



IV504 - January 2017

South Korea's historic candle light protests bring down President Park

31 January 2017, by **Youngsu Won**

In spite of mounting pressure since late October to step down, President Park Geun-hye has refused to resign, instead searching for a political solution that involved neither resigning nor impeachment. However, every maneuver to retain the presidency failed and her presidency ceased functioning.

A series of ever-growing million-strong protests forced parliamentarians to finalize the impeachment process. The 2.3 million mega-protest on December 3rd was a critical turning point that halted Park's last attempt to escape impeachment.

South Koreans were angry not just with the ruling Saenuri Party, but also opposition parties, which oscillated, without any plan or determination, at every turn of Park's so-called apology speeches. The huge mobilizations on each weekend of November up to last Saturday's mega-protest maintained increasing pressure on the mainstream political parties, both those in power and in opposition.

The biggest political scandal ever

This historic battle began as a dispute between the Blue House (presidential palace) and the conservative Daily Chosun, whose concerns as a loyal opposition was despised by Park and her lackeys. Investigative journalists

exposed a series of shocking revelations of Choi Soon-sil's various power abuses and extortions of public fund under Park's connivance or cooperation, as well as personal amoral behavior.

The prosecution arrested Choi and her accomplices; personal business agents like Cha Eun-taek, a music video director, and Jang Shi-ho, her nephew; presidential secretaries like Ahn Jongbeom & Jeong Hoseong; government high officials like Kim Jong, former Deputy Minister of Culture and Sport Department, and others.

Using her 40 year-long friendship with Park, Choi wielded enormous power following Park's election as President in 2013. The most shocking news was that she revised Park's speeches, which was exposed by JTBC's report based on Choi's tablet PC. Choi was also deeply involved in establishing two foundations, Mir Foundation and K Sprot Foundation, which were founded with millions of dollars allegedly donated by major Chaebols, that is, Samsung, Hyundai, SK, Lotte, and so on. In fact, these mysterious foundations were used as a conduit for financial extortion and money laundry.

In addition, Jung Yura, Cho's daughter, enjoyed illegitimate privileges such as financial help from

the National Horseriding Association and admission to Ewha Women's University through irregular procedures. Choi commanded Cha and Jang as her business agents in securing government contracts related with sport and culture spheres.

Choi's hidden power and privilege worked like magic, wielding hundreds of millions of dollar in the budgets, through her private paper companies in Korea and Germany. This little-known women was a key player behind the president. When this mystery was finally solved, Pandora's box of truth was open.

Park versus party politics

The crisis of Park's regime could be foreseen. In the general election of last April, the ruling Saenuri Party suffered a huge defeat, losing its majority. Several dissidents who were expelled from the ruling party won seats and opposition parties won a majority in spite of splits. Thus, though the defeat was caused by arrogant abuses of the pro-Park faction and unfair selection of candidates, the pro-Park faction held onto leadership of the party, defying popular opinion.

Lee Jeongheyon took the leadership due to his obstinate loyalty to the president, and his improper remarks were widely ridiculed, thus the Saenuri Party was seriously stricken with crisis. As the Choi-Park scandal exposed, the party was divided along factional line. The minority non-Park faction joined the opposition in criticizing the scandals and the president. The majority pro-Park faction was isolated, and desperate acts by some MPs to defend the president invoked a huge backlash of popular anger.

The opposition parties, the Democratic Party (DP) and People's Party (PP), had a majority in parliament, but its initial response to the scandals were rather half-hearted, trailing behind media and public opinion. They could not propose any proper measures to cope with the crisis, wavering between a resolute struggle and a political compromise. At this initial stage, the opposition was rather reluctant to initiate an impeachment because they had no confidence in their capacity to secure a two-third majority.

Though they joined candle light protests, the opposition opportunistically kept some distance from the extra-parliamentary mobilization as they regarded it as their task to pursue a solution within parliament. However, throughout the whole November, mobilization kept on growing on a massive scale beyond their expectation, so much so that the opposition had no other option but to follow popular opinion and initiate the impeachment procedure.

In face of tremendous protests, Park made the final maneuver in her last speech on November 29. Though she mentioned her intention to step down for the first time, she proposed that parliament decide on how she should resign, without mentioning any details. This move was interpreted as a maneuver to evade impeachment. A section of the non-Park faction welcomed her proposal, and decided not to join the impeachment, on the condition that the president clarify the precise date of resignation.

However, the mega-protest of December 3 clearly expressed the will

of the indignant people: the immediate, unconditional resignation of the president. Under mounting pressure, the dissidents of the ruling party gave up on a political solution based on compromise and joined the opposition to support impeachment. Thus, it was not the non-Park faction, but the pro-Park faction that exposed in the public eye, and the path to the impeachment was clearly paved.

Media's role and the limit of its hegemony

In this historic battle, the media, especially the conservative media, played a key role, in that every day from late October till now, the media exposed a vast range of power abuse, bribery, and irregularities. Countless unjustified, illegal and illegitimate acts by Park and Choi and their accomplices were reported on a daily basis. Some of the cable TV networks dealt with the scandals around the clock.

In essence, the mass media in South Korea is largely privately owned by conservative media mogul or strongly linked to big businesses. Thus, on the whole, conservative newspapers and cable TV networks supported Park and her conservative government. Some of them were vulgar outlets of anti-communist, anti-North Korea rightwing extremists.

On the other hand, progressive or liberal media are smaller in size and their influence is rather limited. Hangeoreh Shinmoon and Daily Gyeonghyang criticized the government, but among the TV networks, JTBC, though linked with Samsung, was regarded as the only anti-government media, under the influence of Sohn Seokhee who moved from the government-controlled MBC.

In this crisis, JTBC's exposure of Choi Soon-sil's tablet PC on October 24 was the decisive trigger of a whole series of political crises, though TV Chosun prepared for systematic attack through a more extensive coverage of the scandals. The balanced reports and democratic approach of JTBC

boosted its credibility and popularity beyond that of pro-government broadcasts KBS and MBC, or other TV networks.

In a barrage of scandal exposures, the media as a whole, whether conservative, liberal or progressive, were united in criticizing the corrupt government, even competing among themselves on this issue. On the whole, extensive media coverage led to a tremendous explosion of anger and indignation, and ultimately to unprecedented mega-protests.

However, the media was shocked at the enormous scale of the mobilization and used their influence to curb the power of the candle light protests. The media preached non-violence, constantly emphasizing the difference between the candle protests and the social movement's confrontational approach. Seemingly, the hegemony of the conservative media worked and the candle light protests, though growing to a size beyond its control, remained peaceful and civil.

December 3 was a watershed. After Park's speech, conservative media began to advocate a political solution within the framework of law and order, without directly attacking the candle light mobilization. More and more voices from extreme rightwing pundits were audible. However, the sheer size of the December 3 mobilizations overwhelmed any maneuver of the conservative media, which in turn leaned toward the inevitability of presidential impeachment.

The dialectical, dynamic interaction between media and mass mobilization was the key factor in determining the political path of this crisis. Initially, the media seemed to dominate, but the ever-growing candle light protests persisted and eventually prevailed, pushing through the course of the historic struggle.

The evolution of the candle light protests

Though the media exposures were

shocking, the protest began as usual: a candle light vigil at the Cheonggye Square, a historical site of protest. On the first weekend after the JTBC's revelation, 30,000 people gathered to criticize the president and demanding her resignation.

With daily media coverage of the scandals, popular anger exploded, and anger at Park's speech on November 4 led to 200,000 people joining the candle light protest on November 5, a sign of the beginning of mega-protests. On November 12, a one million strong mega-protest signified an escalation of popular protest. The scale of spontaneous mobilization was highly explosive, breaking records at subsequent weekend rallies as follows:

October 29: 30,000
November 5: 200,000
November 12: 1,000,000
November 19: 1,900,000
November 26: 1,500,000
December 3: 2,320,000

The candle light protests came to dominate politics. The president's untruthful excuses and even more exposures provoked bigger mobilization on November 19 and 16. Mobilization of millions became a norm. Park's speech on November 29 provoked the largest mobilization in South Korean history.

However, reaction was never docile. The police attempted to put a strict limit on protest marches. The police set up lengthy walls of buses as a blockade around the rally spot, and did not allow anyone to approach the Blue House [1].

However, a court decision defied police bigotry. Repeatedly, the court decided that the duty of the police is to protect citizens that were marching, not stop them. Thus, in each rally candle light marchers could walk nearer and nearer toward the Blue House, and on December 3, people marched up to the 100 meter parameter around the Blue House.

And in an effort to curtail the candle light protests, the police publicized a severely reduced number of rally participants, denying the obvious fact that millions had joined the rallies. However, media cast doubts on the

calculating method using by the police and confirmed the authenticity of the protests numbers based on alternative, scientific method.

In face of huge mobilization, pro-Park reactionary groups attempted counter-mobilizations. On the weekend, counter rallies were organized, but their sizes never went beyond several thousand. Even these meager rallies were packed with old people who were paid to join the rallies.

Candles in the historical context

Historically, after World War II, Korea was liberated from Japanese imperialism, but divided by Cold War politics, and suffered from a bloody hot war. After three years war, Korea was permanently divided and South Korea was incorporated into the US-led capitalist world system, and politically dominated by anti-communist dictatorships: Rhee Shingman (1948-1960), Park Chunghee (1960-1979) and Chun Doo-hwan (1980-87).

The popular struggle for democracy led to the April Revolution of 1960, and enjoyed a short freedom in 1980 Democracy's Spring, but it constantly faced harsh, until the June Uprising and partial victory in 1987. Since then, South Korea has been regarded as a formal democracy, but under conservative rule, because the June Uprising could not overthrow the military dictatorship completely.

Under the auspice of the IMF crisis, regime change was made possible and the democratization process moved slightly forward under the 10-year liberal regime of Kim Dae-jung (1997-2002) and Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2007), but unfortunately combined with a neoliberal turn. After a "lost decade", conservative forces returned to power with Lee Myeong-bak (2008-12), and Park Geun-hye (2013-present).

The present conservative rule was made possible by the economic downturn and poor performance of the liberals. Old generations' nostalgia of powerful leaders drove Park's

popularity upward, in spite of her anti-people, neoliberal policies.

The 2016 candle light protest can be seen as the historic continuation of the June Uprising of 1987, when students and citizens fought street battle for three weeks, winning a victory in spite of tear gas and massive arrests. The 1987 uprising paved the way for democracy, but the subsequent process failed to deepen democracy. In a sense, Park's government was a reactionary attempt to revive the ghost of the development dictatorship of Park Chunghee.

The 2016 candle light protests have decisively bury the remnant of the dictatorship and provide a more solid foundation for democracy in every sphere of the society. It has again proven that the real motor of history is people power in streets and square, not institutional politics.

