead procurement official Kenneth Brown recently acknowledged, "without adding a cent, the government can increase its output by 30-40%. That is where the real leakage in the system actually is."

Why has such fiscal wastage continued for so long? Gordhan himself admits that Treasury remains confounded by systematic ANC "rent-seeking. It means every time I want to do something, I say it is part of transformation. But in the meantime, it means giving contracts to my pals in closets." (The "I" and "my" refer to the Zupta faction.)

But there are also other pals in other closets, who normally cheer on Treasury neoliberalism: the 1% of rich South Africans who have had an exceptional run since the early 1990s, according to a World Bank report released last month. Post-apartheid economic policies raised their income share from 10-12% of total income (excluding capital gains) in 1990-94 to

18-20% since 2009, nearly unprecedented in the world.

These are also the (mostly) men who take assets abroad illicitly. For in addition to around \$11 billion in net profit, dividend and interest payments that leave the country - the main reason South Africa's current account deficit often reaches a dangerous 5% of GDP - there is \$21 billion in annual average "Illicit Financial Flows" (as counted by Global Financial Integrity over the past decade).

This threat continues unless Treasury and the Reserve Bank counter it by tightening exchange controls. They won't. Apparently without any state regulatory friction, blatant tax dodging occurs at the biggest platinum companies, especially Lonmin with its Bermuda "marketing" arm, De Beers with its \$2.8 billion in diamond misinvoicing over seven years, and MTN's cellphone profit diversions to Mauritius from several African countries.

Society's challenge

A strong, committed Finance Minister would attack such depravities, so as to find funding needed to eliminate society's deprivations. Since Gordhan

has failed, will society now ask what rearrangement of the balance of forces is required to finally construct a democratic, developmental state? The first stage of that (liberal) revolution is upon us: confronting the Zuma faction's corrupt nexus of politicians, parastatal agency managers and public-private pilfering partners. The patronage apparatus may fall slowly, because Zuma will challenge the "State of Capture" findings and a sluggish official commission will only then be appointed to investigate more of the details.

But for the next stage, the ongoing prolific protests by opposition parties, university students, communities and labour, remains on the horizon as the political dust refuses to settle. The period ahead will not only clarify whether the liberals and their allies fighting on behalf of Gordhan and the anti-corruption cause can defeat the master of nationalist survival politics, Zuma. Just as importantly, we will learn what pressures from below can be mobilised to generate non-violent regime change in the interests of a post-Zupta, post-neoliberal budget next time Gordhan presents to parliament, in February 2017.

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Fire on the Mountain - Even as State Repression increases, Indigenous People's voice to claim their rights resounds

21 December 2016, by Stan Swamy

Law vs People

Realizing this injustice, the British rulers introduced some legislations in view of protecting the tribal people and their rights over natural resources. Chotanagpur Tenancy Act, 1908 (CNT) and Santal Pargana Tenancy Act, 1949 (SPT). These laws

were meant to prevent land-alienation of the indigenous Adivasi community. However, over the years some loopholes were made especially in CNT Act through which indigenous land can be taken for public sector undertakings such as mines and industries.

Under this guise thousands of acres of

land has been forcibly taken using the outdated Land Acquisition Act of 1894 enacted by the British. The compensation fixed by petty bureaucrats was meager without any rehabilitation of the displaced. A minimal estimate is about 24 lakh acres of land alienated and 19 lakh people displaced. Further push came in with Liberalisation Policy adopted

from early 1990s paving way for private industrialists to invest in mining and industries.

Memorandums of Underakings on paper only

Even as the govt went on signing Memorandums of Underakings with prospective industrialists, people's resistance movements began to emerge. Consequently very few industrialists could set up their industries leading to an industrial deadlock and most of them had to go back empty handed. Big projects such as Neterhat Field Firing Range, Koel-Karo River-Water Project, Arcelor-Mittal project where people's resolve not to give their land are some of the success stories of people's resistance. It was in such a predicament that UPA govt enacted the 'Land Acquisition Act, 2013' by which better compensation and rehabilitation was offered.

Some significant features are: (1) compensation amount enhanced to four times the market rate, (2) obtaining environment clearance for the industry/mine, (3) obligatory public hearings wherein the consent of 80% for private industries and 70% for public sector industries, (4) social audit by independent expert group to assess the economic, social, cultural impact on the communities because of the industry/mine functioning in their midst. Only on the satisfactory fulfillment of the above conditions, industries/mines would be given the go-ahead signal.

Mass protests overwhelm Ordinance of NDA govt to scrap the salient features of the 2013 Land Acquisition Act. This was a desperate attempt to salvage the assurances the govt had made to industrialists that they would face no problems in setting up industries. This arrogant action of the govt aroused the intellectuals, farmers associations, working class, dalit and adivasi communities to take to the street at local, regional, national levels and denounce the duplicity of the NDA govt. This determined protest by the masses finally brought the govt on its

knees and forced it to withdraw the much hated Ordinance.

Shifting the burden of dismantling the 2013 Land Acquisition Act to State Govts, the NDA govt asked the States to enact their own laws / ordinances / amendments so that the corporates can easily acquire land and start their industries and mines. Now that Jharkhand Govt is a BJP govt and has been faithfully carrying out the dictates of the national NDA govt worked out the sinister plan of passing an Ordinance which sought to tamper with the CNT & SPT Acts. This Ordinance was passed by the State Cabinet just a few days before the commencement of the State Assembly on 28th July 2016. It should rather have been placed in the Assembly, but the govt knew it would be difficult to get it through since the opposition would oppose it vehemently. Sad but true, the State Governor signed it and forwarded it to the President of India for his approval after which it would become a law. Happily, the President had the discretionary sense to forward it to the Central Govt and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes and asked for their comments. While the central govt has been silent on the matter, the ST Commission responded saying it would be highly unconstitutional to pass such an ordinance. Nearly five months have passed and the President has not given his approval. This placed the NDA govt at the centre and the state govt in Jharkhand in an awkward situation where their plot against the indigenous people could not materialize.

Ordinance becomes Amendment

Jharkhand Govt's proposed Amendments to CNT & SPT Acts are a scapegoat to hide its real intent of duping the indigenous community that the above Acts are good and will be preserved but with a few amendments which will open a new path to development! But sufficient awakening is taking place among the affected people and they will no longer be fooled.

Where attendance register becomes 'consent' document!: Sensing the predicament of the govt, indigenous parties, organizations and movements demanded the Vth Schedule of the Constitution be observed in letter and spirit and that govt's proposed amendments should get the approval of Tribes Advisory Council (TAC) before presenting them on the floor of the Assembly. The govt wishing to give the impression that it abides by the constitutional requirements convened a formal meeting of the TAC in September 2016 but the anomaly was the Chief Minister who is not even a tribal made himself the chairman and conducted the meet. Laughable but true, the attendance register was taken as the consent document and the general public was informed through the ever obliging media that the resolution of the govt had been passed by the TAC!

A three-minute miracle! Opposition to the proposed Amendments to CNT & SPT Acts became voluminous on the part of indigenous mass movements and opposition political parties. Rallies, public meetings against the amendments became the order of the day. Opposition parties assured the people that they would not allow the bill to be passed in the State Assembly. Both the ruling party and the opposition parties were geared up for the battle and an obvious tension prevailed all over the state. When the State Assembly gathered, the opposition parties members were up on their feet and demanded that the bill be discussed first before any attempt to pass it. An uproar prevailed and then lo and behold it was announced that the Bill has been passed by a voice vote! All this took place in a matter of three minutes!

It is NOT agricultural land for non-agricultural purpose... BUT snatching indigenous land for out-sider industrialists. What are the objectionable elements in the proposed amendments? (1) Article 49 allowed transfer of indigenous land only to industry and mining. The proposed amendment will open the door to creating infrastructure, rail lines, colleges, hospitals, transmission lines etc. etc. in fact for any and every thing. (2) Article 21 restricted the use of agricultural land only for

agricultural purpose. In other words, agricultural land cannot be changed to non-agricultural business purposes. The proposed amendment will allow any and every non-agricultural use.

It is important to keep in mind that

whatever agricultural land is still in possession of the indigenous community, has been possible because of Article 21 of CNT and Article 13 of SPT Act. So if the amendments will become a law, no land will be left with indigenous communities. Frightening reality indeed!

This plot of the capitalist ruling class against the Indigenous Peoples must be resisted at all costs. If we fail in this struggle, Indigenous Communities will be wiped out in the map of central India.

Rojava, the PYD and Kurdish self-determination

20 December 2016, by **Uraz Aydin**

As we know, the siege of Kobané was finally broken, with the support of Kurdish and Turkish militants who forced their way across the Turkish-Syrian border, Iraqi peshmergas and of course US air strikes. Since then, the Democratic Forces of Syria (FDS) whose main military force is the YPG, supported by the US and to some extent Russia, have played a key role in the war against Islamic State.

In this article we will try to summarise briefly the political roots of the PYD, its place in the Kurdish national movement in Syria, its ideological line, its positions in the revolution, as well as the chief modalities and difficulties of the process of self-determination underway in Rojava.

Kurdish nationalism under the Baath

Kurdish nationalism in Syria presents a very fragmented picture. The multitude of parties far exceeds what is seen in the other parts of Kurdistan. If it is difficult to follow the perpetual regroupings and splits, we can undoubtedly say that there are currently more than 15 active Kurdish parties. Most of these parties originated from the Democratic Party of Kurdistan of Syria (PDKS), founded in 1957 and rapidly dividing into “left” and “right” tendencies, which split to

form distinct parties around 1965. The factional development in Iraq’s Kurdish parties (taken as a model), the conditions of underground activity, and the accusations of collaboration with the regime and the infiltrations and interventions of the state security services perpetuated the splits. Political divergences stemming mainly from the tone employed towards the regime and political demands which stretched from the recognition of cultural, linguistic and citizenship rights to the constitutional recognition of the Kurds as a minority. Nonetheless it is important to stress that autonomy had practically never been demanded before 2011 (apart from the Yekiti party). We note however that citizenship is a crucial question, given that after the exceptional census of 1962 more than 120,000 Kurds had their nationality withdrawn and were classified as “foreign”, deprived of a specific civil status certificate, as being “maktumin”, non-registered, without identity card or rights.

From the 1990s onwards this multitude of parties regrouped. Thus the parties close to the Iraqi Kurdish current of Jalal Talabani regrouped in the Kurdish Democratic Alliance of Syria (“Hevbendi”) while those linked to Mesut Barzani formed the Kurdish Democratic Front of Syria (“Eniya”). Among the parties not originating from the PDKS, we should certainly note first the PKK and its “brother party”, the PYD, founded in 2003. The

PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan as well as his organisation had enjoyed the support of Hafez al-Assad – in the context of his rivalry with his Turkish neighbour – until the end of the 1990s, with PKK camps installed in Syria since the early 1980s. Thus the Kurdish question in Syria was not on the PKK’s agenda and it was only after the regime had ceased to shelter Öcalan and the foundation of the PYD that it began to take an interest in Syrian politics. Another important party was that of Michel Temo, the Party of the Kurdish Future, founded in 2005, which emphasised cooperation with the Arab opposition at the beginning of the revolution, but his assassination dealt a severe blow to his movement, which split. The Party of the Kurdish Union of Syria, known as Yekiti and born out of the fusion of several groups – including a small Trotskyist current which had in the 1980s adhered to the Fourth International, led by the poet Marwan Othman [23], should also be mentioned as a left force on the Kurdish political spectrum. From 2002, immediately after the brief Damascus spring, the political intervention of Yekiti, more open and radical and seeking to mobilise the Kurdish community not only in Rojava but directly in the capital, with a “class struggle” programme, was important in terms of the confrontation with the regime and the politicisation which led to the “Serhildan” (revolt in Kurdish) of Qamishlo [24].

From the Kurdish intifada to the Syrian revolution

A key event was then the revolt of Qamishlo in 2004, also known as the Kurdish intifada, where for the first time thousands of Kurds went onto the streets to affirm their Kurdish identity and demands their rights of citizenship, following confrontations with Arab nationalist supporters during a football match and severe repression by the police. The uprising was not limited to Qamishlo or the Rojava region, but rapidly reached the Kurdish neighbourhoods of Aleppo and Damascus. Statues of Hafez Al-Assad were overthrown, while police stations, public buildings and Baath centres were attacked.

It was then from this *serhildan* that we witnessed for the first time, for more than ten days, the mobilisation of a Kurdish radical youth independent of the traditional parties of Kurdish nationalism which would be seen again in the early days of the revolution. Alongside this radicalised youth, it should be said that it was above all Yekiti and the PYD which were the spearhead of the mobilisations (the television channel linked to the PKK, Roj TV, openly called for insurrection). But the regime's repression was ferocious. Some youth organisations were formed immediately after the revolt, distancing themselves from the pacifism of the traditional parties – sometimes with an armed struggle orientation, although this was not put into practice. The perspective of autonomy gained ground in consciousness, as opposed to the demands for equal rights and citizenship defended by the Alliance and the Front.

The first spontaneous mobilisations in 2011 in Syrian Kurdistan took place in late March, mainly in the town of Amuda, then Serekaniye. If Bashar al-Assad tried to calm the situation by accepting the conferral of nationality on Kurds with the status of *â€˜foreigner*” (but not to the

“maktumine”) this was not sufficient to win over the Kurdish youth. As in the rest of the country, coordination committees were formed, the Kurdish Youth Movement (TCK), founded during the events of 2004, also played an important mobilising role.

The main parties were the Movement of the Future, Yekiti and the Kurdish Liberty Party (“Azadi”) which took part in the demonstrations from the beginning. The other parties only joined the movement during the summer. Michel Temo, leader of the Movement of the Future, was alone in participating in the Syrian National Council (SNC), founded during the Istanbul conference in July. This position would have allowed links to develop between the Syrian and Kurdish oppositions, if he had not been assassinated in October 2011. His funeral became transformed into massive demonstrations in Qamishlo. These mobilisations accelerated the attempts to regroup the Kurdish parties originating from the PDKS, which finally joined the revolt and formed, under the auspices of Mesut Barzani, the Kurdish National Council of Syria (ENKS), which Yekiti and Azadi also joined. Thus it was the broadest rallying of the Kurdish national movement in Syria.

Two parties only remained outside, that of Temo, still a member of the SNC, and the PYD. The latter, which kept at the margins of the uprising which was shaking the whole country, as well as the Kurdish region, had in September founded a coordination of different left Baathist Arab parties and a Christian Aramaic party. Their orientation was rather to negotiate with the regime so as to obtain democratic gains, without any perspective of overthrowing it and – according to them – without risk of opening the way to a civil war. Hundreds of PYD activists were released from prison at the same time as the jihadist militants.

Criticising the ENKS, accused of playing the game of Turkey (because of the relations between Barzani and Ankara) and of the SNC which gave no guarantee for the rights of the Kurdish people, the PYD thus opted for a “third way”. Through its Movement for a Democratic Society (Tev-Dem)

bringing together the parties and associations of civil society linked to it, it announced the foundation of the Popular Council of Western Kurdistan, which constituted the main administrative structure in the Rojava after the PYD and YPG had taken control following the withdrawal of the regime's forces [25].

The PYD and democratic confederalism

The foundation of the PYD resulted from a trend towards the decentralisation of the PKK, parallel to a radical change of political perspective by *Â-calan*. A little before his arrest in 1999, the PKK leader had abandoned the objective of an independent and united Kurdistan (which was henceforth in his view “conservatism”) and proposed a new strategic objective resting on the thesis of the “democratic republic”. Probably formulated with a view to opening negotiations, *Â-calan* here proposed a resolution of the Kurdish question through the democratisation of Turkey, without change of border. Thus the objectives were limited to the recognition of the Kurds by the state and the respecting of their cultural rights (as well as the liberation of prisoners and the authorisation of combatants to reintegrate into civilian life).

However, it soon proved that there was no question of negotiation on the part of the state. Also, with the consolidation of the Kurdish autonomous region in Iraq following the US intervention, southern Kurdistan (in Iraq) and the PDK led by Barzani – the historic rival of the PKK – became a pole of attraction for the Kurdish people. Thus the perspective of a resolution of the Kurdish question limited to a democratisation of the Turkish regime carried a real political risk for the PKK. *Â-calan* thus had to again undertake a change of strategy taking into account all the parties of Kurdistan [26]. The foundation of the PYD in Syria (2003) and that of the PJAK in Iran (2004), as well as the political project which would later take the name of democratic

confederalism, resulted from this new approach.

This project, as well as that of democratic autonomy which completes it at the local level, is strongly inspired by the work of the libertarian socialist theorist Murray Bookchin (who participated in the US Trotskyist movement in the 1930s). After a reconsideration of Marxism, Bookchin replaced the labour-capital contradiction with the capital-ecology contradiction and proposed an anti-capitalist struggle seeking a decentralisation of cities, a local production of food, and the use of renewable energies. In Bookchin's "communalist" project, small autonomous towns administered through democratic councils would form confederal units for the resolution of problems which went beyond their own frontiers [27]. However, in the different programmatic texts of the PKK and the writings of Æ-calan, what these notions would correspond to in practice remains fairly indeterminate: is it about the confederation of the parties and organisations linked to the PKK or is it a larger and more inclusive project? Is it a multi-ethnic project for all the peoples of the Middle East or a project for Kurdistan whose protagonist would be the Kurdish people? Does autonomy mean a strengthening of the existing local administrations or does it amount to a more subversive political project [28]? One can multiply the questions, notably at the level of the means to use to conquer autonomy and the relations with the states concerned, not to mention those with the capitalist mode of production.

As Alex de Jong stresses in his excellent article on the PKK's ideological evolutions, the writings of Æ-calan and the texts of the PKK (for whom Æ-calan is "the supreme theoretical-ideological organ" according to its statutes) include a "potent vagueness" - thus it is possible to find all kinds of responses to these questions and, with all the inconveniences that this includes, the blurred and unfinished character of his political project can prove useful and open itself to broader interpretations [29]. But outside of this, two key points emerge from these

texts (and the practice of the organisations linked to the PKK). The rejection of the nation-state (replaced by the "democratic nation" a concept which again is vague) and the importance of ecology and the liberation of women (resting sometimes on a women-nature-life identification), which can be found in the Rojava Charter.