Social movements and candle protest

Social movements in Korea made huge contributions to democratization and social justice. But after ups and downs, as well as constant repression by regimes, two pillars of historical social movements, that is, the student movement and trade union movement, lost their strength.

Of course, in the course of democratization, social movements expanded their area of influence in society and advocated many progressive reforms. However, the historic effort to build a progressive political party failed, even if the Progressive Justice Party (PJP) survived as a minor party in the parliament. The United Progressive Party (UPP) was dissolved in 2014 as a result of the Park's government's outrageous attack and its own political mistakes.

The candle light vigils are a comparatively new phenomenon that began as a means to protest in 2002, when two middle school girls were trampled to death by a US military tank. The 2002 candle protests were a key moment in the anti-US, anti-imperialist mass struggle.

In 2008, shortly after the Lee MB government was inaugurated, young school girls began protesting against the new government's decision to import US beef without proper supervision. The 2008 candle light protests were different from the previous one, in that the protesters mobilized through the online community, a virtual square where discussion and debates proliferated.

The candle light protests showed a unique dynamic that had not been seen before. All of the different group, mostly organized via online communities, from young student to housewives, joined candle light vigils and marches. The newly emerging protesters were free from old rules, and freer, more expressive, more diverse and more imaginative. Within this free and diverse environment, more militant action groups emerged and led militant street battles against police brutalities.

The 2008 candle light protest waged a daily 4-month-long struggle. Its climax was a one million strong rally on the anniversary of the June 10 1987 Uprising. On August 15, the last big rally was held, but thereafter, under severe suppression, the candle light protest dwindled as a movement.

However, the 2008 candle light protests raised the issue of democracy under the slogan of Constitution Clause 1: The R.O.K. is a democratic republic and its power comes from the people. Taking the beef issue as its starting point, the protest challenged the authoritarianism of Lee's conservative government.

Compared with 2008, the 2016 protest had a more expanded mass base, and the scale of mass mobilization became even larger, though the intensity of struggle or radicalization was lower. Thus, with its determination and enormous scale of mobilization, the 2016 candle light protests won a decisive victory over the whole establishment, unlike the 2008 protest's eventual defeat.

In 2008, the social movement and trade unions were perplexed with the emergence of a new, different type of protests and movements. In contrast, in 2016, they were not in conflict with rank-and-file candle carriers. This was a essential strength of candle protest, defeating divisive maneuvering and ideological attacks.

Formally, the weekend mega rallies were led by a newly formed coalition, the Emergency People's Action, comprised of 1,500 civil society originations. However, spontaneity overwhelmed the organized sectors. For instance, on November 30, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) organized a general strike in which 200,000 workers joined, and held a 100,000 strong rallies and march nationwide. Usually, this would have been seen as a huge mobilization, but in the context of candle light protest, organized labor's intervention had a relatively small impact.

The 2016 candle light protest became too big to control. No group or forces could control or dominate it. In some aspect, it is a perfect example of collective intellect.

Beyond the impeachment

The turning point was the mega-protest on December 3. Before it the conservative media had prevailed and wielded ideological hegemony. The media agitated for protest and applauded its decency in avoiding the violent confrontational approach of old social movements. After Park's speech on November 29, the conservative media preferred a compromise, based not on impeachment, but on an orderly retreat, in which rival factions within the ruling party united.

However, millions of candles demanded her immediate resignation and refused any compromise, thus making parliamentary impeachment the only path to a solution, as long as

Park refuses to step down. As opposition parties united and were joined by the non-Park faction of the ruling party, the path to impeachment was cleared.

It is said that Park gave up attempting another maneuver to defend herself and chose to wait for impeachment, still with the slim hope that impeachment would be voted down. The pressure was on the pro-Park faction MPs who were trapped between Park and their own electorates. Voting for impeachment would mean a punishment of the president, and a self-punishment of their own party. Voting against impeachment would mean no future career as a politician, as well as triggering an even larger protest against the regime as a whole, or apocalyptic catastrophe.

Eventually, the ever-growing candle light grassroots prevailed over the media and institutional party politics. A long road to democracy was paved by the power of multi-million mega-protests.

South Koreans were given the right to vote under a US military government. Historically, South Korea had no Chartist or Suffragette movement. However, in 1987, they fought for the right to elect a leader directly, and now in 2016, they exercised the right to recall a wrongly chosen leader. Technically, the ouster of Park from power is an impeachment by the parliament, but in reality it is a recall enacted by peoples power.

The 2016 candle light uprising has won a tremendous historical victory and democracy will be even stronger and more extensive. However, the people power of candle light protests must go beyond impeachment. It is time to start an imaginative experiment of revolutionizing the potential of people power. The candles may go out, but could be rekindled at any time. In this sense, the candles won't die out

[Links](#)

Trump's first week

30 January 2017, by **David Finkel** , **Joanna Misnik**

What are your initial reactions to Trump's first decisions ?

Trump's executive orders, 14 in the first week, seek to implement his campaign promises and demonstrate his worth as the unique leader who will "make America great again." His announcements, interviews and alarming immature behavior are sometimes bewildering even to his inner circle of top staff, who have difficulty explaining their meaning or covering for his outright lying. A new phrase has entered the American lexicon: alternative facts.

Some of his announcements make no sense: planning to precipitously move the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, making absurd claims about the size of his inaugural crowd and insisting that three million votes cast in the election were illegal. Others are vicious but predictably part and parcel of an agenda to satisfy supporters in the disparate sectors of the extreme and religious right: cancelling immigration visas, massive attack on abortion rights, wiping away the EPA's climate change web page, threatening to cut federal funds for cities that don't cooperate in anti-immigrant sweeps, reauthorizing the Dakota Access and Keystone XL pipeline, and, of course, the infamous wall on the border.

Opposition to Trump's anti-immigrant policies has been swift in coming. Mayors of large U.S. cities - New York, Chicago, Portland, Los Angeles and many others - proclaimed they will continue to be Sanctuary Cities for immigrants no matter what the reprisals from the federal government. Demonstrations have erupted throughout the country, particularly in cities in the Southwest, and now at major airports where refugees and green card holders from seven banned predominantly Muslim countries are being held.

In his second week, Trump will announce his nominee to fill the vacancy on the U.S. Supreme Court. The Republicans are determined to utilize a majority on that Court to roll back the Roe v. Wade legalization of abortion and to hand down decisions that seek to severely weaken the rights of workers to representation by a union. In this first phase, the majority of the U.S. trade union leadership has followed the self-defeating course of a wait and see attitude rather than joining the movement for solidarity and resistance. Still to come are the Republican budget proposals, which by initial reports will test the outer limits of economic lunacy. This is a very dangerous moment.

How did the big demos of last Saturday emerge?

We knew that Trump was the most despised incoming occupant of the White House in modern history. The women's demonstration was initiated by an individual Face book post and was rapidly incorporated by an organizing committee which, although clearly tied to the Democratic Party, was admirable in its centering of Black, Muslim, LGBTQ and general feminist concerns. The event itself was one of those occasions that surpasses all expectations, not only in Washington DC but in big and medium-size cities all over the country, and internationally. This was a spontaneous outpouring of women of all ages showing outrage and making a clear statement of determination not to go backward. The majority of very creative placards in the marches were hand-made by the women carrying them. Participation throughout the U.S. was at least 3.5 million. To a considerable extent the planned marches didn't even happen because the streets were completely filled. The speakers at the Washington rally were excellent, but most of the people were nowhere close enough to

hear them!

The demos seemed to be a broad convergence of all US protest movements, against Trump also for equal rights, the environment, against police violence. How can this convergence continue and build itself.

We can say that these demonstrations picked up where the height of the Occupy movement left off. Where they may lead is an open question. It's important to recognize that the anti-capitalist left can importantly contribute to this development, but can in no way "lead" it. A stable, broad convergence of all the movements and organizations that oppose this new regime remains to be constructed. At this stage, a wide variety of activities are in motion, many of which are aimed at pressuring the Democratic Party and its elected officials to take a serious oppositional stance. Historically this has been a fairly fruitless exercise. Today's neoliberal Democratic Party may fight back on certain issues, if only to avoid extinction. But for the most part the Democrats are still saying they will seek to work with Trump where they can "to bring America together."

In local areas, nonpartisan coalitions to fight Trumpism have developed. Their focus is not on the Democrats, but on a new independent locus of resistance. We hope to build on these models as Trump times get tougher and the Democrats increasingly disappoint those who are now lobbying them to lead .

The movement must be prepared to defend its most vulnerable sectors: For example, there are threats to "investigate" Black Lives Matter in McCarthyite fashion. Undocumented immigrants face terrifying prospects. At the same time, the white working class sector of Trump's voting base is going to be savagely hit by the

pending destruction of health insurance, Social Security and Medicare. The anti-Trump movement must have a message to reach them so that they don't fall deeper into racist illusions. Here again the timidity and disorganization of the trade union movement is a major obstacle. Construction unions for example support Trump's ecocidal oil pipeline policies, and some workers buy into the myth that protectionism will "bring back America's industries and jobs "

What are the perspectives for the anti-Trump movement?

There are a wide variety of activities, more than coherent "perspectives." Every Tuesday there are supposed to be activities that amount mostly to formal or informal congressional lobbying. Nationally, there is a major environmental mobilization planned for April 29 (in Washington DC and perhaps the West Coast). Enraged by attacks on their right to inform the public, scientists working for the federal government are planning a March for Science, date to be determined. Plans are underway for April 15, the day income taxes are due, especially around Trump's refusal to disclose his tax returns as all other presidents have. And the annual Pride March in June will clearly be much larger. It would be logical - although

we don't know yet - for the massive Latino-led immigrant rights mobilizations of ten years ago to revive around May 1. Because much of what Trump is doing is unpredictable, we should expect the unexpected both in terms of attacks and resistance.

A point that deserves mention is that much of the bourgeois media are more opposed to Trump than to any previous president. Any number of scandals will be dug up. The implications cannot be known in advance. Speculation already abounds about when the ruling elite will collide with Trump and decide he is an impediment to the greatness they seek for their country.

Where is the left movement created by Sanders campaign today ?

Predictably, much of the Sanders base was incorporated into the Clinton campaign. Regrettably, the Jill Stein/Ajamu Baraka Green Party campaign did not make a big breakthrough, winning only around 1% of the vote. In the wake of the election, Bernie Sanders launched his Our Revolution organization which attempts to remold the Democratic Party as a progressive populist force. There is some unhappiness among his supporters with this straitjacketed

perspective and some former Bernie staffers and stalwarts have defected and are offering very public critiques of remaining in the Democratic Party. But most of Sanders supporters, like the majority of those who poured into the streets on January 21, are attempting to make the Democrats stand up and fight against Trump.

In terms of the left, the fact that Bernie Sanders popularized the idea of socialism, followed by the shock of the election, has galvanized a layer of people toward socialist politics. In the first place, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)- the closest thing to a traditional social-democratic formation in the USA since the fragmentation of the Socialist Party in the early 1970s - has seen an influx of thousands of new members. They have grown from 7,000 to 14,000 in a matter of several months. After years of stagnation DSA is suddenly a locus of left politics that cannot be overlooked. On a considerably smaller scale, organizations on the revolutionary left including Solidarity have also grown. The test for all of us on the anti-capitalist and revolutionary left will be how to respond to (with no pretensions of vanguard "leadership") the hundreds of thousands of people horrified by the Trump and white-supremacist rightwing ascendancy, and those among them gravitating toward left and socialist ideas.

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30 January 2017, by robm

IV540 January 2017 PDF magazine available to download

[here](#)

Freeing Oscar López Rivera

27 January 2017, by Ed Morales

So when President Obama [announced on Tuesday](#) that he was commuting López Rivera's sentence and permitting his release in May, it set off an outpouring of emotion on the island and the many urban centers where the diaspora lives.

The jubilation over López Rivera's commutation "not a pardon, but a curtailing of his sentence" has cut across all political tendencies in Puerto Rico, from the socialist left to the Green-ish Independence Party to the centrist Popular Democratic Party to the increasingly hard-right Statehood Party.

The widespread support for someone like López Rivera, a former leader of the militant leftist group, the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FALN), is a reflection of the colonial yoke that Puerto Ricans have suffered under for centuries.

The Anticolonial Spirit

The roots of the FALN lie in the violently repressed nationalist movements in Puerto Rico in the 1930s and '40s led by the Harvard-educated Pedro Albizu Campos, who spent many years in prison for his role in fomenting uprisings and labor strikes across the island in protest of colonial rule. A 1954 attack on the House of Representatives in Washington resulted in the arrests and imprisonment of a group of four nationalists, including the legendary Lolita Lebrón.

When the FALN [burst onto the scene](#) with a series of bombings of corporate buildings in 1974, one of its demands was for the release of Lebrón and her fellow prisoners. Yet the FALN also embodied a different kind of nationalist militancy, one forged by the experience of Puerto Rican migrants and their children, who grew up in cities like New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia and were directly impacted by racism, segregation, and social injustice.

Like the violent SDS offshoot the Weathermen, the FALN believed in armed confrontation with the US

government and multinational corporations, and like the Irish Republican Army, it argued that its members had the right to militarily struggle for national sovereignty, distinguishing them from the nihilist pursuits of so-called "terrorist" groups. The FALN's first action "coordinated bombings of Exxon, Union Carbide, and Federal Reserve Bank buildings, among other targets" came the day before a pro-independence rally to be held at Madison Square Garden and three days before hearings about Puerto Rico's colonial status at the UN Special Committee on Decolonization.

While the Puerto Rican Socialist Party initially objected to the FALN's use of violence, in the early 1980s Puerto Rican nationalist movements warmed to the idea that imprisoned FALN members were "freedom fighters" and "patriots." Eventually, the group began to garner sympathy from the broader Puerto Rican community.

López Rivera had joined the FALN after working as a community organizer in Chicago and serving in Vietnam. The latter has been cited as a key element in his radicalization. As the United States tried to inherit the burden and spoils of France's occupation of Southeast Asia, he witnessed firsthand the colonial racism at work and connected it to the what he viewed as the internal colonialism hindering Puerto Ricans, other Latino groups, Asians, and African Americans in the United States. Political radicals of color like López Rivera saw antiracist struggle as part of a global confrontation with class-based imperialism and colonialism. Linking up with the FALN was a logical, if not inevitable, next step.

While López Rivera was never charged with or found guilty of direct involvement in any of the FALN's violent acts "which included various bombings, some lethal, in New York and Chicago" he was convicted in 1981 of seditious conspiracy (essentially a thought crime) and sentenced to fifty-five years. He's spent more than twelve of those years deprived of all human contact.

In 1999, López Rivera turned down a release deal from Bill Clinton, because a) it would have required him to serve an additional ten years and b) it would have left some of his fellow FALN prisoners languishing in prison. (Clinton's deal ultimately set free eleven of López Rivera's co-defendants.)

For the last twenty years, López Rivera and his remaining FALN comrades have renounced violence "a path borne out by other Puerto Rican militants like Dylcia Pagán and [Elizam Escobar](#)" making it easier to attract broad swaths of support from Puerto Ricans as well as high-profile supporters like Representative Luis Gutiérrez, Lin Manuel Miranda, San Juan mayor Carmen Yulán Cruz, LGBTQ activist Pedro Julio Serrano, and rapper René Pérez Joglar (Residente).

Yet the deep support for López Rivera among mainstream Puerto Ricans is still notable. What does it mean that the average Puerto Rican sees the colonial reality as so unjust that they can embrace someone who once believed in violent confrontation? On some level, it has to mean understanding that despite the United States's purportedly anticolonial foundation, it has blatantly held and exploited an island as a de facto colony for over one hundred years, while artificially constructing its economy as a dry run for free-trade extraction of corporate profit long before NAFTA.

Indeed, even as the island prepares a massive celebration for López Rivera's release, and Mayor Cruz [offers](#) López Rivera a job in the "community," Puerto Rico faces harsh austerity measures courtesy of a fiscal oversight board whose imposition was signed, sealed, and delivered by Obama, the Senate Democratic majority, and [Lin Manuel Miranda](#) as the island's last, best hope to manage its \$72 billion debt crisis.

Just last week a [labor reform law](#) passed by the Puerto Rican House of Representatives, pushed by the newly installed statehood party, whose governor was among those calling for and celebrating López Rivera's release, proposed a series of changes that would reduce salary, benefits, and overtime pay for thousands of

employees in an effort to show the board that it would play along with austerity.

Yesterday, as a crisis in health care funding looms and doctors and specialists continue to leave the island the employee union for one of the island's largest hospitals, Auxilio Mutuo, [called](#) a twenty-five-hour work stoppage. Meanwhile, Trump has

named as one of his close economic advisers the billionaire hedge-fund owner John Paulson, a major player in Puerto Rico real estate, and the new governor Ricardo Rosselló has reached out to ex-Trump cohort Corey Lewandowski [to lobby](#) the incoming president on the debt crisis.

Despite Oscar López and the FALN's

flawed strategy of violent confrontation, the explosion of support for his release demonstrates his popular purchase as an anticolonial freedom fighter. As Puerto Rico faces down multiple crises, the island will need a considerable dose of that anticolonial spirit to win a measure of freedom and sovereignty.

[Jacobin](#)

Patrice Lumumba (1925-1961)

26 January 2017, by [Sean Jacobs](#)

Yet Lumumba's short political life as with figures like Thomas Sankara and Steve Biko, who had equally short lives is still a touchstone for debates about what is politically possible in postcolonial Africa, the role of charismatic leaders, and the fate of progressive politics elsewhere.

The details of Lumumba's biography have been endlessly memorialized and cut and pasted: a former postal worker in the Belgian Congo, he became political after joining a local branch of a Belgian liberal party. On his return from a study tour to Belgium arranged by the party, the authorities took note of his burgeoning political involvement and arrested him for embezzling funds from the post office. He served twelve months in prison.

Congolese historian Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja who was in high school during Lumumba's rise and assassination points out that the charges were trumped-up. Their main effect was to radicalize him against Belgian racism, though not colonialism. Upon his release in 1957, Lumumba, by now a beer salesman, was more explicit about Congolese autonomy and helped found the Congolese National Movement, the first Congolese political group which explicitly disavowed Belgian paternalism and tribalism, called unreservedly for independence, and demanded that Congo's vast mineral wealth (exploited by Belgium and

Euro-American multinational firms) benefit Congolese first.

For Belgian public opinion which played up Congolese ethnic differences, infantilized Africans, and in the late 1950s still had a thirty-year plan for Congolese independence Lumumba and the Congolese National Movement's pronouncements came as a shock.

Two months after his release from prison, in December 1958, Lumumba was in Ghana, at the invitation of President Kwame Nkrumah who had organized the seminal All Africa People's Conference. There, as a number of other African nationalists pushing for political independence listened, Lumumba declared:

The winds of freedom currently blowing across all of Africa have not left the Congolese people indifferent. Political awareness, which until very recently was latent, is now becoming manifest and assuming outward expression, and it will assert itself even more forcefully in the months to come. We are thus assured of the support of the masses and of the success of the efforts we are undertaking.

The Belgians reluctantly conceded political independence to the Congolese, and two years later, following a decisive win for the Congolese National Movement in the first democratic elections, Lumumba

found himself elected to prime minister and with the right to form a government. A more moderate leader, Joseph Kasavubu, occupied the mostly ceremonial position of Congolese president.

On June 30, 1960, Independence Day, Lumumba gave what is now considered a timeless speech. The Belgian king, Boudewijn, opened proceedings by praising the murderous regime of his great-great uncle, Leopold II (eight million Congolese died during his reign from 1885 to 1908), as benevolent, highlighted the supposed benefits of colonialism, and warned the Congolese: "Don't compromise the future with hasty reforms." Kasavubu, predictably, thanked the king.

Then Lumumba, unscheduled, took the podium. What happened next has become one of the most recognizable statements of anticolonial defiance and a postcolonial political program. As the Belgian writer and literary critic Joris Note later pointed out, the original French text consisted of no more than 1,167 words. But it covered a lot of ground.

The first half of the speech traced an arc from past to future: the oppression Congolese had to endure together, the end of suffering and colonialism. The second half mapped out a broad vision and called on Congolese to unite at the task ahead.

Most importantly, Congo's natural resources would benefit its people first: "We shall see to it that the lands of our native country truly benefit its children," said Lumumba, adding that the challenge was "creating a national economy and ensuring our economic independence." Political rights would be reconceived: "We shall revise all the old laws and make them into new ones that will be just and noble."

Congolese congressmen and those listening by radio broke out in applause. But the speech did not sit well with the former colonizers, Western journalists, nor with multinational mining interests, local comprador elites (especially Kasavubu and separatist elements in the east of the country), the United States government (which rejected Lumumba's entreaties for help against the reactionary Belgians and the secessionists, forcing him to turn to the Soviet Union), and even the United Nations.

These interests found a willing accomplice in Lumumba's comrade: former journalist and now head of the army Joseph Mobutu. Together they worked to foment rebellion in the army, stoke unrest, exploit attacks on whites, create an economic crisis and eventually kidnap and execute Lumumba.

The CIA had tried to poison him, but eventually settled on local politicians (and Belgian killers) to do the job. He was captured by Mobutu's mutinous army and flown to the secessionist province of Katanga, where he was tortured, shot, and killed.