Rojava, potentialities and contradictions

The model of administration presented in the charter or the "social contract" of Rojava (2014), which has henceforth taken the name of Democratic Federal System of Northern Syria and Rojava, is striking in the accent it places on the importance of democracy ("self-administration"), women's and children's rights, ecology, secularism and of course the multi-ethnic character of the region. In a territory where different parts are controlled by Islamic State, the jihadist gangs of Al Nusra and Ahrar al Sham and the bloodthirsty Al Assad regime, that is no small thing. The contract, which is said to be accepted by Kurds, Arabs, Armenians, Syriacs (Assyrian, Chaldean and Aramaic), Turkmen and Chechens, rejects the nation-state, the religious and military state and the central administration and declares itself as a part of a parliamentary, federal, pluralist and democratic Syria.

The multi-ethnic dimension of the regime in Rojava, which has led to the modification of its name - Æ-calan had proposed that it be just "Federation of Northern Syria" [30] - is criticised by the nationalist currents present in the ENKS. Thus the general secretary of the Democratic Progressive Party, Ehmed Suleyman, said in an interview given in January 2015 that it was not a "project for the Kurds. Democratic autonomy has been founded with the Arabs, the Syriacs and the Chechens. We cannot resolve the Kurdish question in this way. Our people should understand that what they have founded does not belong to the Kurds". Against this perspective of

including the different ethnic groups in the process of construction of autonomy, some within the ENKS defend for example the displacement of the Arab population of Rojava in the context of the "Arab belt" policy of the 1970s [31].

If this contract is mainly limited to the administrative structure, the Charter adopted previously by Tev-Dem in 2013 is much more detailed and reflects again the Bookchinian libertarian spirit of Æ-calan's ideas, which has strongly inspired the model of democratic confederalism. For example the communes are defined as "the smallest and most effective units of society. They are constituted according to the paradigm of society where the values of the freedom of women and ecological democracy reign on the basis of direct democracy". The communal economic system is said to be dominated by the idea of social justice and seeks to eliminate all forms of exploitation. The "houses of the people" work for the "the birth of the culture of communal democracy".

However it is unhappily not enough to repeat the term democracy for the latter to function without hindrance. Because for the moment we are talking about a democracy without elections. If pluralism is lauded at the level of the different ethnic groups, its political dimension is rather absent. That the social contract designates the YPG as the armed forces of Rojava reflects the fact that the PYD is not inclined to share the control of the territories it leads. The imposition of the ideology of Æ-calan is also visible at the level of education. All primary school teachers are obliged to undergo a training based on the texts of Æ-calan and, in the canton of Jazira for examples, primary school books features the speeches of Æ-calan and writings on the lives of PKK martyrs [32]. But apart from these examples of imposition of an official ideology from a very young age (strangely resembling the experience of Kemalism) the authoritarian practices with respect to the other Kurdish parties and ethnic groups not accepting the domination of the PYD have been denounced many times.

There have been movements of protest

against the PYD and its practices, notably in Amuda and Derabissyat in 2013, and the security forces linked to the PYD (the “*asayish*”) have not hesitated to fire on crowds, causing the death of several demonstrators. More recently, in August 2016 the arrest of Hassan Salih, leader of Yekiti, was a deplorable act. Salih had already been imprisoned for a year and a half in 2003 by the Syrian regime, with Marwan Othman, and their liberation had been met with a cortege 4 kilometres long made up of several thousand people [33]. Also, the fact that the regime withdrew (partially) from Rojava without any armed conflict, leaving behind much of its artillery and ammunition, while continuing to control the airport, railway station, state establishments, holding a military camp in the south of Qamishlo and continuing to be present in Hasseke, paying the wages of teachers (apart from those for Kurdish courses), is deemed by the Kurdish opposition as evidence of collaboration with the Syrian state. If it is not possible to exclude the thesis of a certain compromise concerning the withdrawal of the Syrian army between the PYD and the regime, concerned not to multiply the fronts of combat, it seems to us difficult to speak of an alliance properly so called between the two, as shown by recent conflicts between the forces (YPG and *asayish*) of Rojava and those of the regime supported by pro-Assad militias, as well as the bombardment of civilian neighbourhoods in Hasseke by Syrian planes.

The situation is all the more complex inasmuch as the PKK-PYD has for the first time obtained the chance to compete with its historic rival in northern Iraq by building its own “state”, a sovereign administrative structure with borders, for the moment always changing. The reality of an autonomous Rojava, reinforced by the heroic battle of Kobané (which now constitutes a new founding myth for the PKK), has allowed the organisation, mutilated by the imprisonment of its leader and years of fruitless negotiation with the Turkish state, to open a new sequence in its history.

Campism and permanent revolution

Revolutionary Marxists do not have the luxury of succumbing to the temptation of comfortably adopting a campist analytical framework and the positions which flow from it. Campism in its classical sense designates support, in periods of geopolitical tension and conflict, for one of the existing camps, against the other, identified with an absolute evil, without taking into account the relations of class domination within it. The debate on campism mainly concerns the support by left forces during the Cold War to the Eastern or Western blocs, respectively in the name of anti-imperialism or democracy. Such a polarisation exists today concerning the Ukrainian conflict and above all the Syrian question between the USA/EU and Russia. The question in our case is, in the context of the combined process in Syria, the defence, following the same campist mentality, of one of the existing camps, namely the Kurds in their project of autonomisation or uprising against the regime, without taking into account the other process, by attributing to it a secondary importance or placing it in an adverse position.

Thus it is not possible for us to isolate the process of Kurdish self-determination from the dynamics of the Syrian uprising and to take an uncritical attitude to the PYD-PKK, deeming authoritarian practices and attacks on political rights which undermine the bases of its democratic project to be secondary. But nor is it conceivable to refuse to take into account the process underway in Rojava with its genuinely progressive dimensions - which are without parallel in the whole region - and to minimise the emancipatory potential they contain, on the pretext of the (permanently evolving) relations with the regime or with the US, which include their share of danger, as well as the contradictions that we have mentioned.

If the Rojava leadership is certainly

responsible for its deeds and alliances, all its contradictions should be approached in the context of the inter-ethnic historic conflicts between Kurds and Arabs in the region and the rivalry between the various leaderships of the Kurdish people. We have no other choice than to take the question in all its complexity and elaborate an approach which is both critical and constructive [34]. This should rest on the community of interest of toilers of Kurdish, Arab or other origin in the region and thus the necessity of combining the processes of self-determination and revolution.

There is nothing new in this, it is the main argument of the strategic perspective of permanent revolution, formulated by Leon Trotsky after the Russian revolution of 1905, but having determined (above all by its absence) the course of all revolutionary uprisings, from the French revolution to the “Arab Spring”. Revolutionary processes with the objective of national liberation and the installation of a democratic regime weaken and finally fail if collectivist, anti-capitalist measures are not taken, if the aspirations of the popular classes - whose support is primordial - are not taken into consideration and are disappointed. And when movements seeking a radical, egalitarian and libertarian transformation of society do not respect democratic principles on the territories they control, do not recognise the right of self-determination of other peoples, do not act with an anti-imperialist perspective with complete political independence of world and regional forces, their revolution becomes distanced from its initial objectives and is doomed to defeat.

Thus a principal task for the radical left which is active outside of the area of conflict, apart from the indispensable actions of solidarity, is to work for the development of this consciousness in our respective societies contaminated by this ideological scourge - re-emerging from its tomb - of campism, whose sole antidote still remains the tradition of proletarian internationalism borne by revolutionary Marxism.

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Letter to a "comrade" who insists on justifying the unjustifiable

20 December 2016, by **Julien Salingue**

In the name of anti-imperialism?

The city of Aleppo has been victim of a massacre, of a real carnage, which one cannot help comparing with other martyred cities like Srebrenica, Grozny, Fallujah, as well as Warsaw and Guernica, or the Palestinian camps of Sabra and Chatila.

The direct testimonies pouring from the city, coming from "ordinary" Syrians and not only from members of armed groups, are eloquent, a fortiori when they are accompanied by photographs or videos. Words and images that tell about the distress, the impotence, the horror.

But you, "comrade," have done your utmost in these last few days?—if this exercise can be considered as having anything to do with a virtue?—to explain that we should not engage with the inhabitants of Aleppo and that there was no need to denounce the bombing of which they are victims, nor to denounce the abuses committed by the troops on the ground during the "liberation" of the city. In other words, you have come to explain us that we should not take a clear and determined position against the planned massacre perpetrated by the dictatorial regime of Bashar al-Assad and its allies, with Russia and Iran at the forefront.

If I address you, "comrade", it is because in the past we have shared numerous battles, especially—but not only—the fight for the rights of the Palestinian people. Because I thought that, despite our differences, we had common principles. Indeed, I

have nothing to say to the pro Putin and/or pro Assad right and far-right, who are unambiguous in their support of authoritarian regimes in the name of shared "values", and who have never bothered to appear as wanting to build real solidarity with oppressed peoples.

But you, "comrade", you arrogate to yourself "progressive", "anti-imperialist", "socialist", "communist", and even "revolutionary" virtues. And in the name of these virtues you attempt to convince us that for the time being we shouldn't resolutely position on the side of the besieged and massacred people of Aleppo, and that tomorrow we shouldn't position on the side of the rest of the already besieged and soon massacred Syrian cities.

Which is not, you will admit, the least of the paradoxes.

"The bad guys are not necessarily the ones we believe"

My understanding was that what constituted the common genetic heritage of the anti-imperialist left was to be on the side of the peoples crushed by the imperialist states and their allies. My understanding was that in this genetic heritage, that we seemed to share, we did not compromise with international solidarity. And I had hoped that, despite your sometimes more than ambiguous positions on the Syrian tragedy, the martyrdom of Aleppo would bring you back to reason, and home.

But no. You're stubborn. You persist with trying to explain that one cannot take sides with the massacred population in Aleppo.

You persist with trying to explain that "things are not so simple". You persist with trying to explain that in this "war" there is no "good guys on the one hand and bad guys on the other", and that we need to keep a cool head and not succumb to the easy.

Because it's pretty clear, "comrade", you don't succumb to the easy. Never. You propose us a complex, very elevated and nuanced analysis, which reads somewhat like this: "No, Assad is not a democrat, and the countries supporting him are no models either. But be careful: the self-proclaimed Syrian rebellion is mostly composed by forces coming from fundamentalist, even jihadist Islam which are remote-controlled and armed by reactionary regimes like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, even by the Western sponsors of the latter, particularly the US and France"

Conclusion: "Careful, the bad guys are not necessarily the ones we believe"

The Syrian people, you know?

The first problem of your analysis, "comrade", is that it "forgets" an essential actor: the Syrian people. Indeed, you seem to "forget" that the point of departure of the "events" in Syria is not a Saudi, US, Qatari or Turkish intervention. Not even a Russian one. The point of departure of all this is that in March 2011 hundreds of thousands of Syrian men and

women rose up against a dictatorial and predatory regime, like they did in Tunisia, in Egypt, in Libya. And if Assad and his thugs had not decided to brutally repress the uprising, with more than 5.000 killed and tens of thousands of detentions during 2011, they too would have fallen under popular pressure.

And we are talking about 2011, year in which, remember “comrade”, you were excited about the other uprisings in the region. “The people want the fall of the regime”, do you remember? You may have even chanted it in the streets of a French city, you who are so fond of freedom, social justice and democracy. In Syria it was chanted too, along with the same economic, social and political demands as in the other countries of the region that were touched by the uprising, and Ryad, Doha, Paris or Washington had nothing to do with it. If you are so interested in the Syrian question, you must know that every time there has been a truce in recent years, the demonstrations resumed. That without the intervention of Iran, then of Russia, the regime would have fallen, under the pressure of the Syrian people, not a few thousand “foreign fighters” who arrived, by the way, long after the regime killed thousands of unarmed Syrians, and brought tens or even hundreds of “jihadists” out of prison. Have you ever wondered why? And, yes, the roots of the Syrian “crisis” are indeed the popular protest against a clan, and the response of the latter: destroy everything rather than lose its power and perks.

Unless you want to imply that from the beginning Syrians were “manipulated” by Western countries, that all this is basically a story about hydrocarbons, and that the Syrian uprising was remotely guided from outside by powers that need only to press a button for populations to rise. But I dare not even think so: you are not one of those who believe that Arabs are so foolish that they are not able to think for themselves and that when they begin to mobilize and claim “social justice”, even if they risk losing their lives, it is necessarily because they are manipulated by Westerners who think only of “hydrocarbons”.

Right, “comrade”?

Rocket launcher against aviation

The second problem with your analysis, “comrade”, is that you put on the same level, on one side the “support” provided by Russia and Iran to Assad and on the other the “support” brought by the United States, France, Turkey and the Gulf monarchies to the Syrian opposition forces. You try to make us believe that there wouldn’t be an overwhelming military superiority of the Assad regime and its allies and that, after all, to resume, barely altering it, a formula in vogue in a country bordering Syria, “Assad has the right to defend himself”.

But dare you really compare, on one side, the thousands of Iranian “military advisers” and armament, the thousands of Hezbollah fighters and, above all, the Russian air force (as well as the vehicles and heavy weapons supplied by Russia, the 2nd largest military power in the world) that support a state and a regular army, and, on the other, small arms, rocket launchers and anti-missile launches provided or financed by the Gulf monarchies or Turkey and small arms, rocket launchers, a few anti-tank weapons and communications systems and night vision devices provided, by the drip, by the United States and France?

Do you know that what the Syrian opposition forces have been asking for since the beginning are anti-aircraft missiles, in order to defend themselves against the planes of Putin and Assad’s death, and that it is the United States that have systematically vetoed the delivery of such weapons? Do you know that at the beginning of 2014, after the failure of the “Geneva 2” conference, the Saudis for the first time suggested to deliver missile launchers to the Syrian opposition forces, and that the United States opposed it and that they have not changed position since then? The United States, which did not want, and does not want, that these weapons fall “into the wrong hands”, and above all does not wish for the Syrian state

apparatus to be destroyed because they have, contrary to others, drawn the balance sheets of their brilliant intervention in Iraq.

Ask yourself the following question: where are the terrible weapons of the opposition? Do you seriously think that Assad could have bombed entire neighborhoods from helicopters flying low if Syrian opponents had disposed of real armament?

And do you remember that last May the Russian embassy in Great Britain, which must be well informed and which, if it had proofs of the great armament of the opponents of Assad, would exhibit them, was limited to tweeting images extracted from a video game (!) to “prove” that the Syrian opposition forces were receiving chemical weapons?

So, please, let’s be serious!

Who is destroying Syria?

The third problem with your analysis, “comrade”, is that you simply forget a fundamental element: the facts. For you will always be able to tell me that what I have just written is impossible to prove, even if it is the main actors of this “non-support” and the “non-supported” who have testified to it, and who continue to do so. Because, perhaps, after all, they are fierce liars.

But if you absolutely want proof, just open your eyes and ask yourself this simple question: how could Syria have been destroyed? When you comment on the images of devastated cities saying that there is “violence on both sides,” you hide a detail: who possesses the weapons necessary to cause a destruction of such magnitude?

To put it another way: who can carry out bombings? Where are the planes of the Syrian opposition forces? Where are their tanks? Hidden underground, like the super-powerful army of Saddam Hussein that threatened the whole world? How many planes have been destroyed by the Syrian opposition forces? Are you aware that in 2013, when they knocked down two

helicopters, it was such a rare event that they celebrated it with great pomp and spread images of their "feat" everywhere? Two helicopters! At that time, I could not stop thinking about the people of Gaza celebrating the accidental fall of an Israeli drone

The "coalition" led by the United States intervenes militarily, you object. But can you give me a list of the bombings carried out by this coalition against the armed forces of the Assad regime or against the armed forces that support it? No, do not waste your time searching, because I inform myself daily from reliable sources: according to the Damascus regime and the media that relay its communication, sources that can hardly be suspected of wanting to conceal this type of bombing, it has happened ... twice. The first time was in December 2015 (4 dead), in the Deir ez-Zor region, the "coalition" denied having targeted the Syrian army and claimed that it had bombed Daech. The second time in September 2016 (between 50 and 80 deaths according to the sources), near the airport of Deir ez-Zor, this time the "coalition" recognized having bombarded the positions of the regime and presented official apologies to Bashar al-Assad and Vladimir Putin.

In summary, and unless I'm somewhere mistaken (no one is infallible), the "coalition", which claims about 5,000 "strikes" on Syria, has twice targeted the Assad regime since the beginning of its bombing campaign in 2014, and in one of those cases it has "apologized" for it. Therefore, please note down: "The real military operations carried out by the "coalition" targeted Daech and other "jihadist" groups, not Assad and his allies".

Finally, some "preventive" remarks

There are many other problems with your analysis, "comrade", I do not wish to take up any more of your time. Indeed, for having often had the opportunity to discuss verbally with

you these "analysis problems" by confronting your "geopolitics" and your "anti-imperialism" with the facts and the actual chronology of events, I know you do not like them very much: the facts. They are really too stubborn.

For it is much easier to come to provoke or to stir up trouble via posts/comments on Facebook or discussion forums than to take the time to have a somewhat precise and reasoned exchange.

So in case you are still tempted to succumb to the easy and want to play this little game, I present to you a few "preventive" remarks:

- Before telling me that I defend the same positions as the United States, France, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, BHL or some other "cumbersome companions", remember that if you reason in this way you defend on your side the same positions as Russia, Iran, Marshal Sissi, François Fillon or Marine Le Pen, and ask yourself if that's a good argument.

- Before telling me that since 2011 Israel has bombed fifteen times positions of the Assad regime, and that those who are against Assad are therefore with Israel, remember that last June Putin declared, at the end of a meeting with Netanyahu with whom he had just signed several trade agreements, the following: *"We have evoked the need for joint efforts in the fight against international terrorism. In this regard, we are allies. Both countries have significant experience in matters of fight against extremism. We will therefore strengthen our contacts with our Israeli partners in this area"*. And ask yourself if that's a good argument.

- Before telling me that the Syrian rebellion appealed to the Western countries to receive weapons and to benefit from a substantial, especially aerial, military support and that this necessarily hides something, remember that the Kurdish forces that you admire so much? "rightly so"? "since they rejected Daech in Kobane have done exactly the same thing, and they have obtained this support, to the extent that they publicly thanked the United States for their support, and ask yourself if that's

a good argument.

- Before telling me that the Syrian rebellion, even though one might at first have been sympathetic to it, is now confiscated by reactionary forces stemming from political Islam, and that some of these forces do not hesitate to attack civilians or, a variation on the same theme, that it is really tragic to bomb civilians but that it's because terrorists hide among them when they do not use them as human shields, remember that this is the speech of those who want to justify the campaigns of deadly bombing on Gaza, and ask yourself if that's a good argument.