In the wake of his murder, some of Lumumba's comrades most notably Pierre Mulele, Lumumba's minister of education controlled part of the country and fought on bravely, but was finally crushed by American and South African mercenaries. (At one point Che Guevara traveled to Congo on a failed military mission to aid Mulele's army.)

That left Mobutu, under the guise of anticommunism, to declare a one-party, repressive, and kleptomaniac state, and govern, with the consent of the United States and Western governments, for the next thirty-odd

years.

In February 2002, Belgium's government expressed "its profound and sincere regrets and its apologies" for Lumumba's murder, acknowledging that "some members of the government, and some Belgian actors at the time, bear an irrefutable part of the responsibility for the events."

A government commission also heard testimony that "the assassination could not have been carried out without the complicity of Belgian officers backed by the CIA, and it concluded that Belgium had a moral responsibility for the killing."

Lumumba today has tremendous semiotic force: he is a social media avatar, a Twitter meme, and a font for inspirational quotes a perfect hero (like Biko), untainted by any real politics. He is even free of the kind of critiques reserved for figures like Fidel Castro or Thomas Sankara, who confronted some of the inherent contradictions of their own regimes through antidemocratic means.

As such, Lumumba divides debates over political strategy: he is often derided as a merely charismatic leader, a good speaker with very little strategic vision.

For example, in the famed Belgian historical fiction writer David van Reybrouck's much-praised Congo: An Epic History of a People, Lumumba is characterized as a poor tactician, unstatesmanlike, and more interested in rebellion and adulation than governance. He is faulted for not prioritizing Western interests.

Lumumba's denunciation of the Belgian king in June 1960, for example, only served to embolden his enemies, argues Van Reybrouck. Lumumba is also criticized by his Western critics for turning to the Soviet Union after the United States had spurned him.

But as the writer Adam Shatz has argued: "It's not clear how . . . in his two and a half months in office, Lumumba could have dealt differently with a Belgian invasion, two secessionist uprisings, and a covert

American campaign to destabilize his government."

More powerful perhaps is how Lumumba operates unproblematically as a figure of defiance. As the disappointment with national liberation movements in Africa (in particular, Algeria, Angola, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and more recently South Africa's African National Congress) sets in, and new social movements (#OccupyNigeria, #WalktoWork in Uganda, the more radical #FeesMustFall and struggles over land, housing, and health care in South Africa) begin to take shape, references to and images of Patrice Lumumba serve as a call to arms.

In Lumumba's native Congo, ordinary citizens are currently fighting President Joseph Kabila's attempts to circumvent the constitution (his two terms were up in December, but he refused to step down). Hundreds have been killed by the police and thousands arrested. Kabila, who inherited the presidency from his father, who overthrew Mobutu, exploits the weakness of the opposition, especially the power of ethnicity (via patronage politics) to divide Congolese politically. In this, Kabila is merely emulating the Belgian colonists and Mobutu.

Here Lumumba's legacy may be helpful. Lumumba's Congolese National Movement was the only party offering a national rather than ethnic vision and a means to organize Congolese around a progressive ideal. Such a movement and such politicians are in short supply in Congo these days.

But Lumumba's story offers not just an invitation to revisit the political potential of past movements and currents, but also opportunities to refrain from projecting too much onto leaders like Lumumba who had a complicated political life and who did not get to confront the messiness of postcolonial governance. It also means treating tragic political leaders as humans. To take seriously political scientist Adolph Reed Jr's advice about Malcolm X:

He was just like the rest of us a regular person saddled with imperfect

knowledge, human frailties, and conflicting imperatives, but nonetheless trying to make sense of his very specific history, trying unsuccessfully to transcend it, and struggling to push it in a humane direction.

It is perhaps then that we can begin to

make true Patrice Lumumba's critical wish, perhaps as self reflection, that he wrote in a letter from prison to his wife in 1960:

The day will come when history will speak. But it will not be the history which will be taught in Brussels, Paris, Washington or the United Nations. It will be the history which will be taught

in the countries which have won freedom from colonialism and its puppets. Africa will write its own history and in both north and south it will be a history of glory and dignity.

17/1/2017)

[Jacobin](#)

Women's March 2017: The Birth of a New Women's Movement?

25 January 2017, by **Nancy Holmstrom**

Let's start with the size: having gone to demonstrations in D.C. since I was in high school, more than fifty years ago, including the 1963 March for Jobs and Freedom, numerous anti-Vietnam War demos, and the 2004 March for Women's Lives, I think the numbers for this one were a lot more than the 500,000 estimated so far. Where we listened to the speeches the crowds were packed so tight we literally could not move. At one point we heard there was going to be no march because there were too many of us; we just filled the streets. The program lasted more than four hours, instead of the scheduled three (when will organizers ever learn?!), so late that some had to leave to catch their transportation home. So it was difficult to get a visual sense of the whole.

The demographics of the marchers were encouraging, though there is room for improvement. Overwhelmingly women (maybe 25% men—one sign said "Real Men are Allies, Not All Lies"), they were of all ages and from all over the country. Some my age carried signs saying "I can't believe I still have to struggle for this..." but marchers were predominantly middle aged and young, including very young girls. Most of the signs were hand-done, feisty, and many were very playful, often loaded with sexual double-entendres. LGBTQ issues and people

were much more prominent than ever in the past. Although, disappointingly, the marchers were overwhelmingly white, the speakers, performers, and organizers were at least 50% women of color.

Key positive themes of the March were self-determination for women, inclusiveness, and the combination of issues as in the sign "(I am a Muslim Mexican Undocumented Pussy with Teeth)". "Black Lives Matter" was a popular sign and chant, which felt great coming from white marchers.

Initially I was unenthused about having the only big march planned around Trump's inauguration being a specifically women's march, as there are so many issues to protest, and because I thought it would be just a liberal Hillary event. But other issues were connected to women's issues—and this will be key in the next period. There was a Women for Climate Justice contingent, (some) anti-war, and a lot of race/criminal justice issues raised, and many others. Certainly many marchers and speakers were liberal. But the political reality is that many basic liberal gains are threatened by the rise of the Right and socialists need to be there in the struggles, pushing beyond reliance on the Democratic Party. As Tamika Mallory, a young black woman who was one of the National Co-Chairs said, "you're scared now, well this has

always been our reality forever," under Clinton and even Obama.

Many of the speakers were very radical and militant, although mostly around race and gender issues. They included rape survivors, queer and trans women, a formerly incarcerated woman, black women elected officials, and others, including adorable six year old Sophie Cruz who said we were "building a chain of love to protect our families" from deportation. Many (including Madonna!) used the word "Revolution," usually explained as a Revolution of Love. Angela Davis, unsurprisingly, was the most radical.

This new women's movement that seems to be emerging will be mixed ideologically, just like the March. The Guiding Vision and Definition of Principles at the Women's March Website are quite good, though they could be better. They start with statements about Human Rights and Women's Rights, then "Gender justice is Racial Justice is Economic Justice," but were weakest on the latter. They call for an "economy powered by transparency, accountability, security and equity... workforce opportunities that reduce discrimination..." the right to "organize for a living wage," but no mention of the \$15 minimum wage or "equal pay for equal work." (The two union speakers were Ai Jen Poo of the Domestic Workers Alliance and Randi Weingarten of the American

Federation of Teachers.)

But how could we expect otherwise? We are far from a mass socialist movement. At least, thanks to Occupy, Black Lives Matter, and the Sanders campaign, issues of economic and racial justice are on the agenda. When the Republicans repeal the Affordable Care Act, and have nothing better to replace it, many of Trump's followers will be surprised and disappointed. This will give us an opening to raise the demand for Single Payer, stressing

how it is a women's issue and a racial issue, pushing the liberals in the new women's movement to extend their call for "reproductive health care for all" to simply "health care for all."

Mainstream feminists today have moved far to the right of the Women's Liberation movement of the 1970s. However, a more radical politics is implicit in many Women's March principles and socialists should be prepared to expose the contradictions

and draw out their more radical alternatives. Ecological issues will only become more pressing, and we have to push beyond "Protect Mother Earth" to their anti-capitalist implications.

As speaker after speaker said, this is only the beginning. Resistance is on the agenda.

January 24, 2017

[Against the Current](#)

Women's Marches: from protest to movement?

24 January 2017, by **Penelope Duggan**

The worldwide women's marches on 21 January 2017 were a historic event.

- For the first time since the anti-war demonstrations of 15 February 2003, millions of people in different countries and on all seven continents demonstrated on the same day and for the same reasons, both in a gesture of international solidarity but also an understanding how the same political dynamics are at play internationally. [2]

- In the US the level of mobilization outstripped the 2003 anti-war demonstrations and in Britain rivalled that level.

- The marches were initiated and led by and mobilized majoritarily women. While the spark was the election of Trump as US president and reaction to the announced and probable attacks on women's rights in that country under his administration, the international response was also provoked by the attacks and fears of attacks on those same rights by women around the world. The rising tides of far right and religious reaction are underlining the fact that women's rights - to choose, to work, to live their lives as they wish - are never definitely won.

- While the impetus came from women - of all ages, women of colour, ethnic minority women, migrant women, women with disabilities - defending their rights, the marches also mobilized those concerned by the attacks to come from the Trump administration - and similar political forces around the world - on migrants' rights, on Black rights, on the environment.

- In the US the mobilization had a truly mass nature - as is witnessed by the list of mobilizations that has been compiled. [3] Even the protests of a few dozen, indeed sometimes a few individuals, are recorded, showing the extent to which the desire to stand up and be counted against Trump and his policies sank deep.

Of course such a spontaneous mobilization was extremely heterogeneous, bringing into the same marches radical feminists, Democrats and Clinton supporters, Black rights activists, radical anticapitalist left forces.... That was an enormous achievement notably in the US, but also at a worldwide level.

Some left commentators because of this have tended to dismiss the significance of these demonstrations,

arguing that they were dominated by bourgeois, white, liberal, pro-Democrat forces. That such forces were present and may well have taken the initiative is undeniable. But all the reports from around the world underline the fact that many, many of the demonstrators were young, spontaneous and new to mobilizing. What could be a worse tactic for the diverse feminist, anti-capitalist left than to leave those people only in dialogue with liberal, mainstream, institutional feminists? As Susan Pashkoff writing for *Socialist Resistance* in Britain says: *It is essential that socialist feminists and the left participate in this movement and not just criticise from the outside. We need to be there, shifting the boundaries further to the left, to support the demands of working class women, women of colour, LGBTQ comrades and disabled women. We need to make certain that this potential movement is not seized by those that would subvert its aims to further the needs of mainstream political parties and the liberal feminist movement.* [4]

The need for the marches to be of all women, and in particular those that suffer, and have suffered, the most sharply from oppression, exploitation

and discrimination, that is Black and ethnic minority women, LGBTQ people, disabled women, working-class women, was expressed strongly from the outset. The "Guiding Vision and Definition of Principles" in the US were far broader than those of liberal feminism and addressed the demands and struggles of women of colour and working class women. [5] Real efforts were made to ensure that the organizers (co-chairs) [6] at a national level in the US reflected this diversity, but as with any living movement such efforts will have to continue if an ongoing movement is to develop out of this surge of protest.