- Before telling me that the Syrian insurgents are "objective allies" of Daech, remember that Daech was driven out of Aleppo at the beginning of 2014 by those who are now being massacred by Assad, then think about the concept of "objective ally", and ask yourself if that's a good argument. You can also reconsider, if you are not convinced, what I mentioned above about the real targets of the coalition bombing, and ask yourself a second time if the blow of the "objective ally" is a good argument.

- Finally, before telling me that those who denounce Assad and Putin "forget" to denounce the massacres committed by the great Western powers and their allies, keep in mind that of those who mobilize for Aleppo, we are many who also mobilized for Gaza, against military intervention in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya or elsewhere, and that we do not renounce, contrary to you who chose not to be on the street last night to denounce the current butchery [December 14 in Paris], to our political consistency, ideals and anti-imperialism. And ask yourself if that's a good argument.

This is, "comrade", what I wanted to tell you. The tone is not very pleasant, I agree, but it is not much compared to the indifference, sometimes even contempt, that you display towards the martyrdom of Aleppo.

Do whatever you want with this letter, and of course you have the right to

continue be complacent in your short-sighted “geopolitical” vision and your Pavlovian “anti-imperialism” while the Syrians crash under Putin’s and Assad’s bombs before your eyes.

We are not talking about an exercise of rhetoric on Facebook through interposed comments, but of thousands, tens of thousands of lives. We are not talking about a discrepancy between us about the appreciation of this or that event, but about your complicit silence or your miserable contortions in the face of one of the greatest tragedies of our time. We are not talking about a simple political disagreement, but a

real rupture.

I don’t know when we will talk next time, “comrade”. But what I know is that if you persist, and unfortunately I think that is what you are going to do, there will not even be quotation marks anymore, for there will be no more comrade.

I leave you with Che, who has something to say to you: “Above all, try always to be able to feel deeply any injustice committed against anyone in any part of the world. It is the most beautiful quality of a revolutionary.”

15 December 2016

PS: No, I did not put any footnotes. It is not my style not to mention references, but you will probably have understood that it is voluntary. Because you are very good at doing research on the internet (and elsewhere?), you and I know very well that you will be able to find all the sources used here.

First published on Julien Salingue’s blog [Résister À l’air du temps](#).

Translated into Spanish by Faustino Eguberri for [VIENTO SUR](#)

Translated into English from Spanish and French by Rafaela Apel [here](#).

On Morbid Symptoms

17 December 2016, by **Gilbert Achcar**

Jadaliyya (J): What made you write this book?

Gilbert Achcar (GA): Two reasons: one general and one practical. The general reason is the need to assess the new counter-revolutionary phase in the Arab upheaval, which started in 2013. Since early on, I have been describing what began in December 2010 in Tunisia and spread to the whole Arab-speaking region in 2011 as a “long-term revolutionary process” that will necessarily go through a succession of contrasting phases.

My previous book, *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising*—which came out in 2013 and was kindly reviewed by Maha Abdelrahman for *Jadaliyya*—analyzed the economic, social and political roots of the regional upheaval and its dynamics, along with an assessment of its first two years. *Morbid Symptoms* is a sequel to *The People Want*, assessing the reactionary phase that has been unfolding since the turning point of 2013.

The practical issue behind this new book is that, as the first edition of *The People Want* was coming close to going out of print, my London

publisher asked me to write an updated chapter for a second augmented edition. Soon after I started writing this requested chapter, I realized that I would need quite more than a single chapter to examine the key features of the new phase, draw a new provisional balance-sheet and assess the prospects at this new juncture. I therefore left *The People Want* to continue a life of its own, with a second printing.

The new title is taken from a famous statement by Antonio Gramsci, in his *Prison Notebooks*, about the situation in 1930: “The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.” I found that this sentence summarizes admirably the present Arab condition.

J: What particular topics, issues, and literatures does the book address?

GA: *Morbid Symptoms* starts with a discussion of mainstream misinterpretations of what started in 2011 as going to be a relatively brief and peaceful “democratic transition.” This is followed by an examination of

the peculiarities of the Arab region that predetermine the revolutionary process to be much more complicated and violent than expected. The introductory chapter leads to two main chapters, one on Syria entitled “The Clash of Barbarisms” (borrowing from the title of a book that I first published in 2002 in the aftermath of 9/11) and another on Egypt entitled “The ‘23 July’ of Abdul-Fattah al-Sisi” (a nod to Karl Marx’s classic *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, sharing its ironic intention).

The book’s concluding chapter surveys the other main theaters of the regional upheaval—Libya, Yemen, and Tunisia—and shows how developments in each theater can be construed as variations of a similar pattern that prevailed over the whole region. The final section draws a critical balance-sheet of the Arab left’s behavior since the beginning of the uprising and what is required if a progressive alternative to both the old order and its reactionary Islamic fundamentalist contenders is ever to emerge as a credible force.

My books are based on a selection of the most relevant primary and

secondary sources (in European languages as well as in Arabic), and above all on my own engagement with the region. Unlike purely academic authors who feel a need to report every visit and exchange with local actors, especially when they are foreign to the region, I am myself both a scholar presently based in a Western academic institution—SOAS, University of London—and an Arab actor who travels constantly across the region and interacts with a wide range of local actors, with no ethnographic estrangement. This is how I am perceived in the region, where the prominence and dissemination of the Arabic editions of my recent books are much greater than in English or French, not to mention other languages into which my works have been translated.

J: How does this book connect to and/or depart from your previous work?

GA: *Morbid Symptoms* connects to *The People Want* in that it builds on the background analysis that the latter includes and carries on applying the same grid of intelligibility to the new developments.

Two major interpretative threads running from the first book to the sequel are, on the one hand, the analysis of the peculiar character of states in the Arab region and, on the other hand, the difference between the usual binary opposition between revolution and counter-revolution in revolutionary upheavals and the triangulation between a progressive revolutionary pole and two rival counter-revolutionary ones in the Arab case. These two distinctive features bear enormous implications for the regional revolutionary process and the formidable challenges it confronts.

Another connection is that *Morbid Symptoms*, in relating the present as history, picks up from where *The People Want* left off (in October 2012, the date of end of writing). Thus, the new book starts examining each local situation by quoting directly from what *The People Want* concluded and forecasted about this same situation. I contend that the key prognoses made in the first book were confirmed by the turn of events.

As for departing, it is the situation that is covered in *Morbid Symptoms* that departs from the one that is covered in *The People Want* rather than one book departing from the other in analytical orientation. The two situations contrast quite sharply indeed: whereas 2011 and 2012 were years of revolutionary euphoria characterized by over-optimism on a backdrop of ongoing upsurge, albeit a waning one, the subsequent years have been characterized by depression and despair on a backdrop of counter-revolution and what looks very much like a Hobbesian war of all against all.

What each of my two books tries to do is to counter or correct the impressionistic mood of the moment by deploying a historical perspective that locates the ongoing developments in the long-term process to which they belong. From that standpoint, the only absolute certainty regarding the region's future is that it will not recover sustained political stability before very long, with further dramatic shifts ahead in both the actual situation and the accompanying mood.

J: Who do you hope will read this book, and what sort of impact would you like it to have?

GA: The first readership for which I wrote these books is the Arabic-speaking readership. I am quite satisfied in this regard with the dissemination and reputation of the Arabic editions, which I have already mentioned. As for the English editions, I hope first that they will be read by those who seek a non-Orientalist or, to put it more squarely, an anti-Orientalist analysis of the ongoing upheaval, an analysis that is informed by a historical materialist perspective open to relevant inputs from other critical and scholarly perspectives. From the angle of shared values, I write for a readership that regards human emancipation from oppression in its various dimensions—political, social, gender, national, ethnic, etc.—as the supreme and indivisible value from which all other derive and to which they must all be subordinate.

Beyond these specific affinities, I believe that anyone wishing to

improve their understanding of what is going on in the Arabic-speaking region, be it as a scholar of the Middle East and North Africa or simply as a citizen of the world, will find useful insights in my work, if only because it is based on a long accumulation of first-hand knowledge and direct experience of the region. The impact I seek varies from political impact on the Arab actors to scholarly impact on the field of Arab-related studies. The latter remains dominated by too much of a Western-centrist perspective for which Arabic sources are only primary sources and hardly ever valuable secondary sources, as if no legitimate scholarly discourse could be expressed in other than European languages—even when the object of knowledge uses a non-European language. (More prosaically, of course, such an attitude often simply reflects a weak grasp of Arabic.)

J: What other projects are you working on now?

GA: Over my now several decades of intellectual activity, I have begun half a dozen of major book projects on which I carry on accumulating findings. I hope to live long enough to complete them, provided the ongoing events do not keep dictating my writing agenda as happened during the last six years.

Some of these projects bear no direct relation to the Arab world. My next major project related to the latter is a comprehensive assessment and discussion of Islamic fundamentalism, tackling all key questions in this regard from a serene assessment of the essentialist interpretations of the phenomenon that attribute it to specific features of Islam to the explanation of the surge of Islamic fundamentalism since the last quarter of the twentieth century and its production of successive waves of violent totalitarian offshoots.

Another less ambitious project related to the Arab world is a little book that I wish to find the time to write on Ibn Khaldun, whom I regard as a great pioneer of modern social sciences still hugely underrated in mainstream Western scholarship.

Source: [Jadaliyya](#).

Standing Rock: Battle Won, But War Continues

13 December 2016, by **Barry Sheppard**

The battle was joined by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACE), when it issued an ultimatum that the protest at the site where the pipeline is scheduled to go under the river must be disbanded by December 4 or the participants would face arrest and prosecution.

In short, the ACE would instruct the state and local police units to attack the water protectors on Dec. 5 unless they left the site by then. That would mean a repeat of the brutal police attacks against the non-violent protest that have already occurred, with clubs, attack dogs, tear gas, rubber bullets, water spraying of protesters with fire hoses in temperatures lower than 10 degrees (-12 C.), stun grenades, and mass arrests.

One of these grenades shredded the flesh of the arm of a young woman, a gruesome sight. She is undergoing multiple surgeries.

The ACE says it could do this because it operates this federal land, which is a bit outside the reservation. But the Sioux say this land was ceded to them by the U.S. in an 1851 treaty. So the ACE is holding this land illegally because the U.S. arbitrarily broke the treaty, as it has with hundreds of others in its prolonged genocidal war against the first inhabitants of North America. This land also contains sacred burial grounds of the Sioux, some of which have already been bulldozed, a racist insult and desecration to Native Americans.

The Standing Rock struggle had already won wide support, but this ultimatum spurred a qualitative new surge of solidarity, with many new supporters coming to North Dakota to put their bodies on the line. By Dec. 3, there were some 10,000 who joined the struggle at Standing Rock, although they faced injury and arrest.

In addition, there were protests in many cities against the big multinational banks financing the pipeline.

A key aspect of this new surge was veterans of the U.S. armed forces, many Native American but others too, mobilizing to come. They were prepared to form a line of defense between the cops and the protest site. The cops would have to go through them first. By Dec. 3, there were 2,000 veterans ready for the battle.

Dec. 5 was a Monday. An article in the New York Times reported, ““Fall in!” came a cry one night this weekend. Hundreds of men and women [veterans] packed into the building to get their orders from Brenda White Bull and Loreal Black Shawl, who are leading the veterans’ groups at the protest camps.”

The article described some of them. “Some were old men, veterans of Korea and postwar Europe, who said they had grown up in Indian boarding schools where they were beaten for speaking their language. Some drove in from reservations across the Plains.

“Some of the arriving veterans have spent years in the antiwar movement after returning from Vietnam or Iraq. They said they saw the pipeline protests as a new chapter in their activism....

“‘A lot of people here are willing to sacrifice their body, willing to give their life,’ said Vincent Emanuele, 32, a former Marine who served in Iraq and has spoken out extensively against what he called a futile war. “‘You might as well die for something that means something.’

“Others said they did not care much about politics and had never joined a

protest. But they said they had been moved by the tribe’s fight.... Or they said they were angry at seeing images of violent clashes between lines of law enforcement and Native Americans.

“‘I just couldn’t believe what was happening in the United States,’ [a veteran] said. “‘Even in Iraq, there was some rule of engagement. If these guys don’t have weapons, it just doesn’t make sense to me that it’s a shooting gallery.’”

The threat of the spectacle of militarized police charging unarmed veterans gave the powers that be cause for concern, and there were a series of retreats, with the ACE backing down from the threats of force.

Then on Dec. 4, the ACE (obviously under White House orders) denied Energy Transfer Partners, the company doing the construction, the permit to start building the pipeline underneath the river, officially halting construction.

On hearing the news, the encampment broke out into cheers and celebrations, echoed by supporters throughout the country.

But the mood was more sober the next day. Energy Transfer Partners reacted to the AEC decision by saying it meant nothing. They implied they might go ahead with the under river construction anyway, but that is uncertain, as it would lead to a direct clash with the federal government.

More certain is ETP’s boast that they have the full backing of Donald Trump, who has loudly (his normal speech) proclaimed that he will OK the Dakota Access Pipeline, reverse the Obama administration decision to block the XL pipeline, and scrap all regulations on Big Oil, Coal and the

rest of the energy industry.

Trump, as Commander in Chief of the armed forces, could order the ACE, part of the Army, to do so.

So the water protectors know they may have to re-mobilize.

It was the power of mass mobilization that won this battle. Over the last many months of struggle solidarity was built up. First of all, it was the Standing Rock Sioux who united to act. Then other tribes joined in,

including from Canada. Eventually over 200 tribes supported the struggle at Standing Rock, overcoming differences in a show of solidarity. This was the largest gathering of Native Americans in struggle since the American Indian Movement of the last radicalization in the U.S. in the 1960s-70s.

That they stood up and fought back encouraged others to come in support. Environmental groups recognized this fight against Big Oil was their fight too. Black Lives Matter activists saw a kindred struggle, as did many other

groups and individuals.

Nothing inspires all oppressed and exploited than to see a mass battle being waged against the ruling class. That this one was successful - even if conditional and the war is not over - furthers a sense that mass action is effective. In the protest camp, a renewed sense of their power was expressed. If there is need for further mobilization, this confidence will give them strength.

6 December

A despotism that destroys people - let us build the tools to overthrow it

12 December 2016, by Al Mounadil-a

A state with know-how that has been perfected through crime

It has built secret prisons (Tazmammart, Agdez, Kalaat Megouna...) and has never hesitated to machine-gun demonstrators during popular uprisings (1965-1981-1984-1990...)

It has conducted campaigns of collective punishment (Tarmilat, Ifni, Sefrou...)

The history of the kingdom is full of bloody scenes, of citizens subjected to the dictates of an army of functionaries, bureaucrats whose use of terror and corruption know no limits. The peasant from the most remote corner of the country, the small shopkeeper, the street seller, the artisan and any citizen seeking to have an administrative document: all of them suffer, intimidated and forced, the leaden hold of the despotic regime, its corrupt bureaucratic apparatus and its repression.

All of these crimes are not only the expression of medieval barbarity, they are especially and above all a class repression aimed at breaking the solidarity and the unity of the oppressed and their organisation. Banning workers from organising on a trade-union and political level, forbidding citizens to revolt in any way against their state of submission and for their dignity. These are the only reasons that explain so many acts of savagery.

The repression and the denial of dignity are only the face of class oppression

The crime of Hoceima will not be the last, as long as the dictatorship that bans all real democracy, dignity, justice and liberty for the people and for citizens lasts.

The state will act as it has always done in such cases:

â€¢ There will be a "judicial enquiry" and the law will be applied by sacrificing some minor functionaries, by transferring or even arresting them;

â€¢ Ministers will make the trip from the capital to Hoceima to prove that they are serious, to calm down the natives and contain the anger that the crime has provoked.

And after that order will be restored. The state will not abandon those who serve it, and to reassure them that they have nothing to fear, it will pursue its arbitrary actions and its savagery.

To work for a change that will put an end to despotism and corruption: that is our only path to impose the freedom and dignity of the people.

We call for mobilisation and protests against this crime, for which the entire responsibility lies with the state.

We demand that justice is done against those who committed this atrocious crime, those who gave the order for it and those who did not do

The Dangers of Anti-Trumpism

11 December 2016, by **Cinzia Arruzza**

Comparisons between Donald Trump and former Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi abounded throughout the presidential election campaign and have only proliferated since Trump declared victory. They are not entirely ungrounded.

Trump and Berlusconi are both men who came to power from business rather than politics, and both have presented their inexperience with the political establishment as a mark of purity. They have both insisted on their entrepreneurial success as the most evident proof of their qualification to rule the country. Like Plato's tyrant, they both exhibit an ethos based on a dream of continuous and unlimited jouissance and an aggressive and hubristic eros (though Berlusconi prefers to think of himself as an irresistible seducer rather than a rapist).

They both indulge in gross misogynistic and racist jokes and have reshaped public language by legitimizing insult and political incorrectness as acceptable forms of political communication and by embodying an exhilarating return of the repressed. They both revel in kitschy aesthetics and don the orange hue of artificial tanning. And they both allied with the far right in order to advance a political project of authoritarian neoliberalism and unbridled capitalism.

The analogies stop here. Trump's very resistible rise to power is, to a certain extent, more astonishing than Berlusconi's more predictable first electoral victory. While Trump hijacked the Republican Party, running up against opposition from a large part of the Republican establishment and from the media, Berlusconi used his media empire to both control information and create a

new political party, accordingly reshaping the political spectrum.

Because of the characteristics of the Italian parliamentary system, Berlusconi was forced to ally with other right-wing parties at odds with one another, the Alleanza Nazionale and Northern League: the first an evolution of the neofascist party Italian Social Movement (MSI), and the second a federalist, xenophobic right-wing party.

Moreover, Berlusconi did not agitate for isolationism and protectionism, did not challenge international market agreements, and did not question Italy's participation in the creation of the European Union and the eurozone – at least not until 2011. Finally, Italy does not play any hegemonic geopolitical role comparable to that of the United States.

These differences are significant enough to caution against facile predictions about the course of Trump's presidency based on Italian vicissitudes. They do not, however, mean that nothing can be learned from the Italian experience.

On the contrary, we can draw some important lessons if we move our attention away from the apparent similarities between Berlusconi and Trump, and focus instead on the analogies between anti-Berlusconism and the shape anti-Trumpism threatens to take.

Selective Amnesia

In a recent New York Times column, Luigi Zingales offers a rather scattershot interpretation of the mistakes made by the opposition to Berlusconi, arguing that prejudicial resistance to all of Berlusconi's acts

and popular mobilizations against his government, and an excessive focus on his character, actually worked to strengthen Berlusconi's power instead of weakening it.