Pashkoff pointed out "If you expect this nascent movement to understand the fact that it is at the intersections of race, class and gender that women's oppression is felt the hardest, then we need to be there ensuring that the voices of women of colour, working class women, LGBTQ people, and disabled women are heard and their demands are taken on board. It is a nascent movement, if you expect that they will not make errors or put out wrong slogans, you are asking far too much." Nevertheless the movement, if it is to grow in to the powerful protest movement for social justice called for by Angela Davis in her speech in Washington, will have to go beyond this organized diversity to become an expression of the fights and struggles of women against all forms of oppression, exploitation and discrimination. [7]

But movements take time and effort to grow and to build. As the Marxist feminist author Cinzia Arruzza wrote on 22 January:

Mass mobilizations almost never begin when we expect them, almost never have the features we would expect or consider as politically adequate, almost never have political coherence, they are not free of the social contradictions and divisions that are present in society, or of the cultural prejudices and political shortcomings that characterize them. They are not magical events disconnected from the continuum of social life, although they have the capacity and potentiality of creating discontinuity and breaks. They are messy, contradictory processes, where the outcomes are

not given in advance and solidarity is something to be achieved. The last 48 hours have shown the potentiality for a new season of mass mobilization, and that this happened especially in a day of women's mobilizations is even more relevant. Of course, a possible, perhaps likely, scenario is that the Democratic Party and its surrogates will end up taming, coopting and eventually kill this potentiality. But the relevant decision we should make is whether we want to already sing the funeral eulogy of a mobilization that could be or whether we want to be true to our desire to change this world and have a serious non-moralistic political analysis of the limitations, composition and potential of these last two days, and of what we should do and how in order to help the growth and radicalization of the struggle. [8]

That is the challenge facing feminist, anti-capitalist forces in the US and around the world in the wake of this wave of protest. What is at stake, and also the possibilities opened up, are undoubtedly greater in the immediate in the US. But as women around the world fight to defend and extend their rights, this protest movement is a sign of the possibilities to build their own movements, whether for the right to abortion in Ireland and Poland, against violence in India and South Africa, against feminicide in Mexico and for women's rights as human rights everywhere.

History cannot be deleted like web pages

Civil rights activist Angela Davis spoke at the Women's March on Washington on Saturday in front of a crowd of hundreds of thousands who gathered in the nation's capital to protest the Trump administration. Davis, who is known for writing such books as *Women, Race, and Class*, made a passionate call for resistance and asked the audience to become

more militant in their demands for social justice over the next four years of Trump's presidency.

Here's the Full Transcript Of Angela Davis's Women's March Speech

"At a challenging moment in our history, let us remind ourselves that we the hundreds of thousands, the millions of women, trans-people, men and youth who are here at the Women's March, we represent the powerful forces of change that are determined to prevent the dying cultures of racism, hetero-patriarchy from rising again." We recognize that we are collective agents of history and that history cannot be deleted like web pages. We know that we gather this afternoon on indigenous land and we follow the lead of the first peoples who despite massive genocidal violence have never relinquished the struggle for land, water, culture, their people. We especially salute today the Standing Rock Sioux.

"The freedom struggles of black people that have shaped the very nature of this country's history cannot be deleted with the sweep of a hand. We cannot be made to forget that black lives do matter. This is a country anchored in slavery and colonialism, which means for better or for worse the very history of the United States is a history of immigration and enslavement. Spreading xenophobia, hurling accusations of murder and rape and building walls will not erase history." No human being is illegal.

"The struggle to save the planet, to stop climate change, to guarantee the accessibility of water from the lands of the Standing Rock Sioux, to Flint, Michigan, to the West Bank and Gaza. The struggle to save our flora and fauna, to save the air" this is ground zero of the struggle for social justice. "This is a women's march and this women's march represents the promise of feminism as against the pernicious powers of state violence. And inclusive and intersectional feminism that calls upon all of us to join the resistance to racism, to Islamophobia, to anti-Semitism, to misogyny, to capitalist exploitation.

"Yes, we salute the fight for 15. We dedicate ourselves to collective

resistance. Resistance to the billionaire mortgage profiteers and gentrifiers. Resistance to the health care privateers. Resistance to the attacks on Muslims and on immigrants. Resistance to attacks on disabled people. Resistance to state violence perpetrated by the police and through the prison industrial complex. Resistance to institutional and intimate gender violence, especially against trans women of color. "Women's rights are human rights all over the planet and that is

why we say freedom and justice for Palestine. We celebrate the impending release of Chelsea Manning. And Oscar López Rivera. But we also say free Leonard Peltier. Free Mumia Abu-Jamal. Free Assata Shakur.

"Over the next months and years we will be called upon to intensify our demands for social justice to become more militant in our defense of vulnerable populations. Those who still defend the supremacy of white

male hetero-patriarchy had better watch out." The next 1,459 days of the Trump administration will be 1,459 days of resistance: Resistance on the ground, resistance in the classrooms, resistance on the job, resistance in our art and in our music.

"This is just the beginning and in the words of the inimitable Ella Baker, 'We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes.' Thank you."

Angela Davis

"To put on the same level the executioner and the victim, the coloniser and the colonised, is the key formula of international diplomacy - and the reason for its impotence".

23 January 2017, by Alain Krivine, Alain Pojolat, Michel Warschawski

Netanyahu is likely to be charged with "abuse of confidence" in the affair of the "illegal presents" (worth tens of thousands of euros) which he is said to have received from businessmen... How is public opinion reacting?

On this subject, as on everything else, public opinion is divided in two. There are on the one hand those who are shocked - but not surprised - by the degree of corruption of the political class, in particular the circle around the Prime Minister, and on the other hand a majority of the population that considers these affairs to be aimed at the delegitimisation, by those that they call "the élites" of a government elected by the people against the will of these élites. The media, the judicial system, and to a certain extent the police, are for the electorate of the far right the expression of these élites, and that is the reason for the decision

by the Minister of Justice, Ayelet Shaked, to reform profoundly the judicial system so that it will "reflect more the will of the majority".

It is not an exaggeration to say that we are in a period of transition of the political regime, to the detriment of both the rules of a parliamentary regime and public liberties, starting with those of the Palestinian minority in Israel and its elected representatives.

The increase in poverty is undeniable, with a third of Israeli children living under the poverty line. Having said that, the poverty of the majority does not mean, and this is certainly the case under capitalism, a bad economic situation. Compared to the European economies, Israel's is performing well: a rate of growth higher than most of the countries of the OCDE, a rate of unemployment that is under 4%, a balanced budget, the export of capital

and advanced technology to the entire world - Israel is not experiencing a crisis, its economy is listed AAA by the international rating agencies. In neo-liberal capitalism, an economy that performs well is not in contradiction with an increase in the number of poor people, quite the contrary.

On the international level, the situation is not brilliant. What can be the consequences of the vote of the UN Security Council on December 23, which for the first time in decades demanded a stop to colonisation?

The vote by the Security Council against the colonisation of the West Bank is first of all a reflection of the frustration of the entire international community with Israel's intransigence, the arrogance of its leaders and their deafness to the widespread warnings of countries that have friendly

relations with the Jewish state. The growing isolation of Israel on the international scene could be got round because of the unconditional support of US administrations, both Democrat and Republican.

The decision by Barack Obama not to use the right of veto is a first: although the UN General Assembly has adopted dozens of resolutions against Israel's colonial policy, it is the first time since 1983 that the Security Council has voted against Israel without coming up against the obstacle of the US veto. On the eve of his departure, Obama wanted to make Israel pay for the numerous humiliations that he had suffered at the hands of the Netanyahu governments. Let us remember however that in the face of these humiliations - including in front of the US Congress - Obama did not bear grudges: two months ago he signed a treaty of military cooperation worth 35 billion dollars over the next decade. Netanyahu's thanks were forced, and he did not hesitate to say that he was waiting impatiently for the victory of Donald Trump.

On January 15 a conference for peace in the Middle East will be held in Paris. Israel will not take part in it. What outcome can it have?

Initiated by France, the international conference for peace in the Middle East will have absolutely no outcome, and Israel has already announced that it will not take part in it, not being afraid thus to humiliate the French authorities. If Obama did not succeed in getting the Israeli government to move an inch, Jean-Marc Ayrault will not be the one to do it...

Having said that, the Paris conference can be another occasion to put the

Israeli colonial state in the dock for its repeated violation of international law and the human rights of the Palestinians. Let us not dream: everything will be done to remain at what our Belgian comrades call "equidistance", sharing out responsibility between the "two parties" and never forgetting to denounce the so-called Palestinian violence; To put on the same level the executioner and the victim, the coloniser and the colonised, is the key formula of international diplomacy - and the reason for its impotence.

Don't the internal difficulties and the complicated diplomatic context provide a new opportunity for the BDS campaign? Beyond that, what perspectives can that open out for solidarity with Palestine?

The most important problem that is posed by international diplomacy concerning the Palestinian question is not so much the positions adopted - the resolution of the Security Council confirms it - as the refusal to translate these resolutions into effective means of pressure. The so-called international community leaves Israel with a status of impunity for its crimes.

It is in this context that the capital importance of the BDS campaign lies: if there was an "S", in other words if the international community used "sanctions" - as it has often done, whether against apartheid in South Africa or against the repression of democratic liberties in China - there would be no need for a "B" (boycott) or a "D" (disinvestment), and our battle for the rights of the Palestinians would be close to being won. It is the cowardice of the international community, and often even its collusion with the Israeli colonial

regime, that demands the active mobilisation of societies, through the BDS campaign. And this campaign has taken, in ten years, considerable steps forward: from the boycott of "Jaffa" oranges to the disinvestment of Orange from its contract with its former Israeli partner, or the breaking of the partnership between the Dutch water company and Mekorot, the Israeli water company.

The popular pressure on governments to take strong diplomatic initiatives is important, even though it does not yet go beyond the stage of declarations. But to make Israel give way, much more is necessary, we need the implementation of concrete sanctions, in the economic and commercial, but also cultural, university and sporting domains. That is also a lesson from the experience of the South African people.