In Zingales's interpretation, the only defeats Berlusconi suffered were due to electoral campaigns focused on positive proposals to move forward rather than on bashing Berlusconi's character, by Romano Prodi and Matteo Renzi. From this analysis, Zingales proposes that opponents to Trump should stop the current street demonstrations and show a willingness to cooperate with his administration in Congress on issues around which there is agreement between the president and Democrats against the Republican establishment, like new infrastructure investments.

This is a recipe for disaster. Let me set the historical record straight. Berlusconi's first government, in 1994, lasted only seven inglorious months. It was swept away by a combination of heterogeneous factors, but we can identify two of primary importance.

The first was the unruliness of the Northern League, whose votes Berlusconi needed to secure his victory in the North, but to whom he had nothing to offer in exchange. In particular, Berlusconi's attempt to reform the pension system and his inability to pursue a federalist reform ran against the electoral interests of the Northern League, which worried about losing a large part of its working-class support. When the Northern League decided to withdraw its support to the government, Berlusconi was forced to resign.

The second factor was popular mobilization, in particular the general strike called in October 1994 by the

three main unions against pension reform, which “ according to union sources ” saw three million people taking to the streets in ninety cities, and another in November, during which one million people marched in Rome, one of the largest union demonstrations to that date.

But it is what happened after the fall of Berlusconi’s first government that offers the most significant lessons for the anti-Trump opposition, for it was thanks to the neoliberal and austerity policies carried out by the center-left in the subsequent six years that Berlusconi’s power was consolidated.

First, the technocratic government led by Lamberto Dini between 1995 and 1996 undertook the most devastating reform of the pension system to date, introducing for the first time the contributory scheme meant to progressively replace the retributive system. The reform passed with the support of the center-left and the agreement of the unions, in the name of preventing Berlusconi’s return to power at all costs.

In the 1996 elections, the center-left coalition managed to secure a parliamentary majority thanks to the external support of Rifondazione Comunista and the Northern League’s refusal to form a coalition with Berlusconi. The center-left coalition produced the first Prodi government and subsequently Massimo D’Alema’s government.

Over the course of five years, center-left governments passed the first labor reforms to introduce massive casualization and significantly erode workers’ rights; tried to pass a devastating reform of public education and successfully introduced school autonomy policies that opened the path to a corporate-style management of public schools, as well as neoliberal reforms to higher education; carried out the largest privatization of public companies and assets in Europe to that date; participated in the NATO bombing of Serbia; and passed an immigration law instituting the first detention centers for undocumented migrants.

Finally, D’Alema’s government created the infamous “Bicamerale,” a

bipartisan commission that, D’Alema hoped, would lead to an agreement with Berlusconi on a project of semi-presidential reform of the Constitution that would have strengthened the prerogatives of the executive power at the expense of representation and parliamentary democracy.

With each of these measures, center-left governments only met opposition organized in the streets by the radical left, because unions and center-left voters were willing to swallow everything in the name of preventing Berlusconi’s return to power at all costs.

The outcome of these policies was the real beginning of Berlusconi’s era, with his victory in the elections of 2001, which secured him a crashing majority both in the Senate and in the Chamber of Deputies. While after 2001 center-left voters took to the streets for anti-Berlusconi demonstrations in defense of democracy and against corruption, center-left MPs continued to cooperate with Berlusconi whenever possible and to protect him from judiciary prosecution, in the same way that they refused to pass a law against Berlusconi’s monopoly on information during the Prodi and D’Alema governments.

The icing on the cake was the 2014 deal between Renzi and Berlusconi on constitutional reform and new electoral law, blessed by the president of the republic and former Communist Giorgio Napolitano. It is also worth remembering that Berlusconi actually lost the elections of 2006, and came back to power only after the failure of the Prodi’s government to keep its narrow parliamentary majority, due to the defection of a small centrist party (the Union of Democrats for Europe).

Mainstream Italian anti-Berlusconism has always suffered from a grave form of selective amnesia. The effects of six years of harsh austerity policies and virtually no significant social opposition have never been taken into consideration as a decisive causal factor in the consolidation of Berlusconi’s power. Nor has mainstream anti-Berlusconism ever shown any willingness to admit the substantial continuity between

Berlusconi’s second government’s austerity policies and those of the center-left.

Berlusconi’s attack on labor rights was, for example, just an effort to expand the casualization of work introduced by the center-left (a goal realized years later by the center-left Renzi government through the Jobs Act). His privatizations of public services were primed by the center-left’s embrace of the notion that “private” is better.

The center-right’s immigration law, which criminalizes illegal immigration, is nothing but an amendment of the previous center-left law. Italian participation in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars was made politically possible by the first violation of Article 11 of the Italian constitution “ which prevents Italy from participating in wars of aggression ” carried out by D’Alema to allow Italian forces to contribute to the bombing of Serbia.

Mainstream anti-Berlusconism has indeed always preferred to deal in perceptions and impressions, rather than actual facts.

In the anti-Berlusconian imaginary, Berlusconi’s rule lasted twenty long years rather than nine, Berlusconi was a fascist, Italian democracy was in danger, the radical left helped consolidate Berlusconi’s power because of its sectarianism and unwillingness to cooperate with the center-left, Berlusconi’s voters were all racist and misogynistic uneducated losers, the country was constitutively right wing and that was the reason why even moderate Keynesian policies were impossible and why the Left needed to ally with all kinds of neoliberal technocrats, in the name of preventing Berlusconi’s return to power at all costs.

Does this sound familiar?

Avoiding the Same Mistakes

The conclusion to this sad story is illuminating.

For all the talk about Berlusconi’s

fascism, his irresistible media empire and control of public information, his "videocracy," and the end of republican democracy, a week of mild financial terrorism and the alliance of interests between the European Union Commission, the European Central Bank, and the Europeanist sector of Italian capital "with support from the president of the republic and of the center-left" was sufficient to swiftly kick Berlusconi out of office and replace him with Mario Monti's technocratic government. This was the end of the very center-right that in the eyes of mainstream anti-Berlusconians was so invincible only a few months earlier.

And here is the lesson: Italian anti-Berlusconism ended up consolidating and strengthening Berlusconi's power, rather than undermining it, by consistently avoiding the real causes of Berlusconi's success and by justifying and legitimizing years of harsh austerity in the name of preventing Berlusconi's return to power at all costs.

On top of this, it contributed to the self-disintegration of the Italian left and enabled the further neoliberal and technocratic degeneration of the Democratic Party. In 2014, Paolo Flores D'Arcais, director of Micromega and one of the founders of the democratic anti-Berlusconi movement, "I girotondi," which exemplified many of the limitations of mainstream anti-Berlusconism, would claim that Renzi was worse than Berlusconi. At the end of the day it appears that lesser-evilmism delivered the worst.

Anti-Trumpism runs the same risk. Immediately after the presidential elections, the white working class has been targeted by Democratic public opinion-makers as the source of

Trump's victory and dismissed as intrinsically racist and grossly uneducated. Third-party voters have been accused of contributing to Clinton's defeat.

Attempts at explaining both working-class voters' support for Trump or abstention in light of the effects of neoliberal globalization and disillusionment with Obama's presidency have been mocked as economic reductionism. And a number of think pieces have commented upon the end of American democracy and the advent of American fascism.

A thoroughly informed analysis of the composition of the Trump vote and of its significance to molecular political changes taking place in the US electorate will have to wait until the end of vote-counting. However, some significant new information seems to have emerged.

It now appears that Trump indeed garnered one million votes more than Romney, and there is a chance that he even fared better than Romney with Latino voters. The margin of Clinton's victory in the popular vote has increased to an astonishing 1.7 million, but Clinton is still down 2.3 million votes compared to Obama in 2012, and it is likely that a number of former Obama supporters voted for Trump. Finally, turnout was higher than in 2012.

What seems to have delivered the victory to Trump is the combination of two main factors. One is, of course, a profoundly undemocratic electoral system, which the Democratic Party has never really challenged. A second factor resides in Trump's ability to serve as a catalyst for entirely heterogeneous voting motivations. A significant part of his white electorate has certainly been galvanized by his appalling racism, homophobia, and

misogyny and has identified Trump as the agent of revenge for the election of Obama and the nomination of a female candidate.

But a significant component of the vote for Trump cannot be explained without referring to disillusionment with Obama's presidency, to the dramatic social effects of the world economic crisis, delocalizations, and austerity, and to the well-grounded perception of Clinton's entanglements with Wall Street and the old establishment.

This heterogeneity of motivations and expectations, combined with the strained relationship between Trump and a large number of Republican officials, represents an element of fragility in Trump's future presidency. An effective opposition to Trump should work on disentangling these heterogeneous and even incompatible motivations, by, on the one hand, fighting back against the new wave of racism, misogyny, and homophobia ahead of us, and on the other, addressing the legitimate desire for a radical change expressed in part by votes for Trump and in the abstention of millions of former Democratic voters.

This entails working on creating large social coalitions and movements to oppose what is to come, but also abandoning once and for all the idea that lesser-evilmism, which has already caused serious damage, is a viable option.

As the disaster of Italian anti-Berlusconism shows, the only way to effectively oppose authoritarian, racist, and sexist neoliberalism is by offering a radical and credible alternative.

[Jacobin](#)

A Trump boom?

9 December 2016, by **Michael Roberts**



Finance capital is getting very positive about Trumponomics with its plans for cutting taxes (both corporate and personal), reducing the regulation of the banks and implementing range of infrastructure projects to create jobs and boost investment. But even assuming all this would happen under a Trump presidency, will it really get the US economy out of its depressingly slow crawl? In my last post, I doubted it. Now JP Morgan economists have taken a similar sceptical line.

They reckon Trump's agenda will likely yield little impact on US employment and inflation in the next two years, while tax cuts will boost growth by only a modest 0.4 percentage points by the end of 2018 (i.e. over two years) at most.

JP Morgan thinks that Trump will introduce tax cuts worth around \$200 billion per year, evenly split between personal and corporate taxes. Interestingly, they agree with me that the so-called Keynesian 'multiplier' (how much rise in real GDP growth from tax cuts) is low: just 0.6 for personal taxes and 0.4 for corporate taxes 'meaning for every \$1 in tax breaks received by individuals and by businesses, that will likely boost aggregate demand to the tune of 60 cents and 40 cents in a given fiscal year, respectively.



As a result, JPMorgan reckons US economic growth will hardly pick up at all from its current 2% a year average and will be nowhere near the 4% annual that Trump claims he can get. I would argue that faster growth would depend not on more spending in the shops or more house purchases but on higher business investment and that is what is missing from the equation.

Part of the Trump plan (again I hasten to add if it happens) is to cut the tax rate for companies that hold huge cash reserves overseas if they return these funds to invest at home. Unlike other developed nations, the US taxes corporate income globally, but it

allows companies to defer paying tax on offshore earnings until they decide to repatriate that income. As a result, US companies have avoided U.S. taxes by stashing roughly \$2.6trn offshore, a figure cited by Congress's Joint Committee on Taxation. The top five in order of overseas cash holdings as of Sept. 30, are Apple (\$216 billion), Microsoft (\$111 Billion), Cisco (\$60 billion), Oracle Corp. (\$51 billion) and Alphabet Inc. (\$48 billion).



Such an idea was tried back in 2004 under George Bush. But the result was not a rise in productive investment but a new bout of financial speculation. Companies got a tax 'amnesty' but used the cash they brought home on buying back their own shares or pay out dividends to shareholders, driving up the stock price and then borrowing on the enhanced 'market value' of the company at very low rates. In 2004, when US firms brought back \$300bn in cash, S&P 500 buybacks rose by 84%.

Goldman Sachs economists reckon that this will happen again with the Trump plan. Indeed GS reckon that next year could see buybacks take the largest share of company profits for 20 years. They estimate that \$150bn (or 20 percent of total buybacks) will be driven by repatriated overseas cash. They predict buybacks 30 percent higher than last year, compared to just 5 percent higher without the repatriation impact, while productive investment's share will be little changed.

Asked what he would do with repatriated cash should the Trump administration slash taxes on foreign profits, Cisco Systems Inc. Chief Executive Officer Chuck Robbins said "We do have various scenarios in terms of what we'd do but you can assume we'll focus on the obvious ones 'buy-backs, dividends and M&A activities."



Now it is argued by some that the hoard of overseas cash shows that the problem American capital has is not

that its profitability is too low. On the contrary, it is awash with profits (and profits not counted in the official stats). But here is an interesting observation by Morgan Stanley economists. Of the \$2.6trn cash held abroad by American companies, only 40%, or roughly \$1 trillion, is available in the form of cash and marketable securities. The other \$1.5 trillion has been reinvested to support foreign operations and exists in the form of other operating assets, such as inventory, property, equipment, intangibles and goodwill. So it has been invested not held in cash after all. And the cash is not so awash.

It's also highly unlikely that companies with factories overseas will shift meaningful production to the US. After all, labour remains significantly cheaper in nations like China. Hourly compensation costs were \$36.49 per employee in the US in 2013, according to The Conference Board. The comparable cost in China was just \$4.12 that year (the most recent figure), even after having increased more than six-fold over the preceding ten years.

Besides, many companies that do still make products in the US are automating production. Consider Intel Corp. The chipmaker has giant fabrication plants in Oregon, Arizona and New Mexico that employ just a handful of people to keep the machines running. Nothing the Trump administration does will stop robots from taking over large swathes of manufacturing in the long run.

Another part of Trumponomics is to implement an infrastructure program of building roads and communications. His plan to fund this from private money in return for ownership and revenues from the projects. This has made Keynesian economic guru, Paul Krugman apoplectic, and rightly so.

As Krugman explains "imagine a private consortium building a toll road for \$1 billion. Under the Trump plan, the consortium might borrow \$800 billion while putting up \$200 million in equity 'but it would get a tax credit of 82 percent of that sum, so that its actual outlays would only be \$36 million. And any future revenue from tolls would go to the people who put

up that \$36 million. Crucially, it's not a plan to borrow \$1 trillion and spend it on much-needed projects "which would be the straightforward, obvious thing to do. Instead "If the government builds it, it ends up paying interest but gets the future revenue from the tolls. But if it turns the project over to private investors, it avoids the interest cost " but also loses the future toll revenue. The government's future cash flow is no better than it would have been if it borrowed directly, and worse if it strikes a bad deal, say because the investors have political connections."

Second, Krugman goes on, "how is this kind of scheme supposed to finance investment that doesn't produce a revenue stream? Toll roads are not the main thing we need right now; what about sewage systems, making up for deferred maintenance, and so on? Third, how much of the investment thus financed would actually be investment that wouldn't have taken place anyway? That is, how much "additionality" is there?"

Suppose that there's a planned tunnel, which is clearly going to be built; but now it's renamed the Trump Tunnel, the building and financing are carried out by private firms, and the future

tolls and/or rent paid by the government go to those private interests. In that case we haven't promoted investment at all, we've just in effect privatized a public asset " and given the buyers 82 percent of the purchase price in the form of a tax credit."

So the Trump plans will be ineffective in getting US economic growth rates up, in delivering more jobs, real incomes and better transport; but it will boost financial markets and a speculative boom.

[The next recession](#)

Justified and burning anger hobbled by reformism

8 December 2016, by **John McNulty**

Yet the two campaigns are very different, and the comparison shows up many weaknesses in the Irish movement. They are similar in that both involve the mobilisation of tens of thousands of women, fed up with church and state ruling over their bodies. However in Poland we had a spontaneous movement that took strike action and went onto the streets in an instant and successful counter to an attack by the right, designed to extend the law to prevent abortion under any circumstances. The Irish movement is based around a call for a referendum to remove a decades old element of the constitution and is heavily dominated by the trade union bureaucracy and the populist and reformist politics they espouse.

The colour and militancy of the demonstrations tends to disguise the fact that the repeal campaign, as with anti austerity campaigns and protests against water charges led by the union bosses, is at its heart a lobbying campaign aimed at persuading the Irish bourgeoisie to change direction. This limits both policy and tactics.

Weak campaign

Of course the idea that the constitution poses such a direct threat to women is repulsive and should always be opposed, but it is the ebb and flow of popular consciousness and of class struggle that secure rights. No-one remarks the many elements of the Irish constitution meant to secure the well-being of the citizens that are simply dead letters or how easily a history of neutrality was abandoned to facilitate war transport through Irish airports by the US military.

Removal of the 8th, on its own, would simply restore the status quo of an Ireland before the amendment, where abortion was practically impossible. A new referendum might well be lost through a mobilisation of the large forces of the religious right. As recently as 2002 an attempt to overturn suicide as grounds for an abortion was only narrowly defeated in a referendum. If a new referendum on the 8th amendment is defeated what are women to do then? Accept their fate?

There are other problems. The call for the right to choose is drowned out in a popular front that holds together a range of views that stop far short of support for any extensive abortion rights. In addition, the movement has a partitionist element. The right wing attacks on women do not stop at the border with the British zone in the North. British legislation was never extended to cover the colony and recently women in the North have been charged with buying abortifacients on the internet and one woman was given a suspended sentence - underlining the fact that criminalisation of women still applies.

The weakness of the campaign extends to tactics. The current activity is to lobby a "people's assembly" set up by the government to consider the issue of a constitutional change. While it is right to present your case wherever possible, the campaign should point out that the assembly is a hoary mechanism used over and over by the government, and supported by the trade union leaders, to delay decisions and create a fake sense of popular consent to their eventual

action. All shades of political position are present (with the working class massively under represented) and the range of views justifies the government clinging to reaction.

Battle on the streets

The 8th amendment was the result of an offensive by the religious right, led by the Catholic church. Abortion rights were non-existent, but the right wanted to copper-fasten the ban and prevent any future liberalisation.

The battle has never returned to the constitutional field. Rather, the application of the 8th amendment has led to the brutal victimisation of individual women leading to mass protest, followed by whatever interpretation of the constitution Irish capital considered necessary to defuse the mobilization.

The most striking of these incidents was the X case. A 14 year old girl in care was barred from travelling to Britain for an abortion. Following mass protest the courts, to the dismay of the right, interpreted the "equal right" section to mean that there was a limited right to abortion where the life of the mother was at risk.

Since then this right has remained ill-defined. The cycle of medical barbarity has been followed by cycles of protest.

One of the most significant of these cases was the case of Savita Halappanavar, a foreign national allowed to die of sepsis despite her pleas for help, because of her pregnancy. Outrage at home was mirrored abroad, as it was realised that visiting Ireland while pregnant might result in a death sentence.

The legislative route

The response to the case was prolonged lobbying campaign by feminists, socialists and trade unionists which took as its focus the slogan "legislate for X." Under

international inspection, the government did finally legislate.

The result was not good. The Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act of 2013, passed in the wake of the Death of Savita Halappanavar, maintains an almost total ban on abortion. The only area of liberalisation has been in the right to travel outside the state for an abortion. The act went no further than formalising the court rulings made around the X Case of 1992. Termination was allowed where the mother's life was at risk. Suicide was a potential reason, but required interrogation by a panel of doctors. The package was wrapped up with criminal law involving 14 year sentences for women who stepped outside the legislation.

As with the constitutional amendment, the law had to meet the test of practice. Such a test was not long in coming. In the Y case, a young woman, the victim of rape, applied for an abortion because of suicidal intent. She was interrogated by a panel of doctors who agreed that she was suicidal. However because of delays they agreed that the best form of 'termination' was that she gave birth! The woman went on hunger strike and the state obtained a court order to forcibly hydrate her, subsequently carrying out a caesarean section without her consent and delivering a baby.

The repeal the 8th campaign is in many ways a carbon copy of legislate for X. Many in the leadership would consider that campaign a success. In their view a gradual inching forward, even through reactionary legislation, will gradually extend women's rights. So deeply is this model embedded that a legalistic lobbying campaign in the Northern state under the slogan "trust women" simply ignores the absolute veto that the right wing Democratic Unionist Party has on this issue.

Targeting church and state

This worldview consistently ignores a central element of the Irish state - its confessional character and the

alliance of Church and State. As the campaign waits patiently for a response to its lobbying the government has buried the issue in a people's assembly and rushed to Rome to invite the Pope to visit. Any abortion referendum will coincide with a papal visit and a mass conference on the family organized by the Irish bishops.

The endorsement of the trade union bureaucracy is to be welcomed and can provide substantial funding and resources, but we must also see that it can lock campaigns in legalistic and reformist cages. It is not the conservatism of the bureaucracy that is the main problem, but the willingness of many socialist and feminist activists to operate a policy of peaceful co-existence with them and avoid calls for a more democratic structure or advance their programme as the policy of the movement.

In Ireland today popular support for the Catholic church has fallen sharply, yet it remains embedded in the state structures, especially the health and education sectors. Up into modern times the church were involved in barbaric medical practices aimed at pregnant women, used the slave labour of young women in the Magdalen laundries and of children in orphanages, were involved in child rape and violent abuse and ran baby markets exporting to catholic families across the world.

They have earned the hatred of many workers, yet the relation with the state is so close that compensation for their crimes was paid for by the government. Activists should demand the separation of church and state as a necessity to remove the shackles from women and from the working class as a whole. They should recognize the class nature of abortion restrictions - those with the money simply travel to Britain and pay for the procedure - and aim the campaign at the working class. In terms of tactics they should learn from the 1960s battle for contraception rights, when women flouted the law with contraception trains and mass protest that made an ass of the law.

Already activists have come forward in the North to "confess" to the police

the use of abortifacients. Defiance on a mass scale – the sort of defiance

shown by Polish women – can defeat the bigots..

6 December 2016

Pro-Regime Forces in Syria Respond to Trump's Election by Escalating Military Offensive

7 December 2016, by **Jaisal Noor, Joseph Daher**

According to UN official Jan Egeland, Russia and the Syrian government for now refuse to make a pause in the bombing to let medical and food assistance in the eastern part of Aleppo. But Russia has proposed to set up four humanitarian corridors to evacuate the wounded — 400 injured people still need immediate evacuation from East Aleppo and to get aid in. Well, now joining us to discuss this and much more is Joseph Daher. He's a Swiss Syrian socialist activist, academic, founder of the blog Syria Freedom Forever. And his recent book is titled Hezbollah: Political Economy of Lebanon's Party of God which came out in October of this year. Thanks so much for joining us.

JOSEPH DAHER: Thank you for the invitation.

JN: So, I wanted to start off by having you address the humanitarian situation in Aleppo. The Syrian army and its allies continue to push to retake the Eastern part of the city which until very recently been a stronghold of the so-called rebel alliance. Can you talk about the latest news?

JD: Obviously, the pro-regime forces, which is not composed mainly of the regime's army, is mostly composed of Iranian-sponsored militias, Iraqi fighters, Lebanese Hezbollah, Iran fighters and other pro-regime militias, have been trying to take over the complete territories of Eastern Aleppo. In regards to the humanitarian situation, it's catastrophic.

It's been catastrophic for the past three years when the bombing and the shelling has started against the three neighborhoods of Aleppo and Eastern areas of the city. But for the past four months, Eastern Aleppo has been under siege, and today, you only have 10 ambulances working and you have a shortage of fuel. So, they might not work in the following days. You don't have any more hospitals because they've been destroyed by regime's airplanes and Russian airplanes and shellings, etcetera.

Doctors are working in very difficult conditions. You have a shortage of fuel, of food, no electricity, etcetera. So, it's catastrophic conditions. People have spoken of an Armageddon occurring in Eastern Aleppo, whereas, one of the UN officials said it was one of the worst places, or the worse place on Earth for civilians today.

JN: And so, there are some reports suggesting that these recent events, the advancement of regime, pro-regime forces, could signal a shift, maybe a dramatic shift in the conflict. What are your thoughts on that?

JD: Obviously, there's a process of incubating the revolutionary process and this has been accelerated by the last events within Syria, but also internationally-speaking and we'll speak about it I think later, the election of Trump who wants to have closer relationship with Russia and wants to put an end to the Syrian revolutionary processes in the region, while having a closer relationship with authoritarian regime, including the

Assad regime.

When it comes to Syria, Eastern Aleppo has been a symbol of the democratic alternative that could be Syria. Whereas, you don't have any kind of control, or of the Islamic State, the so-called Islamic State, where it has been kicked out from Eastern Aleppo in the beginning of 2014, following an uprising of the democratic forces of Syria, both civilian and the armed forces.

And Jabhat al-Nusra, which is al-Qaeda, only has a couple of hundred forces, where you have around 8,000 soldiers of the various Free Syrian Army and other Islamic forces. And you had hundreds of popular organizations, obviously that had their role completely diminished following the sieges, the shelling, the bombing for the past few years on these areas.

I would just remind people that in 2013 summer, you had 1.3 million people living in Eastern Aleppo. Today, you only have 250,000 persons because this has been a strategy of the regime to prevent any kind of democratic alternative within Syria. Whereas, you can see, for example, areas controlled by the Islamic State not being bombed by the regime, or by Russian bombing, since the direct intervention of Russian airplanes. In Syria, from the end of September, 2015, 90% of the Russian bombing has not been in the area controlled by the Islamic States. So, the fall of Aleppo would definitely be a turning point and a very bad turning point for the Syrian revolutionary process.

JN: Some would say that many of the opposition groups that are fighting Assad are funded and backed by Gulf dictatorships, for example, Saudi Arabia, and if they have their way, Assad would be replaced by something more resembling the Taliban. And, you know, perhaps something more repressive and worse than what Assad represents. What are your thoughts on that?

JD: First of all, I think what has characterized the groups affiliated or have considered themselves as the Free Syrian Army, is the lack of any kind of assistance, whether political, financial, or military to these kind of groups.

When it comes to ... Islamic fundamental forces, yes, they have received funding from various ... league of countries or networks, private networks within Gulf monarchies. For example, Jaysh al-Islam, which is present in the Damascus Province, has been the biggest receiver of Saudi funding and it has attacked revolutionaries. So, the objective of the various Gulf monarchies has not been to assist the democratic armed forces of Syria — especially the various groups that were affiliated with the Free Syrian Army at the beginning of the uprising and even later — but to transform this popular revolution into a sectarian civil war because they are also afraid of a democratic Syria, because this could serve as an example for expanding any kind of democratic experience throughout Syria and to Saudi citizens, etcetera or the Gulf citizens.

Today, you cannot say that the biggest threat for the Syrian people and the main actor that has killed for the past five years Syrian civilians, or displaced people, or created millions of refugees, is the Assad regime and its allies. This is a thing. This is not in any way to undermine the threat of the various Islamic fundamentalist forces. But you cannot fight one monster by helping another. Let things be very clear, we have to fight both monsters, because they nurture each other.

JN: And so, some, like Larry

Wilkerson, he's the former Chief of Staff of the Former Secretary of State Colin Powell, have said Obama made a grave error by demanding Assad must go. That Assad has too strong a base of support and too much power for that to be a realistic demand and by hanging on that demand, we're extending the conflict. We're continuing the flow of weapons and arms to both sides. How do you respond to that?

JD: On the opposite, the US has not extended its help to the various Free Syrian Army forces. I just remind that the program that was voted into the US parliament, I think it was in 2014, to fund various groups was completely been cancelled in 2015 and has no result on the ground. Because one of the demands in this program to fund various Free Syrian Army-affiliated groups is that they don't fight the Assad regime and that they concentrate their offensives against the Islamic State. This shows once again that the US, for the past few years, has never had the objective to overthrow the same regime, or the Assad regime. John Kerry declared in the end of 2015, in Moscow in front of Putin, Russian President, that the US are not seeking any kind of regime change.

So, I would say, it's the lack of any kind of assistance to Free Syrian Army groups that allow the development and the expansion, in addition to the repression of the Assad regime, and its ally against the popular forces of Syria to have enabled the expansion of various Islamic fundamentalist forces within Syria, as well. In addition to this, it's important to remember that the Islamic State is the reaction... it's a form of counter-revolution as a reaction to the various repression of authoritarian regimes in the region and, particularly, the Assad regime.

So, you cannot put an end to that without putting an end to the condition that enabled expansion of groups such as the Islamic State. And one of these reasons are authoritarian regimes in the region supported directly and indirectly by various imperialist, sub-imperialist forces, as well, that we have to denounce, as well, all the interventions that

occurred in the past few years in Syria in the region from regional and international states that only brought problems, definitely.

JN: So, I wanted to ask a question about the role of the Kurdish forces, and we know the US has been backing some Kurdish forces with air strikes since 2014, and there was some reports that the Kurdish YPG forces were cooperating with the regime in fighting with Aleppo and now, apparently, they are denying having cooperated with Assad in Aleppo. Talk about what's going on with the Kurds.

JD: So, when we speak about the Kurds, it's a variety of political forces. The group you're mentioning is the YPG which is the armed branch of the PYD which is the sister organization of the PKK. The PYD in Syria has since the beginning of the uprising, tried to advance its own interests. This meant making deals on some occasions with regime forces. And when regime forces withdrew from Kurdish majority-inhabited regions, it gave them to the PYD forces. And until today you have in cities controlled by the PYD, Qamishli or Hasakah, areas that are still controlled or areas that are still under the control of the regime.

This does not mean that PYD is an ally of the Assad Regime. The Assad regime has refused any kind of self-determination of the Kurdish people; the Baathist regime has a history of repressing Kurdish forces and of colonization of Kurdish-inhabited regions, etcetera. But the opportunist interests of the PYD has pushed it to work with various forces — for example, working sometimes with Assad forces — and what might happen, most probably in the case of Aleppo, is that they took advantage of the bombing of Russian airplanes and regime airplanes and the ground offensive of poor regime forces to advance their own interests, taking control of various areas that were under the domination of armed opposition forces. But at the same time the YPG had worked in the past with groups of the Free Syrian Army, like when Kobani was under siege by the Islamic State, the forces with

various Free Syrian Army forces.

And one of the examples you had also in Aleppo, people fleeing regions from opposition forces, to Sheik Maqsood which is a Kurdish-inhabited area, controlled by the PYD. So, it's been, PYD has done what's in its best interests and we should criticize some of its positions — for example, supporting the Russian intervention in Syria that has killed for the past, more than a year now, more than 3,000 civilians. At the same time, we have to take into consideration the chauvinist policies and position of the exiled opposition that have refused to acknowledge the Kurdish people as a nation and refuse any kind of demands of the Kurdish people like federalism project or changing the name of the country into a Syrian Republic instead of Syrian Arab Republic. So, it's nuanced analysis that we should have on the policies of the PYD.

JN: And finally, I wanted to end the interview with a question about Donald Trump. One of his leading campaign pledges would be to tear up the Iran nuclear deal. You know, talk about what — and for the region and specifically for Syria — what a Trump presidency could mean for the conflict.

JD: Trump's election meant an

acceleration, and we're seeing on the ground an acceleration of the liquidation(?) of the Syrian revolution. And most of various analysts have commented how Russian forces, as well as Iranian forces and pro-regime forces, are accelerating their offensive in various areas of Syria, not only in Aleppo because today or yesterday Russia bombed a market in a village of Idlib Province called Ariha, killing 40 people. But you also have offensive of regime forces in the Damascus Province and pushing people to leave these areas, so to accelerate the various offensives to reach a point of fait accompli when Trump would be in power officially, beginning of January.

Because the plan of Trump is, as he said, a form of isolationism, which is usually inherited or affiliated with extreme right-wing connotation in the US, and seeking more collaboration with the Russian State and, therefore, including in the case of Syria, he has repeatedly said that his main objective is to put an end to Daesh and that he's ready to work even with, for example, the Assad regime because it's not his direct enemy.

He said, as well, in the election campaign that it was a mistake to help get rid of Saddam Hussein and Gaddafi because although they were not nice guys, at least, we didn't have terrorists. So, he has this plan of

seeking increased relationship with authoritarian regimes. For example, just as he wants to upgrade relationship with Egypt, that is lead by the dictator Sisi, that he wants to call the Egyptian regime a friend, I think we'll see more generally-speaking in the region bad days for the self-determination of the people. Just as in the case of Palestine, as well, he has supported the various policies of Netanyahu and wants to declare Jerusalem as a capital.

So, for the Syrian, Egyptian, Palestinian and, more generally, the people of the region, it's not good days in perspective. So, and obviously for the Syrian people, it's the worst in absolute manner because it means an acceleration of pro-regime, destruction of opposition-held areas and increased suffering for the people in these areas.

JN: All right, Joseph Daher, thank you so much for joining us. He's a Swiss-Syrian socialist activist, founder of the blog Syria Freedom Forever. His recent book, titled Hezbollah: Political Economy of Lebanon's Party of God is joining us from Geneva, Switzerland.

December 2

[The real news](#)

Democracy Against Neoliberalism

6 December 2016, by Cinzia Arruzza

Listening to the media, you would think that yesterday's Italian referendum results were yet another victory of right-wing populism against democracy. The situation, however, is much more complex than this, and the No victory is a victory for democracy and for the defense of social rights worth celebrating.

The constitutional reform proposed by Matteo Renzi's government was politically illegitimate in its method and antidemocratic in its content. The

current parliament was selected with an electoral law that has been judged as unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court. Moreover, Renzi's government was created after he managed to hijack the Democratic Party (PD), marginalizing its left and the former majority by secretly organizing a "No" vote in the parliament against the presidential candidate "Romano Prodi" put forward by the PD leadership.

Finally, Renzi adopted disgraced

former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi's style in putting forward the constitutional reform, by not trying to reach a large consensus across the parliamentary spectrum, but rather using institutional tricks to block parliamentary discussion, to the point that the opposition decided not to participate in the vote on the reform, in protest. As for the content, this constitutional reform was the last of a long series of attempts at revising the constitution in direction of

stronger executive power and at the expense of democratic representation.

The Italian people rejected a previous attempt by Berlusconi in 2006, when the center-right government tried to pass a presidentialist reform of the constitution. But this is a much older story, which began already in the postwar era. The constitution of 1948 was the outcome of a compromise between the three main forces of the antifascist resistance: the Christian Democrats, the Italian Communist Party, and the liberal-socialist Action Party.

However, a sector of the Italian political class has never accepted the democratic liberties and the egalitarian principles espoused by the 1948 constitution. This story of attacks on the constitution continued in the last decades of the twentieth century with various attempts at changing the constitution and with increasingly antidemocratic reforms of the electoral law passed by parliament with the support of center-left forces.

In order to explain the outcome of this referendum, which saw a massive turnout of 67 percent and No winning with almost 60 percent of the votes, one has to look at the convergence of multiple factors. Forces across the political spectrum opposed the reform for different reasons. On the Left, the measure was challenged by the CGIL, the country's biggest union; by the left of the Democratic Party, including its former secretary; by the National Association of Italian Partisans (ANPI); by the whole radical left, including left unions, social coalitions, students' organizations, and the various networks of occupied spaces; and by a number of prominent left-leaning constitutional law experts such as Gustavo Zagrebelsky. The arguments ranged from the defense of democratic representation and popular sovereignty against the principle of governability to the opposition to Renzi's aggressively neoliberal political project, of which the constitutional reform is only a portion.

On the Right, the reform was opportunistically opposed by the xenophobic Northern League, by the right-wing nationalist party Fratelli d'Italia, by neo-fascist forces such as

Casa Pound and Forza Nuova, and "reluctantly" by Berlusconi. The reason for the mainstream right's opposition is rather clear: as Renzi highly personalized the vote on the constitutional reform and linked the destiny of his government to the outcome of the referendum, the currently disorganized and fragmented right saw it as an opportunity to get rid of the government and start a process that may allow them to regroup and be competitive again.

Finally, the Five Star Movement, a catch-all populist movement with highly contradictory positions, resisted the constitutional reform all the way through the parliamentary debate, protesting at every turn against the violation of the most basic parliamentary rules by the government. The reasons for their position combined both a defense of parliamentary democracy's rules and the ambition to overtake the PD as Italy's principal party.

The impressive defeat of Renzi's project will most likely begin a period of confusion and instability. Liberal fears about this, however, entirely miss the point. Over the course of five years, the political forces most linked to European Union interests and projects have carried on a stunning attack on social rights: the technocratic Mario Monti government, supported by the center-left, introduced the obligation of balanced budgets in the constitution, in obedience to the European Treatises, making even moderate Keynesian policies of public spending unconstitutional. That same government also passed a devastating pension reform, part of which has been judged unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court.

But it was Renzi's government that succeeded even where Berlusconi had failed. The worst reforms passed by his government included measures like the [Jobs Act](#), which abolished Article 18 of the Statuto dei Lavoratori, which made impossible for employers to fire a worker without justification, and introduced further forms of casualization of labor; and the reform of the public school system, which significantly strengthened the

corporate-style management of schools, gravely affecting work conditions for teachers and the nature of the curricula for students.

Ultimately, Renzi hoped to pass both an antidemocratic constitutional reform combined with a new electoral law that would have established a majority bonus system in the Chamber of Deputies: as an outcome the government would have achieved entire control of the parliament, including control of the times for parliamentary discussion on laws deemed to be part of the government's program.