To conclude this interview, I would like to insist on the necessity to make, in France as well as elsewhere in Europe, a further effort to build the movement of solidarity with Palestine. The collapse, programmed by the neo-conservatives, of the Sykes-Picot order in the Middle East, has created a vacuum that is being filled by the new barbarians that Daesh represents. This regional reality has the effect of marginalising the Palestinian question. However, it remains the key, if not to the political reality of the region, at least to the possibility of a progressive solution of it. Although we cannot and must not reduce the problems of the world, whether in Aleppo or in Brussels, to the Palestinian question alone, it remains nevertheless the case that this question is still a running sore, which if it is not dealt with will continue to be a source not only of combats for justice, but also of them evolving in a barbaric terrorist direction.

Forced disappearances will not silence us

21 January 2017, by Sana Saleem, Usama Khilji

No groups have taken responsibility for abducting them. There's been no response from the authorities on the whereabouts of these individuals and no admission that they may be under arrest. The interior ministry has so far said that they're looking into the issue.

The implication that they've been taken by a security agency stems from the testimonies of their families that are far too familiar. Men in plain clothes picking up individuals from their home and taking them away in an unmarked car. At least two of those missing were taken from their homes.

Salman Haider: Professor at Fatima Jinnah Women University, active in Awami Workers Party, a leftist socialist party who was very critical of state policies, editor at Tanqeed - an independent e-zine critical of state policies - and a poet. Ahmed Waqas Goraya, Asim Saeed - both visiting from abroad - and Ahmed Raza Naseer were active political commentators online. Samar Abbas is the president of Civil Progressive Alliance Pakistan - working on minority rights especially the targeted killing of Shia Muslims in Pakistan.

The one thing common between the missing five was their critical approach to state policies, the rise of extremism, and the military's overreaching on matters outside its ambit. Their abduction sends a strong message that the state is willing to bypass the constitution, and overlook the legal and constitutional rights of every citizen to critique and debate state's affairs, in order to threaten, intimidate, and silence citizens.

A history of forced disappearances

Pakistan consistently ranks very low for press freedom, ranking 147 in the 2016 World Press Freedom Index, and "Not Free" in the Freedom of the Press 2016 rankings by Freedom House. This is largely due to several cases of killing of journalists with impunity.

Both the reports point to threats to journalists, not only from extremist

militant organisations, but also the powerful military and its associated intelligence agencies. Journalists covering issues and activists criticising state policies considered sensitive by the military often come under scrutiny, are forcibly disappeared, or killed.

These issues include fighting in the Balochistan province - where the state alleges Indian involvement, investigating links between the military and "extremist" organisations and lately, criticising projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) worth a total of \$51.5bn.

Despite the fact that forced disappearances have been a pressing issue in Pakistan, the number of people who have been abducted, and their whereabouts, is still not known and widely disputed. In 2015, the Supreme Court of Pakistan issued an order demanding that the authorities produce a report on the number of missing people in Pakistan.

While the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (CIED) said that it has received 1,265 cases as of Dec 31, 2014, the Defence of Human Rights (DHR) - a civil society organisation working with the families of those missing - claims that the total number of cases of missing persons is 5,149 and 252 of them surfaced in 2014 alone.

In its final report last year, the CIED, headed by retired Justice Javed Iqbal, directed the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Interior to lodge criminal cases against some 117 officials of secret agencies, police and Frontier Corps accusing them of participating in illegal abductions of individuals across the country. Despite the 400-page report and its very clear recommendations, forced disappearances have continued in Pakistan.

Accusations of blasphemy

Since the disappearance of the five activists this month, there has been a campaign against them on social media accusing them of blasphemy - a

sensitive issue in Pakistan that has cost the life of several activists and politicians including federal minister Shahbaz Bhatti and the governor of the Punjab province, Salmaan Taseer, both in 2011.

Not only are the activists missing, but those that are speaking out to demand accountability now bear the risk of being painted as supporters of blasphemers.

The controversial blasphemy law, which activists allege has been used as an easy way to settle disputes, seems to be an added tool in the campaign against these activists deemed problematic for breaching national security - another excuse regularly employed to silence free speech.

This is especially concerning because the government passed the controversial cybercrime related act, the Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act 2016, in August 2016, that has been criticised for its draconian approach to freedom of expression online.

In October 2016, the military's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency successfully sought the authority from the government to take pre-emptive actions against individuals or organisations that it deems to be breaching national security.

However, the forced disappearances of these activists have happened outside the law, leaving their families with no legal recourse and no way of inquiring the whereabouts of their loved ones.

There are two important takeaways from these alarming disappearances. First, that the state apparatus is willing to go beyond the draconian laws it has pushed through to silence dissent and free speech. Second, that the state is successful in setting a narrative where not free speech, but the extent of the limits around it are being negotiated by citizens.

Many fear these disappearances are a warning shot: Whereas traditional media was easier to censor, it has been more difficult to silence individuals on digital media. These disappearances are setting a

precedent whereby many bloggers and activists are likely to give up their right to freedom of expression and choose censorship in fear of similar consequences.

However, amid fears and unconfirmed reports of more disappearances, hundreds have come out to the streets to demonstrate across Pakistan and to make one thing clear: They will not be

silenced. [9]

January 14

[Al Jazeera](#)

Social regression encounters resistance

20 January 2017, by **Babak Kia**

This policy has been particularly characterised by the modification of the labour laws and the reintroduction of the possibility of exploiting the labour of children under fifteen. The meagre forms of protection concerning contracts have been removed and the possibility of “establishing” oral contracts has been extended. From now on salaries can be “negotiated” directly between the employer and the worker. The level of the minimum wage is fixed enterprise by enterprise, taking account of “economic reality”.

It is in this context that large multinationals are renewing contact with Tehran. Thus, Peugeot is trying to win back its position as the leading Western firm on the Iranian car market. The launching in October 2016 of a joint venture called IKAP (Iran Khodro Automobiles Peugeot) announced the return of the French brand on the Iranian market. For its part, Renault has created a joint enterprise with Iran Khodro and Saipa. And the social violence suffered by the Iranian workers does not count for much...

As for Airbus, it has signed a protocol of agreement with the Islamic Republic covering 114 middle-distance

and long-distance planes. The national company Iran Air has just taken delivery of its first Airbus A321. On the commercial level, the “Great Satan” is making sure it is not left out. Thus the US company Boeing has announced the signature of an agreement with Iran Air for the sale of 80 planes and the leasing of 29 others.

Struggles, protests and solidarity

Faced with this economic and “social” policy and with the violent of the repression, workers’ struggles have not weakened. They are conducted in the workplaces, continued also in the prisons of the Islamic Republic and they find an echo among the population that is not negligible. Numerous solidarity campaigns are being conducted, abroad or via social networks.

Since the end of October 2016, there has been a fresh wave of protests in Iranian prisons. Over the last few weeks, several prisoners have gone on hunger strike to denounce their conditions of incarceration. Among them there are some well-known activists: Ali Shariati, imprisoned for having taken part in a peaceful

demonstration against acid attacks on women; the defender of children’s rights Saaed Shirzad; and also many working-class and Kurdish activists.

The aim of this movement is to demand justice and to have trials that are properly conducted, as well as an end to torture and ill-treatment. Some prisoners have been on hunger strike for more than 70 days and are in critical condition. Faced with this movement and with the support for the activists, the regime has undertaken a campaign of threats against the prisoners and their families. Several prisoners have been transferred and placed in solitary confinement in high-security wings. Some who had been hospitalised have been reincarcerated, despite opposition from the medical personnel.

However the regime has also demonstrated some weaknesses. It is thanks to the international campaign and to support actions in Iran that the woman writer and activist Golrokh Ebrhaimi has been freed. The battle must continue. The imprisoned activists and those who are fighting courageously against the dictatorship of the mullahs are counting on the campaigns of international solidarity.

Beating ISIS in Mosul Won’t Heal Deep Iraq Divisions

19 January 2017, by **Joseph Daher**

The offensive to retake Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, has been going on since mid-October. It is led by the official Iraqi armed forces, but many more military units are involved. There are militias of the Hashd al-Shaabi ("popular mobilization"), which are basically made up of Shi'a Islamic fundamental movements linked to the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), on one side and on the other side the Kurdish Peshmerga forces of Barzani assisted by the Turkish government, which backs 3,000 Sunni Arabs officially led by the former Governor of Mosul Atheel al-Nujayfi.

Other actors involved in the offensive are Christian militias supported by Barzani forces and the PKK (Kurdish Workers' Party). A total of about 100,000 fighters are involved in this offensive. These various actors are however seeking divergent goals, while the absence of any agreements between Kurdish dominated Erbil and Baghdad regarding the post-IS territorial settlement will probably create new political tensions and problems, with a risk of more division in Iraq.

This military offensive also receives air support from the international coalition under the leadership of the United States, which bombarded positions of the IS in Syria and Iraq since August 2014. This coalition is guilty of causing the death of more than 2000 Civilians in both countries since the beginning of the strikes. The French and American governments also provide logistical support on the ground to the Iraqi armed forces since the beginning of the campaign for the reconquest of Mosul. More than 5,000 American service members are also currently deployed in Iraq as part of the international coalition that is advising local forces. Iraqi armed forces have also been guilty of crimes in these offensive. In December, air strikes by the Iraqi military aviation on a market of the border city with Syria, Qaim, in the province of Anbar, occupied by the Islamic state, killed about 60 people, the vast majority

civilians, including 19 children. This information was denied by the joint military command of the Iraqi army, which criticized the media and politicians for disseminating this information. At the same time, Turkey is also present militarily in Iraq. It has troops stationed the Bashiqa camp northeast of Mosul, where Sunni Muslim groups and Kurdish peshmerga units participating in the campaign received training from by Turkish forces. Turkey's military presence in northern Iraq since well before the Mosul campaign has angered Baghdad, and the two countries traded barbs over the issue shortly before it started on October 17.

The jihadists of the IS have been however opposing a fierce resistance: suicide attacks, trucks trapped, snipers, concealment of explosives in houses and buildings. Almost 2000 fighters participating in the offensive on Mosul died in November: members of the Iraqi armed forces, police killed in action, Kurdish fighters (peshmergas), forces of the Ministry of the Interior and pro-government paramilitary militias. At the same time, some 926 civilians were also killed in Iraq in November, bringing to 2885 the total number of Iraqis killed in attacks, violence and armed conflicts in the same month, according to the UN. Of these civilians, 332 were killed in the province of Nineveh (north), of which Mosul is the capital.

Most of the 125,000 civilians who have fled Mosul since Iraqi forces launched their campaign to recapture IS's biggest stronghold came from the eastern half of the city, where government troops have gradually gained ground, around 70 percent of eastern Mosul was liberated on January 5, while more than one million people still live in these areas most of the city's residents, either having chosen to stay or have been unable to escape. At the military level, the IS had to withdraw from the cities of Tikrit, Ramadi and Falluja. Jihadi fighters continue to occupy large

areas of land, but sparsely populated, near the Syrian border, in addition to Mosul. Iraqi elite forces have so far retaken a quarter of the city of Mossul.

Political divisions

The battle of Mosul is above all a competition to occupy the territory recaptured from IS, to control the local population, and to make new political gains at the national level. In addition to this, this rivalry between the different actors has been aggravated by the fact that it is a continuation of preexisting tensions between Baghdad and Erbil regarding the political status of part of Mosul governorate. Following the US and British led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Nineweh Plain and Sinjar, north and west respectively of Mosul city, were under the jurisdiction of the Iraqi government but de facto under the control of Massoud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). As explained by researcher Arthur Quesnay "The unresolved status of these territories prompted parallel institutions to develop alongside Iraqi state institutions" and contradictory modes of governance. Baghdad kept in place its administrative institutions and a police force, and paid civil servant salaries, without this signifying clear sovereignty over these territories. Erbil could deploy armed forces to control the Kurdish population and part of the informal economy. The stake of this dual control was, however, less armed confrontation than it was a political football with which Baghdad and Erbil pressured one another".

The IS's conquest of these Disputed Territories in the summer 2014, and the subsequent withdrawal of its forces in November 2015 opened new opportunities and ambitions for other forces. The PKK forces for example, tacitly backed by Shia fundamentalist militias and Baghdad, have increasingly been present in the Disputed Territories, notably the the

town of Sinjar liberated by the combined forces of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The central Iraqi government dominated by Shi'a fundamentalist force actually saw an opportunity to counter the PDK's re-establishment within the Disputed Territories by allowing PKK forces to expand and to anger the Turkish government as well. The Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS), Yezidi militias established by the PKK, actually receive their salaries from the Iraqi Defense Ministry and are officially registered in Baghdad legalizing their presence. The PKK took advantage of IS withdrawal in some Kurdish areas to develop its own civil institutions and governance model. Training camps allow it to increase its numbers in case of rapid advances. Its establishment in Sinjar may allow PKK forces to possibly expand its influence in the future in the Kurdish and Yezidi neighbourhoods of Mosul. The PKK attempts to use these areas as a basis to build a popular basis in Iraqi Kurdistan dominated by PDK's forces.

The tacit acceptance and support of the Iraqi government of the PKK is however not strategic and may be jeopardized by the last talks between Baghdad and Ankara officials. A joint communique was issued following a meeting by the two prime ministers few days ago declaring that both countries had agreed to respect each other's territorial integrity, and noted that Bashiqa was "an Iraqi camp". The Turkish Prime Minister Yildirim also welcomed recent remarks of the Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi that Iraq would not allow the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) to harm Turkey from Iraqi territory.

At the same time, in many territories disputed between Baghdad and Erbil, inter-partisan and inter-community conflicts have been resurgent. The town of Touzkhurmatu, whose population is 55% Kurdish, 35% Shia Turkmen and 10% Sunni Arab, has for example been the scene of such increased clashes, in the context of an institutional vacuum left by the weakening of the Iraqi state. Some 40 kilometers south of Kirkuk, the town has since October 2015 witnessed clashes between the Kurdish forces

and Shi'a paramilitary militias that both claim its control. The Kurds consider the town a strategic rampart against the advance of the Shi'a fundamentalist militias. The latter, led by the Badr Brigades, consider control of Touzkhurmatu a first step towards recovering the oil-rich province of Kirkuk.

These problems are still persistent. Iraq's former prime minister and now leader of Shi'a Islamic fundamentalist party al-Dawa Nouri al-Maliki has actually attacked the Kurdistan Region accusing it of land grabbing in the beginning of January. He declared that the Peshmerga forces must retreat to the borders agreed on in the transitional government of 2003 and all liberated areas must be dealt with constitutionally, Maliki, and other Shi'a leaders, as well have called on the Kurds to pull out of areas retaken from IS by the Peshmerga. The five main Kurdish parties have separately rejected al-Maliki's call for Kurds to retreat from areas they have liberated from ISIS in the last two years, saying they defended these lands from the radical group and can keep them until the issue is resolved constitutionally.

In the current military offensive in Mosul, the coordination of on one side Iraqi armed forces and pro-government paramilitary militias, and on the other side Kurdish led Barzani forces is very loose and only operates on vague agreements. The Kurdish peshmerga are for example to stay outside of Mosul and deploy only in the Disputed Territories (the Nineweh Plain and Sinjar) that were under Kurdish influence before 2014. The Iraqi Army is permitted to deploy from these territories, but under Kurdish supervision and only temporarily.

Humanitarian Hazard

The political divisions are not only the problems with this offensive. With the winter and the city completely encircled by the Iraqi army and its allies, humanitarian problems intensified in Mosul. The United Nations agencies that first distributed aid on December 8, 2016 in the eastern areas of the city, which had

just been freed from the IS forces, were almost overwhelmed by the residents suffering from an acute shortage of food, fuel and water and often trapped for days in their homes as a result of the fighting. Residents within the areas of the city still occupied by the IS face a growing shortage of fuel, water and food. Food prices have also increased and the cost of fuel has tripled. Civilians who were able to leave western areas under control of IS said their militants had announced they would soon distribute food and break the siege in an attempt to placate their increasingly desperate subjects and convince them to stay.

Persistent political problems

The offensive to recapture Mosul from IS nevertheless does not remove the structural problems in Iraq, on the contrary. Moreover, leaders of Sunni tribes gathered on November 30, 2016, in Shayyalah al-Imam, a village near Mosul, whose men took part in the offensive on Mosul in the brigades of the "Lions of the Tiger Unity", expressed the need to reform the Iraqi political system once IS is defeated and move towards a form of federalism. During the meeting, they also reiterated their distrust of the current Iraqi government and the Iraqi political class in general. At the end of November, a law voted by the majority of the Iraqi parliament, dominated by Shi'a Islamic fundamentalist political forces, legalized the paramilitary militias of Hashd al-Shaabi as a military body of the state, separated from the army. Sunni members of the parliament boycotted this session by opposing the existence of armed groups outside the army and the police. They were also concerned that the law would strengthen the domination of "Shi'a governing forces" and "Iran's regional influence on Iraq". These groups are guilty of violations of Human Rights against Sunni populations, while they have some autonomy from the central government, despite attempts by Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi to bring them under the control of the state. These paramilitary forces control dozens of prisons, and they even in June 2016

took control of a military base of the Iraqi army in the town of Balad, north of Baghdad, for a few days against the orders of the central government.

Iraq's prominent Sunni politician and Vice President Osama al-Nujaifi raised new criticisms in January 2017 against the government accusing it of having violated many agreements with Sunni political forces. He also accused the Shi'a fundamentalist led government of running the country by themselves and the initiative of reconciliation by the Shi'a national alliance to normalize relations with the Sunnis was doomed to fail. He also declared his willingness to see a federal system implemented in Iraq to give more autonomy to regions to be able to govern themselves.

These demands are rooted in political, social and economic marginalization for the majority of the Arab Sunni population in Iraq by the central government, in addition to suffering of repressive and discriminatory actions against them. These feelings have been strengthened in these past two years, where the Sunni Arab population in Iraq have been blamed collectively for IS's crimes and were the targets of coercive measures and violent actions both from Shi'a fundamentalist militias, operating with the complicity of the Baghdad central government, and the Kurdistan Regional Government's forces. Numerous abuses were committed: killings or disappearance of Sunni men, individually or in groups, Sunni villages recaptured from the IS destroyed, Sunni residents banished or prevented from returning to their villages in the "disputed territories", which the KRG has long tried to appropriate.

Western forces want to stay in Iraq, even after Mosul

"The offensive against the IS in Mosul could take another two months, and even if the group is defeated there, it will always pose a threat to Iraq and the western states," said a commander of the international coalition led by the United States. The United States has already announced that the countries of the international coalition should maintain a military presence in Iraq even after the end of the Mosul offensive. A French officer in Iraq, Olivier Lebas, made similar statements "It is really important to stay as long as necessary to guarantee we eradicate the IS". The military presence of the western states in Iraq is again there to last.

Moreover, Iraq has continued to suffer attacks, mostly suicide bombings, from IS, despite the offensive on Mosul. At the beginning of November, two suicide bombings killed at least 18 people and 30 in two towns north of Baghdad, respectively Tikrit and Samara. At the end of the same month, a suicide bombing by the IS murdered more than 100 people, mostly Iranian pilgrims returning from the Shi'a holy city of Karbala, in the town of Hilla, south of Baghdad. In December, eight people were killed in two car bomb attacks in the city of Fallujah, which was taken up at the EI in Iraq. Since the beginning of the year 2017, a series of attacks in Baghdad and other Iraqi cities have

killed more than 80 people in just over a week.

As I wrote in last year, the military strategies of regional and international states are doomed to failure in the medium and long term. IS will most likely be defeated in Mosul, although with much difficulties, destruction and human casualties. We must remember that the IS was formed from the remains of al-Qaeda fighters whose group had almost disappeared in late 2010 in Iraq. Without addressing the political and socio-economic conditions that allowed and enabled the development of the IS, its capacity of nuisance or that of other similar groups will remain.

A placard, among others, brandished by Iraqi protesters during the popular demonstrations in the summer of 2015 challenging the country's sectarian and bourgeois political system had correctly put this dilemma forward "The parliament and the Islamic State (or Daech) are the two sides of the same coin "... In other words, the solution is of course to oppose the jihadist reactionary forces of ISIS, but also to oppose the sectarian, racist, authoritarian policies of other reactionary bourgeois forces in Iraq. These actors feed each other and have to be overthrown and defeated in order of hoping to build a social and progressive popular movement opposing sectarianism and racism enabling Iraq to end a nightmare that has lasted too long, just as international and regional powers seeking their own political interests in Iraq at the detriment of local populations must be defeated.

[Peace News](#)

Women march for choice, against Trump - internationally

17 January 2017

Women's March on Washington

Guiding Vision and Definition of Principles

The Women's March on Washington is a women-led movement bringing together people of all genders, ages, races, cultures, political affiliations and backgrounds in our nation's capital on January 21, 2017, to affirm our shared humanity and pronounce our bold message of resistance and self-determination.

Recognizing that women have intersecting identities and are therefore impacted by a multitude of social justice and human rights issues, we have outlined a representative vision for a government that is based on the principles of liberty and justice for all. As Dr. King said, "We cannot walk alone. And as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back."

Our liberation is bound in each other's. The Women's March on Washington includes leaders of organizations and communities that have been building the foundation for social progress for generations. We welcome vibrant collaboration and honor the legacy of the movements before us - the suffragists and abolitionists, the Civil Rights Movement, the feminist movement, the American Indian Movement, Occupy Wall Street, Marriage Equality, Black Lives Matter, and more - by employing a decentralized, leader-full structure and focusing on an ambitious, fundamental and comprehensive agenda.