It's worth considering what would have happened if Yes had won. Likely, we would have seen a continued rise of the populist and far right in Italy, fueled by a center-left that has incessantly put forward austerity and neoliberal policies which have significantly worsened the conditions of life of the Italian population, affecting in particular younger people, whose chances of even finding a decent job are nil. (Not by chance, 81 percent of voters between eighteen and thirty-four voted No and Yes won only among voters older than fifty-three.)

If Yes had won, we would have risked ending up with a Five Star Movement or right-wing government with much greater executive powers than the ones currently allowed by the constitution. Not to speak of the majority system bonus's effects. And even in the case Renzi had managed to secure a majority for the center-left at the next elections, we would have ended up with more neoliberalism and with an even stronger government with no space for effective opposition.

The main motivation behind the No vote was the opposition to the government. But regardless of the diverging motivations behind the No vote, the referendum outcome defended democracy and popular sovereignty, destabilized the political system in a phase in which stability only means further attacks on democratic liberties and social rights, and opened a political space for a possible rebirth of social movements. On November 26, 150,000 women marched in Rome against male

violence and on a radical platform, and the next day, thousands gathering in an assembly and workshops called for a women's strike on [March 8](#), uniting the fight against violence with opposition to austerity, social and health services cuts, and the casualization of labor.

Women's assemblies are being created in the whole country in preparation for the March action. The struggle we have ahead of us will of course be hard, as the Right is already trying to capitalize on the referendum result, hiding the fact that even a large part of PD voters voted against the reform.

But the answer to this cannot be fear or lesser evilism, for these responses only work to strengthen the Right. The answer must be a return to politics as confrontation, starting from a participation in the women's strike of March 8, which is opening the path for social resistance.

Italian voters reject authoritarian proposal

6 December 2016, by [Sinistra Anticapitalista](#)

The constitutional law with which Renzi wanted to reform article 47 of the Italian constitution, has been comprehensively scuppered. It was a shift of the constitution in an authoritarian direction, which a government imposed by President Napolitano managed to get approved by an illegitimate parliament, to make the institutions of the state more pliable to neo-liberal politics.

In fact, the result of the referendum is, above all, the clearest evidence of the crisis of consent in the face of the government's anti working class politics. The very high voter turnout (just under 70%, which drops to 65.5% when people abroad eligible to vote are taken into account) is the highest of the consultation referenda of the last twenty years. The No vote (almost 60% of the just under 20 million voters) is strikingly similar to the 1974 referendum on divorce and was consistent across every region in the country (except in South Tyrol and, strictly speaking in Tuscany and Emilia Romagna) shows that the

electorate rejected both the government's project and its most prominent leader. By contrast the Yes vote was broadly similar in scale to that of Renzi's Partito Democratico (PD) and its allies in the government.

The loose coalition which won the No vote is obviously not in a position to exploit its success. The right is still divided and fortunately lacks a clear leadership. The Five Star Movement doesn't seem to have a clear strategy or programme other than electoral success. The "left" of the PD will most probably get sucked into the internal battle that will open up in the party following the defeat. The "radical" left still has a lot of political unclarity that the discussion opening up in the PD will only amplify. The CGIL union federation, despite the timidity of its No position will gain from the referendum result, but has decided to surrender to the bosses' demands by signing a terrible contract on behalf of its engineering members. This will have a detrimental impact on public sector workers' negotiations.

The prime minister's exuberance is now making the government pay a heavy political price and his prominence in the campaign made it inevitable that he would be forced to resign.

Renzi's resignation must be followed by the dissolution of parliament and the scheduling of new elections. This parliament already lacks legitimacy due to the legal basis on which it was elected and after this referendum it is now completely unrepresentative and doesn't reflect the wishes of the people. New elections must be called immediately in accordance with the Constitutional Court's 2014 ruling.

But, more than anything else, the democratic victory in the referendum and the resignation of the government have to be the signal for a resumption of the big social movement mobilisations and struggles in the workplaces, schools and universities for the defence of our rights, the environment and for an improvement in our living and working conditions.

The reality of the elections

6 December 2016, by [Al Mounadil-a](#)

In fact, the essential core of the 1962 Constitution of Hassan II is still in force in Morocco. Putting real power

in the hands of a single person, this Constitution makes a mockery of the popular will in order to serve the

interests of a minority of local capitalists and their neo-colonialist allies - an armada of multinational

enterprises which is pillaging Morocco and foreign banks which are exhausting its resources by means of the infernal mechanism of debt.

The regime refuses to make any concession that would limit its powers. It is abandoning any support for the demands of the historic "reformist" opposition, making it capitulate totally after having used it in the government of facade (called government of alternance after Abderrahman El Youssef was utilised as "prime minister".)

The popular pressure exerted by the demonstrations of the Movement of February 20, 2011, in the context of the revolutionary wave that swept the region, forced the regime to make meagre concessions and minor promises, whose uncertain implementation will inevitably stretch over several decades. The concessions were proportional to the level of pressure, given that the Movement of February 20 was incapable of developing and attaining, on the quantitative and qualitative levels, enough strength to make it possible to impose real change.

Increasing poverty, endemic unemployment, the continuing destruction of what remains of the public services of health and education, the gloomy future that millions of young people see before them, the crushing oppression of which the majority of women are victims... - all these problems will no doubt become greater and worsen with whatever government of facade comes out of the electoral masquerade.

In reality the satisfaction of popular demands implies above all:

â€¢ Sweeping away the present political hypocrisy whose aim is to provide a cover for tyranny and injustice;

â€¢ The establishment of a political system that reflects the will of the majority of the workers and labouring masses.

This objective will only be attained by mass struggle conducted by the millions of victims of the existing

political, economic and social system. The energies of the labouring masses will only converge towards this path if there exists a conscious vanguard which undertakes the political education of the victims of marginalisation and ignorance, for which responsibility is borne in equal measure by the regime and the opposition originating in the bourgeois national movement.

The great misfortune that has struck the workers and all the poor of Morocco is the result of the failure of the efforts to build the revolutionary socialist party of the workers, under the blows of repression on the one hand, and on the other the mistakes that have been made. This misfortune is both a cause and a consequence of the political backwardness of the popular masses, which limits their response to class oppression to spontaneous explosions of anger without any political horizons (1965, 1981, 1990...).

Because of this, the masses have become a simple instrument of pressure, profoundly unconscious, so to speak, in the hands of bourgeois forces, in particular on the trade union level, which are leading them into skirmishes which have no relation to their real interests, modelling them politically, either to run after illusions in change through elections, or to retreat into passivity and abstention in elections.

There is no other way to achieve the satisfaction of popular aspirations than by building instruments of struggle, in a democratic and combative fashion, and bringing together the most conscious elements in an autonomous party. This party will adopt the struggle outside the institutions as its principal means of action to raise the level of consciousness of the workers and the popular masses. It will work out all the tactics of struggle depending on the relationship of force between the classes - including using elected institutions as tribunes for struggle - as well as all the channels which make it possible to awaken the layers of the popular masses that have been up to now victims of political marginalisation and ignorance. Such is the vision of the revolutionary

workers' current Al Mounahdil-a, which organises today a small number of activists, trade unionists and young men and women, all of them convinced that the future lies in the struggle of the working class, in spite of the enormous difficulties accumulated over decades and the pressure of the negative developments in our region over the last five years.

Our position on the present elections diverges from the so-called "boycott" as it has been practiced historically by the Moroccan left. It rejects its justification, given that the real conditions for a revolutionary boycott do not exist. It goes without saying that missing the occasion of the electoral campaign implies losing the possibility of using the tribune that is offered to us in a revolutionary way. Our current also rejects the kind of participation that sows illusions, as do the not very democratic forces which are responsible for what affects the Moroccan trade union movement, in terms of bureaucratic negligence and disastrous defeats.

The Al-Mounadhil-a current does not have the organisational strength to be able to take part in elections under an independent working-class and socialist banner. Moreover, there are no Marxist currents or a workers' party, even reformist, to which it would be possible give critical support. However, this concrete reality must not serve to justify the maintenance of erroneous and politically absurd positions.

The regime will put in place a new government of facade in the image of the preceding governments, given that the parties competing in the elections are in unanimous agreement - even though they try to present an appearance of disagreement - to continue to implement the policies of the International Monetary Fund and the European Union.

The attacks will increase further against what remains of our rights and gains and our meagre liberties. It is our duty to take part fully in the struggles to resist, in a unitary and democratic spirit, and to organise the forces of struggle on the trade-union, popular and political levels.

Profound global change will be the result of gigantic class struggles of which the dynamic of February 20 was

but a mere training exercise. Winning victory in the decisive battle will depend on the degree of political and organisational independence of the

working class, developing which is the immediate task of all working-class and socialist activists in our country.

Bolivia's Extractive Economy and Alternatives

5 December 2016, by **Marc Becker**

When the World Social Forum (WSF) began in 2001 the possibilities of a leftist victory, either through elections or via an armed struggle, appeared remote in Latin America. In contrast, social movements were in ascendency in their battles against neoliberal capitalism. In this environment, the WSF embraced civil society as the best path forward toward a transformation of society.

Grassroots mobilizations quickly remade Latin America's political landscape. Their successes led to a wave of leftist electoral victories across the region. With the notable exceptions of Colombia and Mexico, almost every country elected a leftist government.

Ironically, this development introduced a complicated dance between social movements and elected leftist governments, and one that has persisted ever since with both sides throwing ever-sharper barbs back and forth across a yawning divide.

The rift between movements and parties was once again full on display when the WSF reconvened in Montreal, Quebec during the dog days of August. The forum started as an explicit social movement response from the south to the ravages of neoliberal capitalism as represented by the World Economic Forum that met every year in Davos, Switzerland.

The WSF formally excluded governmental participation, but this prohibition soon was compromised in practice and then ignored in policy. In 2003, when Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez arrived with the intent of riding the wave of anti-systemic

protests, Forum organizers shuffled him off to a small venue outside the forum where he talked to those supporters who could squeeze into the hall.

Two years later, the largest event at the forum was Chávez joining Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva at the "estadio gigantesco" for their show.

The 2016 WSF in Montreal was no different, although the show was conducted on a much smaller scale than the oversized mobilizations that greeted the early years of the forum. The program featured a series of late afternoon "Grand Conferences."

One titled "Stand up for social justice!" advertised Bernie Sanders as the speaker. A sign on the door indicated that the program had an "error" and Bolivian vice president Álvaro GarcÃa Linera would speak instead of the socialist senator and former United States Democratic presidential candidate.

Introducing Álvaro GarcÃa Linera

GarcÃa Linera is well known in Latin American leftist circles. He studied math at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) in the early 1980s before returning to Bolivia and joining the insurgent Tupac Katari Guerrilla Army (EGTK).

In 1991, he was convicted of insurrection and terrorism. He studied sociology in prison, and after his

release he taught at a university and became a prolific author on Indigenous communities, social movements and Marxist theory. In 2005, as part of Latin America's swing to the left he was elected vice president on a ticket with Evo Morales. He has held that position ever since.

GarcÃa Linera comes out of a political tradition that emphasizes Indigenous rights, the rights of nature, and the nationalization of natural resources. In office, his thinking and positions began to change. In 2011, he wrote a book attacking non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as part of a rightwing conspiracy that undermined his government's progressive policies.

The following year, he published the even more controversial book *Geopolitics of the Amazon, Landed Hereditary Power and Capitalist Accumulation* that defended his government's extractivist policies and attacked Indigenous organizations that criticized those policies (see a review of this book [here](#)). Many of his writings are available on the vice president's website, and in translation on other websites.

GarcÃa Linera followed these intellectual and political lines in his talk at the WSF. The Bolivian vice presidency will probably publish his presentation of ten theses against neoliberalism, and his comments will probably be widely available, so they will not be summarized here.

More instructive and interesting, however, was his responses to the moderator's and audience questions after the formal talk. His formal presentation struck a measured,

academic tone, but his informal comments were much more polemical. "Free trade is a fiction," he declared to loud audience cheers.

The vice president proceeded to argue that so-called free trade was just a pretext for powerful economic interests to advance their control, but popular mobilizations had halted the trade pacts such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

"More poverty doesn't necessarily mean more struggle," he continued. "It often means more tolerance of oppression." In this context, "hope moves people," and Garc a Linera proclaimed our need for collective optimism.

Arguing Extractive Policy

Audience questions on extractive policies under new left governments became much more pointed than the moderator's initial friendly queries that had elicited supportive audience reactions.

In response to a question about the climate, Garc a Linera explained how capitalism treats nature as something that is free, and that the cost to the environment should be added to the price of commodities. The Bolivian vice president then entered directly into historical debates in the WSF over what role the state should play in making societal changes.

Garc a Linera noted the anti-statist influences on the forum of Subcomandante Marcos from the neo-Zapatista army in Chiapas, Mexico, and the codification of that perspective in John Holloway's book *Change The World Without Taking Power*. At one point Garc a Linera may once have had some sympathy for such viewpoints, but now that he is in government he had nothing but criticism for them.

An audience member asked a rather direct question about how Bolivia's extractive economy is consistent with the constitution's embrace of the *buen vivir*. The *buen vivir*, loosely translated as "the good life," has gained wide

acceptance as a rhetorical condemnation of the destructive aspects of capitalism's commodification of human existence.

It is on the execution of sustainable development models, however, that one of the deepest rubs between different tendencies on the left becomes apparent.

Garc a Linera responded to the question about the *buen vivir* with a now standard line that the country cannot change overnight. He reviewed a well-trod Bolivian history of resource extraction, starting with the Potos  silver mines in the 16th century and continuing through tin mines in the 20th, all of which underdeveloped Bolivia's economy.

The vice president argued that it was a long process to overcome 450 years of colonial exploitation, and that a government could not undo in one decade what capitalism had taken centuries to construct.

Garc a Linera has become known for his embrace of what he calls "Andean-Amazonian capitalism." From an orthodox Marxist perspective, his argument has a deep internal logic. Obviously, located on the periphery of the global economy, Bolivia does not meet the objective economic conditions necessary to move toward socialism.

Furthermore, Bolivia could not construct communism on its own. Rather, it has to be a broader process. As other intellectuals have argued, post-capitalism has to happen on a global level, or it will not be successful. Socialism, the vice president argued, cannot just appear as an isolated phenomenon in one's garden.

Furthermore, he complained about critics who condemn Bolivia for not moving more quickly to socialism, and said activists who want those immediate transformations should implement them in their own countries rather than denounce Bolivia for its shortcomings.

The goal of communism is still centuries away. In the meantime, he said, we are in this transitional

stage. He claimed that his term of "Andean-Amazonian capitalism" is just a matter of honesty to reflect Bolivia's current realities.

Bolivia is by no means unique in terms of being a new left government that continues to rely on the export of raw commodities to fund social development programs. After more than fifteen years of "Bolivarian revolution" â€" first under Hugo Ch vez and then Nicol s Maduro â€" Venezuela is no closer to freeing itself from dependency on petroleum exports than it was under previous neoliberal regimes.

Similarly, Brazil under the Workers Party (PT) administrations of Luiz In cio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff increased the agro-industrial export industry, with a particular focus on soy production. Genetically engineered crops and petroleum exploration also experienced boom times under N stor Kirchner and Cristina Fern ndez in Argentina.

In Ecuador, Rafael Correa likewise encouraged the expansion of petroleum extraction and gold mining. In each case, leftist governments contended, as does Garc a Linera, that such policies were necessary to fund social programs and provide financing to industrialize the local economy.

In response to a question at the WSF about the Bolivian government's conflicts with social movements, Garcia Linera discussed a tradeoff between democracy and efficiency. He argued that the tension between the two is an ongoing struggle, and that these divergences could last for centuries. In the meantime, society is caught in persistent contradictions, and in the process the government risks losing popular support.

But Garc a Linera highlights the significant progress that Bolivia had made in reducing the country's poverty rates â€" at a gradual but ever quickening pace. He stressed the importance of industrializing the economy to move beyond poverty.

Pablo Solón for the Movements

Bolivia's former ambassador to the United Nations Pablo Solón also had a significant presence at the World Social Forum in Montreal, although not on a stage in a large auditorium as a political superstar, but rather in a series of smaller sessions where he spoke as part of a movement of grassroots opposition to leftist government extractive policies.

Solón had split with Evo Morales in 2011 over concern that his extractive policies, including the controversial construction of a road through the Isiboro Secure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS), were not consistent with the government's rhetoric in defense of the environment.

Those conflicts were on full display at the forum in the contrasting presentations of Solón and Garc a Linera, and reflect broader debates that are currently playing out across Latin America. Whereas Garc a Linera emphasized the roles of governments in transforming society, Solón argued that the process of change must be rooted in social movements, not political parties.

Solón pointed to his experience with the Cochabamba war waters fifteen years ago when large protests erupted over a government attempt to privatize the municipal water supply. If we can kick out Bechtel, Solón contended, then we can also defeat other transnational institutions.

The former ambassador summarized debates within the Bolivian left over how to make those urgent and necessary changes, and the conclusion they reached of the need to create a political instrument to implement them. This led to the formation of the political party Movement to Socialism (MAS) and the election of Morales and Garc a Linera in 2005.

In office, the MAS government achieved significant social and economic advancements. Among these was a renegotiation of contracts with transnational petroleum companies so

that more of the revenue from the exportation of natural gas and other commodities would flow into the government's coffers.

Instead of 20% of the rents accruing to the government with the rest going to private companies, those figures were reversed with 80% of the profits funding government social programs. Even with this policy change, the transnational companies remained in Bolivia because they were still making significant sums of money.

During economic boom times in the first decade of the 21st century, other leftist governments similarly experienced success in extracting more favorable concessions from extractive industries.

A second noteworthy achievement was a constitutional assembly that included a transformation of Bolivian identities and a redistribution of land resources. On a deeply symbolic level, in recognition of the multiple Indigenous nationalities (Quechua, Aymara, Guaran , and others) that live in the country, legislators changed the name of country to the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

Bolivia followed in the tracks of Venezuela and Ecuador, both of which also rewrote the ground rules for their countries under leftist administrations. Both Garc a Linera and Solón shared appreciation for these reforms.

Economic Complications

While changes in identity politics without accompanying material concessions can be quite painless, economic policies are more complicated. Again, both Garc a Linera and Solón pointed to one of the new Bolivian government's most important gains as providing peasants with title to the land that they work. Furthermore, they have also gained subsoil rights.

The two leftists, however, painted quite different images of how this happened. In his Grand Conference, Garc a Linera declared that the

government had implemented caps on the size of landownership, which forced a downward distribution of land resources. Solón, however, claimed that the land titling was accomplished through a redistribution of government land to peasants.

This policy, he complained, has not affected wealthy landholders. On a most fundamental level, preexisting land tenure structures had not been touched.

Solón acknowledged that the government had engaged in important political changes, but he also maintained that they were limited in that they did not fundamentally change an extractivist and neoliberal economic model.

Renegotiating gas contracts provided the government with more revenue for social programs, especially after petroleum prices rose. But the government stopped short of the important step of nationalizing natural resources. As a result, the means of production still lay in the hands of foreign interests that subjugated Bolivia to imperial control.

This is a common complaint that has been voiced across the continent. Furthermore, now that commodity prices have declined, a country has to double the amount of exports and expand into other extractive sectors to continue the desirable social programs. In Bolivia, that means the development of hydroelectric power " with all of the accompanying environmental damages that building dams creates.

Solón complained that Bolivia was now more dependent on extractivist industries than when the MAS government took office, and that the country had become even more reliant for its tax revenues on these exports. Although over the last several years Bolivia has achieved impressive growth rates, falling commodity prices means that it now faces the prospect of an economic crisis.

Bolivia has not reached the depths that Venezuela or Brazil are currently experiencing, but Solón cautioned that the country was headed in that direction, and that it was going to be a

hard landing.

Facing this reality, Solón asked why Bolivia has not been able to change its extractivist model. It was not due to a lack of political desire or recognition of the importance of changing that model. In fact, protecting the environment and diversifying the economy were originally the MAS government's central goals. But at the end of the day, Bolivia has stayed the same, and in fact is more dependent on extractive industries than it was ten or fifteen years ago.

Solón acknowledged the positive changes that the Morales' government has made, but also observed that it has reinforced a destructive model that is not consistent with a professed allegiance to the ideals of a *buen vivir*. This contradiction has been particularly difficult because one of the original goals for which they fought was to achieve harmony with nature. Indigenous rights activists in Ecuador have come into conflict with the Correa administration over very similar issues.

The State, Capital and Extractivism

Solón suggested that an underlying problem was that the left has a bad understanding of the state. The MAS members thought that they would transform society and state structures when they won political office. In reality, however, the state has its own dynamic, and ends up transforming people.

Similar to how people speak about the logic of capital, Solón said leftists need to understand the logic of power and recognize the process by which it transforms people. This is key to understanding the shortcomings of leftist governments.

The logic of power, similar to the logic of capitalism, demands a continual need to produce more, and a desire to consolidate one's position. A result is that people begin to make decisions not based on their original political principles, but out of a wish to maintain themselves in power.

Leftists justify their actions by telling supporters that the alternative is a much less desirable conservative government imposed through CIA imperialism. They become guardians of power as they defend leftist gains from rightwing sabotage.

This logic of power is related to an extractivist model. For left governments to maintain themselves in power they engage in clientelist actions that require revenue streams, and these come from the export of commodities.

Solón pointed out that Bolivia could have moved toward an agroecology instead of an extractivist model of development. Such a model would emphasize food sovereignty and privilege sustainable development over export-fueled growth patterns. In fact, the new Bolivian constitution, as with the ones in Venezuela and Ecuador, prioritize solidarity economies and sustainable development practices.

Likewise in Brazil, the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) hoped that the PT government would move in a direction of improving conditions for local farmers. Grassroots organizations have made similar demands in Argentina for fundamental structural changes in production and consumption that would improve the lives of the most disadvantaged members of society, rather than striving to improve macro economic indicators to the benefit of privileged sectors and foreign corporations.

The MAS government intentionally opted instead for an extractivist model to generate revenue for social programs that contributed to its high levels of popular support. Exporting petroleum resources simply provides more money than a sustainable agricultural economy. Similarly, the government is pursuing plans to build new hydropower plants to export electricity to Brazil.

Moving from exporting gas to exporting electrical power, Solón noted, is just maintaining the same extractivist model with the associated negative environmental impacts. He asked why the government does not search out another model that would

benefit people rather than endlessly pursuing these same developmentalist logics.

Furthermore, in order to maintain its grasp on power the MAS government reached agreements with rightwing forces to prevent a civil war. In exchange for not expropriating the property of large landowners and for accepting the importation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), the conservative opposition does not challenge the leftist MAS government.

A similar growth in agro-industrial exports also occurred in Brazil and Argentina, and Ecuador has backed away from its ban on the import of GMOs.

Finally, Solón observed a phenomenon of leftist activists coming into government and beginning to earn more money than they ever had before. From living on \$50 a month, they gained official posts that earned \$1000 or \$1500 a month.

Similar to how critics observe the emergence of a revolutionary "*Bolibourgeoisie*," or people who became wealthy under the Chávez administration in Venezuela, Bolivia has witnessed the appearance of a new Aymara popular bourgeoisie that has become very conservative in its outlook.

Sectors from within the movement start improving their personal position. Previously they wanted change, but now they want to stop structural modifications and instead enjoy their new privileged situation.

Social Movements

A fault line that currently runs through discussions regarding the Latin American left, and one that was visibly apparent at the World Social Forum in the contrasting comments of Garc a Linera and Sol n, is whether social movements are the roots of the problem or the answer to the crisis that Latin America is facing.

Leftist governments and their supporters have become increasingly visceral in their criticisms of social

movement activists, and accuse them of working in concert with a resurgent rightwing to remove leftist governments from power.

Solón, in contrast, contended that the worst thing that leftist governments in Latin America have done is to weaken social movements. In order to maintain themselves in power, these governments have undermined their ability to organize and mobilize. As a result, across the hemisphere, social movements are weaker today than they were ten years ago.

Some of those who previously held governmental posts and subsequently have had a falling out with the direction that those administrations have taken now complain about their authoritarian tendencies. Instead, they argue in favor of a democratic and pluralistic political system in which different parties alternate in power.

This can easily be seen as an

opportunistic position that is not in the interests of either the left or social movements. If the only viable alternative to an entrenched left in power is the return of the conservative oligarchy with their discredited neoliberal policies, how is that possibly a good thing or a reasonable position to advocate?

A theme in many of the discussions at the World Social Forum is the need for a fuller study of previous leftist experiences, and better theoretical reflections. It can be difficult to have these important discussions in the middle of intense political debates. These are not easy issues with simple answers, and the forum provides a space for these deliberations.

The WSF's origins in anti-systemic protests have always provided it with a certain amount of affinity with an anarchist rejection of state power. The past fifteen years of leftists in

government, however, have also highlighted in the minds of many activists of the need and the possibilities of interacting with state power.

Many of the less dogmatic voices at the WSF argued for the need to democratize power, even while recognizing that a completely democratic society is an elusive goal that may not be achievable. It is necessary to build more participative, transparent, and less patriarchal power structures, but at the same time construct independent counter-powers.

Solón pondered whether the biggest mistake in Bolivia was to admit social movements into government. They may have played a more useful role as a critical voice outside of power, even if they provided an irritant to those in office. We need to continue to engage in critical self-criticism to find new ways to move forward.

Hezbollah and the Workers

5 December 2016, by **Joseph Daher**

Though its reputation has waned in recent years, Hezbollah has long earned plaudits from the Left for its military resistance to Israel. Many, too, have pointed to its provision of social services as a sign of the organization's progressive hue.

This latter claim, however, doesn't hold up to reality. Hezbollah has over time positioned itself on the wrong side of social and economic struggles in Lebanon and shed some of its former roots, aligning itself with an emerging fraction of the Shi'a bourgeoisie. It and other sectarian movements in the country continue to block the emergence of a broader class politics in Lebanon.

Party of God and

the Poor?

Hezbollah has portrayed itself as the party of the oppressed, which challenges deprivation and champions the rights of farmers, the poor, workers, and the homeless. In its 2009 manifesto, the organization claims that:

Savage capitalist forces, led by the USA and Western countries and embodied mainly in international monopoly networks of companies that cross nations and continents, networks of various international establishments especially the financial ones backed by superior military force have led to more contradictions and conflicts . . .

Despite this rhetoric, Hezbollah's theoretical conception and policy orientation have not displayed any

systematic alternative to neoliberalism "much less capitalism" in Lebanon. Professed social justice objectives are married awkwardly to support for neoliberal measures.

We can find this contradiction in the political thought of previous important figures of Shi'a Islamic fundamentalism such as Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr, Iraqi Shi'a cleric and ideological founder of the Iraqi Islamic Dawa Party and especially Ruhollah Khomeini, who became the supreme religious leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979.

Among other titles, Al-Sadr wrote two books "Falsafatunâ (Our Philosophy) in 1959 and *Iqtisâdunâ* (Our Economics) in 1961 " with the aim of confronting Marxism and secular thoughts. His main thesis was to offer Islam as a progressive alternative to contending theories

from the Left. Al-Sadr promoted an “Islamic economic system” as a third way between capitalism and socialism. In his view, social and economic problems were the result of the misconduct of man — the solution, then, had to be religious.

Meanwhile, Khomeini also used economic discourses to win support for his Islamic project. In 1979–1982, at the height of Iran’s revolution and popular mobilization, Khomeini had presented Islam through the lens of social justice, praising the oppressed (who were equated with the poorest sections of society) and condemning the oppressors — understood as the rich, the greedy palace dwellers, and their foreign patrons.

This populist rhetoric was instrumental in mobilizing urban workers against the Pahlavi monarchy. But after 1982, during the consolidation of the new Islamic regime and the associated repression of the opposition (especially those on the Left), he increasingly equated Islam with respect for private property and depicted the bazaar as an essential pillar of society. He now progressively delineated three main classes: an upper class constituted of the remnants of the old wealthy families; a middle class formed of clerics, intellectuals, civil servants, merchants, shopkeepers, and tradesmen; and a lower class composed of laborers, peasants, and slum dwellers.

The “oppressed” ceased to be an economic category describing the deprived masses, becoming instead a political label for the new regime’s supporters, including wealthy bazaar merchants. The class-struggle rhetoric was significantly reduced with Khomeini arguing that Islam sought harmonious relationships between factory owners and workers and between landlords and peasants.

In much the same way as Sadr and Khomeini, Hezbollah’s economic thought has consistently upheld the market and defense of private property as a key pillar, despite also professing allegiance to social justice goals. Throughout the neoliberal period in Lebanon, this orientation meant that Hezbollah’s support for

measures such as privatization, liberalization, and opening up to foreign capital inflows has not been considered by the organization as being in contradiction to its commitment to tackling poverty and inequality.

Hezbollah’s sources of funding also explains its rather conservative economic program. The Islamic movement’s financial resources are based on support first from Iran (estimates range from \$100 to \$400 million a year) and then from the Lebanese Shi’a middle class and bourgeoisie, and the alms (zakāt) collected by Hezbollah on behalf of Khomeini.

Ultimately, like Khomeini, Hezbollah believes in the unity of the community and cooperation between classes, where the workers should not ask more than what is given by the bourgeoisie and where the bourgeoisie has an obligation to be charitable towards the poor. Class struggle is seen as fragmenting the community (the Ummah). Broader appeals to class unity across Lebanon’s fractured society are thus stifled.

Privatization and Disinvestment

The manifestations of this ideology are hard to miss. Following the 2003 Paris II Conference, Hezbollah — then part of the opposition — did not comment on or assess the social consequences of [privatizing state assets](#). This despite the fact that the target for privatization was Middle East Airlines (MEA), which employed several hundred Shi’a who were laid off after the company was sold.

The prospect of 1,200 to 1,500 workers losing their jobs produced considerable unrest. —Ali Tahir Yasin, the current head of the Hezbollah-aligned al-Wafaa trade union — its name literally translates to “the Loyalty Union” — was involved in the MEA negotiations as a workers’ representative. He claimed in an interview that the proposed privatization did not hurt workers or the wider population.

The next year, the General Confederation of Lebanese Workers (CGTL) called a general strike to protest rising prices and inflation. The mobilizations paralyzed the country. According to —Abd al-Amir Najda, president of the Federation of Public Ground Transportation Drivers’ Unions, the political elite pressured the CGTL to end the strike. Workers, however — especially those in the transportation sector — [opposed their leadership](#) and called for the strike to continue.

The CGTL leadership eventually withdrew from the strike, which allowed the army to intervene. The government forces opened fire on demonstrators, who were gathered in Hayy al-Sallum, one of the poorer Shi’a neighborhoods in south Beirut. Five workers were killed, and dozens injured.

The main political parties, including Hezbollah, supported the army, saying that “the army is the red line.” Most of the media portrayed the strike as a “barbaric attempt by Shi’a to attack the army.” The CGTL stayed completely silent.

In a press conference a few days later, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah [accused individuals](#) linked to the US Embassy of instigating the violence between protesters and the army. He claimed that “after the shooting in Hay al-Sellom area, groups linked to the embassy worked to spread chaos and violence in other regions in the southern suburbs.” He added that the instigators wanted to undermine the close relationship between the government and Hezbollah, and he denied claims that his party had any interest in seeing Premier Rafic Hariri leave office.

Soon after, following the withdrawal of Syrian forces, Fu’ad Siniora formed a new government that included the March 8 Alliance, the March 14 Alliance, and, for the first time, Hezbollah. Trad Hamada, a Hezbollah-appointed minister and ally of the party, served as minister of labor.

He was soon faced with a major mobilization by the teachers’ union. Defending public services, they gathered at least a quarter of a million

people and forced the government to withdraw and cancel some of its decisions, including “diminishing pensions, increasing VAT from 10 percent to 12 percent, raising fuel prices by 30 percent, and imposing short-term contracts on government workers and teachers.”

Hezbollah participated in these protests, alongside the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) and the Lebanese Communist Party. The ruling parties attacked this coalition, saying it was mostly Shi'a-orchestrated and was infiltrated by Syrian workers. Once again, the CGTL stayed out.

The party's uneven opposition to the ruling party continued in January 2007. Then, the CGTL called a demonstration against the Paris III agenda. Only two thousand people showed up, in large part due to inaction from Hezbollah and the rest of the March 8 forces. While critical of some aspects of the upcoming conference, Hezbollah explained that they did not want to jeopardize its outcomes. Indeed, Hezbollah MPs, even after resigning from the government in December 2006, supported the reform program Prime Minister Siniora presented.

On January 23, however, Hezbollah joined with the March 8 Alliance, Amal, and the FPM to call for a general strike. The target of their action was not a labor dispute but the creation of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, an international investigation into the former prime minister Rafiq al-Hariri's assassination in 2005, which Hezbollah and its allies considered unconstitutional and specifically aimed at the Shi'a Islamic group.

This turned rapidly into a popular uprising that blocked the main roads of transit in the country. The situation overwhelmed the strike's initiators, and they decided to end the protest, declaring that it might “create confessional tensions.” According to the left-wing activist Bassem Chit, the March 8 Alliance feared that the popular movement was beginning to cross sectarian lines in order to address socioeconomic issues. The organization preferred to emphasize only Shi'a interests.

One of the characteristics of Hezbollah's orientation toward labor struggles, particularly those that emerged after 2008, is its unwillingness to support large-scale, independent mass worker mobilizations, preferring to rely instead upon small-scale, armed actions against its political opponents. In this sense, Hezbollah has reinforced the sectarian dynamic of these struggles, undercutting any broader class impulse they may have potentially developed.

The aborted general strike in May 2008 exemplifies this. Called by taxi drivers, teachers, and farmers, protesters demanded a minimum wage increase, higher public wages (which had been frozen since 1996), and anti-inflationary measures.

Just four months earlier, a different strike had been called with the same demands. It escalated into deadly battles in Beirut's southern suburbs, with roads cut off and taxis refusing to take passengers.

The second strike was called off due to street fighting between opposing political forces. The March 14 Alliance “which held governmental power at the time” had threatened to shut down Hezbollah's telecommunications network. In response, Hezbollah declined to mobilize for the general strike and instead launched armed attacks on pro-March 14 neighborhoods.

These fights ended popular mobilization in the streets and stalled any possibility of joint worker struggles across sectarian lines. A few weeks after the cessation of hostilities and the formation of a new national unity government, the minimum wage was increased two-thirds, from LP300,000 (\$200) to LP500,000 (\$333). This was far lower than the workers' demands and only benefited private-sector employees, leaving public-sector workers with the same pay they'd been earning for twelve years.

Trade unionist Ahmad Dirani explained that Hezbollah's military intervention was “aimed against the possibility of a large trade union and workers' mobilization taking the lead

against the government in a democratic way. Hezbollah did not favor this option.” Dirani argued that if the general strike had been allowed to go on, it could have achieved social gains around wages while also addressing the threat to Hezbollah's telecommunication system.

The Nahas Plan

In June 2011, a new government led by the March 8 Alliance and headed by Najib Miqati was formed. Hezbollah held two ministries in this government: agriculture (Hussein Hajj Hassan) and state (Muhammad Fneich). Hezbollah's experience in this government is instructive, as it demonstrates the party's unwillingness to support significant reform measures aimed at helping Lebanese workers.

The initiative advanced by Minister of Labor Charbel Nahas became the center of these debates. His plan contained a number of significant social reforms, particularly the establishment of a social wage that would adjust the public- and private-sector salaries in line with inflation and expand the range of subsidies, including transport allowances and a universal health-care system. Higher taxes on finance and other rentier activities would have funded these wage increases. Had it gone through, Nahas's initiative would have reversed the weakening of labor vis-à-vis capital that had been characteristic of the previous years.

A range of political forces opposed Nahas. Initially, Amal's minister of health, Ali Hassan Khalil, opposed the health-care plan because he believed it encroached on his domain, despite the fact that the labor “not health” ministry controlled the National Fund for Social Security. Lebanese journalist Zbeeb has argued that Khalil's opposition came from the fact “that the Ministry of Health and Social Security are part of Nabih Berri's share of the pie, and he cannot concede his share while the shares of other political forces remain in place.” Likewise, trade unionist Adib Bou Habib claimed in an interview that “Amal and its Minister of Health did not want this project because they

wanted to use the universal health coverage for their own political and clientelist interests.”

Following pressure from Amal and Hezbollah, Nahas agreed to separate the health care from wage reform. The latter would soon become the new line of battle inside of the government.

Nahas’s first wage initiative called for a LP890,000 (\$593) minimum wage plus transportation allowances. Private-sector employers, however, firmly refused this, arguing that adding transportation allowances to the basic salary would unsustainably [increase costs](#). Instead they signed the [Consensual Agreement on Wage Reform](#) with the leadership of the CGTL and Prime Minister Najib Miqati. This gave less to workers, as it did not include transport allowances and would only raise the minimum wage to LP675,000 (\$450).

The government adopted the Consensual Agreement (CA) in December 2011, with the two Hezbollah ministers “Fneich and Hassan” voting to support it. Referring to CGTL’s role in the negotiations, [Fneich](#) argued that “workers and employees reject[ed] the wage adjustment plan proposed by the Minister of Labor Charbel Nahas.”

Following immediate and widespread criticisms of its ministers’ position, Hezbollah shifted its position. They supported a strike and demonstration organized against the agreement. Hezbollah ministers claimed that they voted in favor of the CA to punish Nahas for a lack of coordination, not because they opposed his plan. Indeed, they called the approved wage proposal far too low.

Despite this, the party declined to participate in a demonstration supporting the Nahas plan. [The December 15 protest](#) drew more than six thousand people in Beirut. CGTL also refused. The Hezbollah representative on the CGTL, Ali Yassin, stated that the party decided not to mobilize because it opposed the CGTL executive. At the demonstration, many protestors expressed their frustration with CGTL through placards, chants, and group discussions.

In January 2012, parliament undertook a final round of voting on the CA and the Nahas initiative. In the debate, Nahas proposed a slightly lower minimum wage plus transport allowances. Despite numerous meetings between Nahas and Hezbollah, Amal, and the prime minister, no agreement was reached. His plan was eventually rejected in favor of the CA, and he resigned from the cabinet the following month.

Hezbollah trade unionist Ali Taher Yassin justified the vote and CGTL’s rejection of the plan stating that:

It was a special situation, you have to weigh how much you can mobilize and how much you want to destabilize this government. With strikes and demonstrations you put in danger the stability and the security of the country.

Yassin echoed these sentiments at a conference in March 2012. He argued that it would be difficult for workers to demand higher wages because of the country’s instability and the damage they might cause the Lebanese economy. While declaring his support for “humane” salaries, Yassin argued that they should be reached through negotiation with employers. He defended the CGTL leadership from audience members who complained that the federation no longer represented workers’ interests.

Other trade unionists linked to Hezbollah, Akram Zeid and Abdallah Hamadeh (head of the al-Wala transport federation), agreed that the party could not support the Nahas initiative because of the potential for economic and political instability.

The Union Coordination Committee

Hezbollah adopted a similarly hostile attitude to the Union Coordination Committee (UCC), which brings together more than forty independent trade unions and between 140,000 and 176,000 members, mainly employed in civil service or as teachers.

The UCC grew massively during national labor struggles in 2012 and 2013. In 2012 alone, it held fourteen strikes, sixty sit-ins, and four mass demonstrations. In the spring and summer of that year, for example, more than 2,500 contract workers at the electricity company EdL protested the government’s privatization plans. The workers claimed that the Ministry of Energy and Water (MoEW) had failed to provide them with permanent employment, social security, a decent monthly salary, or job security.

At the time of the protests, the minister in charge, Gebran Bassil, refused to meet with workers and described them as troublemakers and outlaws. He also sent in security services to prevent strikers from reaching their sit-in location. His restructuring plan would have made 1,800 workers redundant.

Hezbollah, who had been in charge of the MeOW from July 2005 to November 2006 under Minister Muhammad Fneich, supported the privatization process. It endorsed [Bassil’s plan](#) and voted for a draft law allowing contract workers at Lebanon’s state-run electricity company to become full-time employees. During this period, Hezbollah did not criticize Bassil’s vocal and sectarian attacks on the workers’ mobilization, despite the fact that the vast majority of affected workers were Shi’a.

In February and March of 2013, UCC-led teachers called for massive demonstrations and open-ended strikes. The year before, the minister of education had promised a salary increase, but it had yet to come into effect. Tens of thousands of teachers demonstrated nationwide, and the strikes lasted for more than three weeks.

The UCC played a major role in these mobilizations, which continued through 2014 as teachers still waited for their promised raise. Throughout, the union resisted government proposals to fund the program by shifting the burden onto the poorer layers of society, including measures like new taxes, benefit reductions for teachers, cuts to retirees’ pay, or an increase in contractual employment.

Other struggles that emerged in 2013 should also be noted. The Federation of Bank Employees tried to defend the last remaining collective agreement in Lebanon; employees of the Spinneys supermarket chain fought for their right to organize; and contract workers and those without fixed contracts in the education sector mobilized for protection and job security. Using a national campaign and allying with popular local organizations, UCC circulated a petition for a million-person rally to support the labor movement.

But the teachers' struggle best underlines several salient and interrelated features of the Lebanese labor movement. First, it demonstrated Hezbollah's unwillingness to support independent worker mobilizations, particularly given its participation in government. During these strikes, Hezbollah refused to stand up for the salary increases and did not mobilize its membership to join the actions.

In fact, on several occasions, Hezbollah representatives directly opposed these strikes. At a November 2013 meeting of the southern branch of the Public Secondary Schools Teachers League in Lebanon, Hezbollah and Amal representatives argued against a strike that the majority of participants supported. Hezbollah teachers also did not participate in the open-ended strikes led by the UCC and refused calls from Hanna Gharib, a prominent labor activist and current head of the Lebanese Communist Party, to escalate the protests.

Likewise, during a grading boycott in the summer of 2014, Hezbollah representatives called for an end to the action and supported the parliamentary decision to automatically pass all students in an attempt to break the action. Nonetheless, the UCC decided to continue the boycott and to join further strikes called by various sectors of the public administration to implement the increased salary scale.

These struggles illustrate Hezbollah's orientation toward the Lebanese labor movement. The period witnessed a significant upsurge in worker

militancy, marked particularly by the call for general strikes in 2004 and 2008 and the fierce debate around the Nahas initiative in 2011. These struggles revealed the tensions between Hezbollah's claim to represent the poor and marginalized layers of the Shi'a population and its integration into the political elite which link it to the emerging bourgeoisie.

At all major points, Hezbollah has expressed a rhetorical concern for issues like privatization, the Paris agreements, and the decreasing value of real wages. At the same time, it has strongly resisted attempts to mobilize its base in a manner that would support independent initiatives across sectarian lines. In general, these tensions have been resolved in favor of neoliberal reform, particularly in those periods in which Hezbollah has held governmental positions.

Hezbollah's Changing Composition

Hezbollah's record toward labor protests reflects the party's changing class interests. From its roots in Lebanon's poor Shi'a population, Hezbollah has become a party whose membership and cadres are increasingly dominated by a fraction of the Shi'a bourgeoisie, especially in Beirut. In the capital's southern suburbs, many wealthy families and most of the merchants have been integrated into Hezbollah, while the party's activities "particularly those connected to real estate, tourism, and leisure" cater to middle-class Shi'a residents.

This transformation appears most clearly in the party cadres, which are no longer composed of lower middle-class clerics, but are now largely drawn from a professional class who hold secular college degrees.

The party holds increasing weight in professional associations, and some companies, especially in real estate, tourism, and trade, under Hezbollah's direct influence have gained power in the Lebanese business community. A

new fraction of the bourgeoisie linked to the party through Iranian capital and investments was created, while the rest of the Shi'a fraction of the bourgeoisie, whether in Lebanon or in the diaspora, came increasingly under the umbrella of Hezbollah "or at least close to the party because of its political and financial powers. These characteristics of Hezbollah's political representation and social base indicate that though the organization continues to draw support from all levels of society, its priorities are increasingly oriented to the highest strata.

The development of class-based movements present a potential threat to all the sectarian and ruling class parties in Lebanon, of which Hezbollah has become part. Thus Hezbollah has never mobilized around socioeconomic demands from a cross-sectarian perspective. Its support for the CGTL and other social movements has been purely rhetorical.

Indeed, Hezbollah, along with other political forces in Lebanon, has actively worked to weaken of the labor movement. The party formed separate, Shi'a-based federations and trade unions in a number of sectors, including agriculture, transportation, construction, printing, the press, and utilities. This proliferation of federations and trade unions allowed it to win significant power in the CGTL. Today, Amal and Hezbollah control the majority of the federation's leadership seats. As a result, the CGTL refuses to mobilize workers despite the intensification of neoliberal policies.

It seems likely that the Association of Public Secondary Education Teachers, which has played a leading role within the UCC, will have a similar fate. At their January 2015 election, the sectarian political parties "including Hezbollah and the March 8 and March 14 Alliances" united against Hanna Gharib, who only drew support from independents and the Lebanese Communist Party. These elections mirrored how sectarian political forces undermined the CGTL. Indeed, the UCC's activities have diminished following this election.

Hezbollah has not been engaged in

building a counterhegemonic project that challenges the capitalist system. Rather, it aims to use religious mobilization to reach the largest possible section of the Shi'a population, while presenting no threat to the dominant capitalist and sectarian political system in Lebanon or the region. In fact, it actively sustains that system.

Hezbollah's service provisions resemble most other Lebanese political and sectarian communities – although its network of organizations is larger and more efficient. They all promote the private- and patronage-based mitigation of suffering.

Any real counterhegemonic project would break with the sectarian political system, as well as the regional and international imperialist system. In this sense, Mehdi Amel's description of the Islamic bourgeoisie's behavior in the 1980s also applies to Hezbollah:

the aspiration of fractions of the Islamic bourgeoisie to strengthen their positions in the power structure, or rather to modify the place they occupy within the confessional political system, in order to better share the hegemony and not to change the system . . . This solution is not

actually a solution; it will lead only to a worsening of the crisis of the system.

Hezbollah's record confirms that the party's interests are more aligned with elites than with workers. It remains firmly in line with Lebanon's other dominant political parties as an impediment to the emergence of a popular movement that could raise deep social and economic questions.

This shouldn't be a surprise: those types of class dynamics would unravel the ground on which Hezbollah itself stands.

[Jacobin](#)

Oil Pipelines: Converging in Illinois

4 December 2016, by [Sandra Lindberg](#)

Tammy Brewer, THE great-granddaughter of a Keokuk chief, climbed a steep and wooded hill beside the Mississippi River and then crossed a rough fence to stand on a Bakken Pipeline work site. Across from her stood a young security guard, a local hired by Dakota Access LLC at \$30 an hour to keep protesters away from workers digging trenches with backhoes.

"Have you ever seen a baby in a coffin?" Tammy demanded of the young guard in front of her. He stayed quiet, but she saw tears in his eyes. "Those [will be] your grandchildren. You are putting nails in their coffins. You could get a different job."

As the young guard opened his mouth to answer, he and Tammy saw another guard glaring at them. They watched as the guard slashed with his fingers across his throat, silently ordering the young guy to keep quiet. The gesture was a threat and the young man knew it. He held his tongue.

Tammy's husband Jerry Brewer, who has been fighting the Bakken Pipeline for three years, has his own stories of threats. A local community college

where Jerry teaches has warned him "not to get in trouble." Jerry helps to organize protests, but avoids arrest. Even so, his insurance agent has suggested that Jerry's property rates will go up unless he stops his work against the pipeline. Jerry keeps going anyway.

The Brewers are part of the Mississippi Stand protest, begun by Jessica Rezinek and Frank Cordaro of Des Moines Catholic Worker. When asked what was getting left out of media coverage about the river encampment she has organized to stop the Bakken Pipeline from boring under the Mississippi River, Jess quickly answered "Stress it's time for us to come together and take back our lives, and our democratic way of life. Locals here oppose these poor environmental choices. It's time to move past individual actions and come together."

The Bakken Pipeline already has a green light from the Army Corps of Engineers and the Iowa Utility Board – in spite of full-throated protests by Iowans. Now groups like Mississippi Stand and the Iowa Pipeline Abatement Group are adopting

strategies used by Standing Rock protesters in North Dakota – putting their bodies in the way of pipeline construction. In North Dakota, the Standing Rock encampment numbers over 7,000. In Iowa, three encampments are growing larger every day.

At the Mississippi Stand just south of Montrose, Iowa, a man wearing an IBEW Local 13 t-shirt stops to explain how he saw Jessica Rezinek on a Facebook post and decided he had to help her. He tells me his union's mission is to fight for what's right and fight for people. He spoke proudly of being a union man since the age of 20, and how his father was the union president of another union in a neighboring community.

At the encampment he set up a television, a battery and connection to the internet so protesters can see how media outside of Iowa are covering their efforts. "There was no coverage of us locally," he told me. "I wanted them to see what others were saying about what we are doing." Then, hurrying off, he added, "Civil disobedience works hand-in-hand with education."

On October 1, 2016, over 30 protesters were arrested at Mississippi Stand.

The Enbridge Pipeline Octopus

Across the Mississippi River, Illinois coalitions are also fighting to halt new pipeline construction. Enbridge owns 27.6% of the [Bakken Pipeline project](#), which is only one new project threatening to come across the river.

In northern Illinois, Enbridge has already built a new stretch of pipe from the central Illinois Flanagan Terminal, south to the southern Illinois Pakota Terminal where the company hopes it will arrive. And in Wisconsin and five northern Illinois counties, Enbridge is gearing up to build a “twin” line to one already in the ground running from Duluth, MN, through Wisconsin and northern Illinois until it reaches Flanagan.

At this time, Enbridge is denying to those in northern Illinois that it plans to build the “twin” to Line 61, but a Bloomberg News article that ran in Canada announced the [new line weeks ago](#). In Wisconsin, where Madison news sources are reporting the same story, landowners are already fighting the eminent domain cases Enbridge has brought against them — demanding that construction easements be increased from 70 to 300 feet across, to accommodate one or more new lines.

Enbridge does not yet have ICC approval for a new Illinois line. Dave and Sandra Davis, organizers for Save

Our Illinois Land (SOIL), hope to “get out in front of this issue and stop the project before it secures state approval.” They have held DeKalb, IL community information sessions in packed rooms. Citizen requests are coming in for meetings in four other affected counties.

Like the Iowa activists, SOIL is building coalitions with other environmental groups, labor and social justice organizations. The coalitions are growing stronger as it becomes more and more difficult to discount the collision of climate change, extreme weather and oil pipelines accidents. When it comes to pipeline spills, Enbridge’s name is well known.

¶ In 1979 Enbridge was responsible for an oil spill in Bemidji, MN. Thirty years later Enbridge still pays for the one-of-a-kind research facility established at the accident’s site to study how the oil plume is affecting the area’s underground water aquifer.

¶ The corporation was responsible for the huge and costly Kalamazoo oil spill in 2010. It took years and over one billion to clean up the mess, the EPA levied a fine of \$61 million against Enbridge as part of an overall settlement of \$177 million but the area is still not completely restored.

¶ In September 2010 Enbridge closed Line 6A for eight days after it leaked 6,100 barrels of crude near Romeoville, Illinois, affecting ground water, a retention pond and a [wastewater treatment plant](#) (2011,. The EPA fined Enbridge over \$100 million for this accident.

Poisoned Water and Climate Change

To get a sense of how the Army Corps of Engineers has been attempting to control the Mississippi, read “What We’ve Done to the Mississippi River: An Explainer” by Alexis C. Madrigal in [The Atlantic](#) (2011,. That oil companies believe they can safely run pipe under a river that changes as much and as often as the Mississippi will seem reckless indeed in light of the river’s history.

In northern Illinois, the “twin” to Enbridge’s Line 61 will run under several creeks and rivers. It will also sit on top of two Illinois aquifers. An oil spill in that area would not only destroy some of the most fertile farmland in the nation, but also contaminate aquifers and require decades of study and remediation.

When standing with protesters at Standing Rock, think of Iowa and Illinois as well. All these pipelines, before they send oil to storage tanks in Cushing Oklahoma or storage and refineries in Louisiana, converge in Illinois. Coalitions gathering to stop pipelines in Illinois are part of efforts to kill the black snake, too.

If you want to donate or find out how to get involved in Iowa: email frank.cordaro@gmail.com. To help SOIL in Illinois, message them on Facebook.

[Against the Current](#)

The new Stolen Generation

1 December 2016, by [Kim Bullimore](#)

According to commissioner Andrew Jackomos, many of the Aboriginal children who had been removed from their homes had suffered “physical, mental and cultural” neglect within

the system.

The investigation surveyed the treatment of 980 Aboriginal children and found that more than 86 percent

were case managed by a non-Aboriginal agency, 60 percent were placed with a non-Aboriginal carer, and 42 percent were placed in care outside of their extended family. More

than 40 percent of the children were separated from their brothers and sisters.

The rate of Aboriginal child removal in Victoria exceeds that at any time since white settlement.

According to the report, the Department of Health and Human Service, along with other community organisations, offered poor cultural safety to Aboriginal children in out-of-home care, including either failing to identify the child as Aboriginal or de-identifying the child as Aboriginal. Only 38 percent of Aboriginal children in care had their identity confirmed during the first home visit by service providers.

An earlier report by the commission found that Aboriginal children were 16 times more likely to be in out-of-home care than non-Aboriginal children. According to the 2014 report, “the rate of Aboriginal child removal in Victoria exceeds that at any time since white settlement”.

While children were removed as a result of experiencing family violence in combination with parental alcohol and/or substance abuse, the new report noted that the over-representation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care was closely linked with Australia’s colonial settler history.

The “history of separation from community, family, land and culture” experienced by Indigenous people had left “a legacy of disempowerment and trauma”, which had negatively impacted on family stability, health and education.

“Tracing the stories of individual children and their families across Victoria, we saw generations caught up in criminal justice and child protection systems, struggling with unemployment, poverty, poor education, high rates of suicide and the over-riding impact of the past impacting on the present”, Jackomos said.

Victoria is not alone in its high level of Aboriginal child removals and failure to provide cultural safety. In 2014-15, there were more than 15,000 Indigenous children in care across the country. Despite being only 5.5 percent of children nationally, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders make up 35 percent of all children placed in care – a 65 percent increase since 2008.

According to the national children’s commissioner, Megan Mitchell, racism has played a part in the high levels of removal. Addressing a federal Senate inquiry in 2015, Mitchell noted “a really high level of surveillance of Aboriginal communities” compared to

non-Indigenous communities. “I do think there’s a level of racism, whether it’s intended or not”, she said.

Mitchell, whose comments were reported in the Sydney Morning Herald in March last year, noted that one of the reasons for the high rates of removal was that the current system of child care and protection was focused on the “removal end, not the family support end”. Mitchell argued this was the wrong focus; instead, parents should be offered more support in order to improve home life.

The Office of the Northern Territory Coordinator-General for Remote Services similarly revealed in 2012 that close to \$80 million was being spent on the surveillance and removal of Aboriginal children by the territory government, while a mere \$513,000 was being spent on family support.

As Luke Pearson noted at the @IndigenousX website in February: “That is a discrepancy of 160:1 in terms of resource allocation for child protection and out of home care vs. intensive family support services”.

The current child protection regime in all but name continues to enact racist assimilationist policies. We are witnessing the creation of a new stolen generation.

[Red Flag](#)