#WHYWEMARCH

We are empowered by the legions of revolutionary leaders who paved the way for us to march, and acknowledge those around the globe who fight for our freedoms. We honor these women and so many more. They are #WHYWEMARCH.

Bella Abzug • Corazon Aquino • Ella Baker • Grace Lee Boggs Berta Cáceres • Rachel Carson • Shirley Chisholm

Angela Davis • Miss Major Griffin Gracy • LaDonna Harris Dorothy I. Height • bell hooks • Dolores Huerta • Marsha P. Johnson Barbara Jordan • Yuri Kochiyama • Winona LaDuke Audre Lorde • Wilma Mankiller • Diane Nash • Sylvia Rivera Barbara Smith • Gloria Steinem • Hannah G. Solomon Harriet Tubman • Edith Windsor • Malala Yousafzai

VALUES & PRINCIPLES

? We believe that Women's Rights are Human Rights and Human Rights are Women's Rights. This is the basic and original tenet from which all our values stem.

? We believe Gender Justice is Racial Justice is Economic Justice. We must create a society in which women, in particular womenâ€”in particular Black women, Native women, poor women, immigrant women, Muslim women, and queer and trans womenâ€”are free and able to care for and nurture their families, however they are formed, in safe and healthy environments free from structural impediments.

? Women deserve to live full and healthy lives, free of violence against our bodies. One in three women have been victims of some form of physical violence by an intimate partner within their lifetime; and one in five women have been raped. Further, each year, thousands of women and girls, particularly Black, indigenous and transgender women and girls, are kidnapped, trafficked, or murdered. We honor the lives of those women who were taken before their time and we affirm that we work for a day when all forms of violence against women are eliminated.

? We believe in accountability and justice for police brutality and ending racial profiling and targeting of communities of color. Women of color are killed in police custody at greater rates than white women, and are more likely to be sexually assaulted by police. We also call for an immediate end to arming police with the military grade weapons and military tactics that are wreaking havoc on communities of color. No woman or

mother should have to fear that her loved ones will be harmed at the hands of those sworn to protect.

? We believe it is our moral imperative to dismantle the gender and racial inequities within the criminal justice system. The rate of imprisonment has grown faster for women than men, increasing by 700% since 1980, and the majority of women in prison have a child under the age of 18. Incarcerated women also face a high rate of violence and sexual assault. We are committed to ensuring access to gender-responsive programming and dedicated healthcare including substance abuse treatment, mental and maternal health services for women in prison. We believe in the promise of restorative justice and alternatives to incarceration. We are also committed to disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline that prioritizes incarceration over education by systematically funneling our childrenâ€”particularly children of color, queer and trans youth, foster care children, and girlsâ€”into the justice system.

? We believe in Reproductive Freedom. We do not accept any federal, state or local rollbacks, cuts or restrictions on our ability to access quality reproductive healthcare services, birth control, HIV/AIDS care and prevention, or medically accurate sexuality education. This means open access to safe, legal, affordable abortion and birth control for all people, regardless of income, location or education. We understand that we can only have reproductive justice when reproductive health care is accessible to all people regardless of income, location or education.

? We believe in Gender Justice. We must have the power to control our bodies and be free from gender norms, expectations and stereotypes. We must free ourselves and our society from the institution of awarding power, agency and resources disproportionately to masculinity to the exclusion of others.

? We firmly declare that LGBTQIA Rights are Human Rights and that it is our obligation to uplift, expand and protect the rights of our gay, lesbian, bi, queer, trans or gender non-

conforming brothers, sisters and siblings. This includes access to non-judgmental, comprehensive healthcare with no exceptions or limitations; access to name and gender changes on identity documents; full anti-discrimination protections; access to education, employment, housing and benefits; and an end to police and state violence.

? We believe in an economy powered by transparency, accountability, security and equity. We believe that creating workforce opportunities that reduce discrimination against women and mothers allow economies to thrive. Nations and industries that support and invest in caregiving and basic workplace protections—including benefits like paid family leave, access to affordable childcare, sick days, healthcare, fair pay, vacation time, and healthy work environments—have shown growth and increased capacity.

? We believe in equal pay for equal work and the right of all women to be paid equitably. We must end the pay and hiring discrimination that women, particularly mothers, women of color, lesbian, queer and trans women still face each day in our nation. Many mothers have always worked and in our modern labor force; and women are now 50% of all family breadwinners. We stand for the 82% of women who become moms, particularly moms of color, being paid, judged, and treated fairly. Equal pay for equal work will lift families out of poverty and boost our nation's economy.

? We recognize that women of color carry the heaviest burden in the global and domestic economic landscape, particularly in the care economy. We further affirm that all care work—caring for the elderly, caring for the chronically ill, caring for children and supporting independence for people with disabilities—is work, and that the burden of care falls disproportionately on the shoulders of women, particularly women of color. We stand for the rights, dignity, and fair treatment of all unpaid and paid caregivers. We must repair and replace the systemic disparities that permeate caregiving at every level of society.

? We believe that all workers – including domestic and farm workers – must have the right to organize and fight for a living minimum wage, and that unions and other labor associations are critical to a healthy and thriving economy for all. Undocumented and migrant workers must be included in our labor protections, and we stand in solidarity with sex workers' rights movements.

? We believe Civil Rights are our birthright. Our Constitutional government establishes a framework to provide and expand rights and freedoms—not restrict them. To this end, we must protect and restore all the Constitutionally-mandated rights to all our citizens, including voting rights, freedom to worship without fear of intimidation or harassment, freedom of speech, and protections for all citizens regardless of race, gender, age or disability.

? We believe it is time for an all-inclusive Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Most Americans believe the Constitution guarantees equal rights, but it does not. The 14th Amendment has been undermined by courts and cannot produce real equity on the basis of race and/or sex. And in a true democracy, each citizen's vote should count equally. All Americans deserve equality guarantees in the Constitution that cannot be taken away or disregarded, recognizing the reality that inequalities intersect, interconnect and overlap.

? Rooted in the promise of America's call for huddled masses yearning to breathe free, we believe in immigrant and refugee rights regardless of status or country of origin. It is our moral duty to keep families together and empower all aspiring Americans to fully participate in, and contribute to, our economy and society. We reject mass deportation, family detention, violations of due process and violence against queer and trans migrants. Immigration reform must establish a roadmap to citizenship, and provide equal opportunities and workplace protections for all. We recognize that the call to action to love our neighbor is not limited to the United States, because there is a global migration crisis. We believe migration is a human right and that no human being

is illegal.

? We believe that every person and every community in our nation has the right to clean water, clean air, and access to and enjoyment of public lands. We believe that our environment and our climate must be protected, and that our land and natural resources cannot be exploited for corporate gain or greed—especially at the risk of public safety and health.

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

The guiding vision and definition of principles were prepared by a broad and diverse group of leaders. The Women's March on Washington is grateful to all contributors, listed and unlisted, for their dedication in shaping this agenda.

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Find the appeal through the Women's March [website](#) or directly [here](#).

What Happened in Aleppo?

15 January 2017, by **Joseph Daher**

Eastern Aleppo has been under siege since July 2016, and the civilian population lacked food, water, medicine, and other necessities. Before the takeover, about fifty thousand people had fled, mostly to regime-controlled areas. Several thousand, however, went to the Sheikh Maqsoud neighborhood, which is under Kurdish control. Some sources report that the regime has ordered the Kurdish armed forces, the People's Protection Units (YPG), to leave their stronghold before the end of the year. [10]

Meanwhile, a few days after the official announcement of the takeover of Aleppo, on December 29, Russian military officials hosted a meeting in their air base at Hmeimim in western Syria with various representatives of Kurdish movements, including both the Democratic Society Movement (TeV-Dem) – implicitly representing the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) – and the Kurdish National Council (KNC), supported by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), to mediate future relations between them and the Assad regime.

The regime's authorities, which has so far refused to recognize "unlawful" PYD-led self-administered areas, submitted a list of conditions that would regulate relations between Damascus and the Kurdish enclave: Kurdish parties must back Assad in the upcoming elections, they abandon

their demand for a federal system, and they hoist the Syrian flag on all government buildings and offices. [11] The day before the PYD Kurdish authorities had actually announced the dropping of the word Rojava – a Kurdish word for western Kurdistan – from the official name of the Federation of Northern Syria.

Assad's diplomatic maneuvering occurred in a bloody context. During the battle for Aleppo, pro-regime soldiers committed war crimes, while a new forced displacement of the population occurred. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that it had credible evidence that soldiers killed some eighty-two civilians either at home or on the streets during the conquest.

Pro-Iranian militias delayed the tenuous civilian evacuation, attacking the first convoys. Other pro-regime forces robbed fleeing residents. Fighters linked to the jihadist group Jund Al-Aqsa – allied with Jabhat Fateh al-Sham – burned the buses evacuating the wounded from two Shi'a inhabited cities, temporarily blocking civilian departures from eastern Aleppo. Many condemned this act on social networks.

Fleeing men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five were separated from the rest of the civilian population and interrogated by security services.

Some feared incarceration or execution, but the majority were conscripted into Assad's army to fight against the opposition, some against their former comrades.

The opposition forces consist of between 7,000 and 10,000 combatants. Although many journalists [12] have focused on the number of jihadists in eastern Aleppo, only about 250 to 700 fighters [13] come from Jabhat Fateh al-Sham. [14] Local brigades were mostly a combination of armed groups acting under the network of the Free Syrian Army (FSA), Ahrar al-Sham, a salafist force, and other Islamic groups, but were not jihadists. That does not mean that these groups did not commit crimes. Many Syrian leftists have condemned their bombing of civilians and civilian infrastructures in the regions under the control of the regime's forces, and of the Kurdish neighborhoods of Sheikh Maqsoud, among other abuses. The issue at hand, however, was to oppose a destructive and aggressive war against the civilians in Eastern Aleppo, and elsewhere, regardless of the reactionary nature of some parts of the opposition.

The groups in the city formed a unified command called "the army of Aleppo" to defend the districts under their control, but this didn't prevent infighting or criminal activity. Further, some of the brigades that depend on

Turkey for support actually left Aleppo in August to join the Turkish intervention against ISIS and the Kurdish PYD in northern Syria. Their absence contributed to the chaos of the siege's final weeks.

Indeed, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan "despite his ostensible support for the rebels" remained silent on the events in Aleppo, and his prime minister stated that he did not object to Assad remaining in power during a transitional period. In fact, Erdoğan has agreed to a power-sharing scheme with Russian and Iranian leaders: Aleppo for them; Jarablus and other border regions for Turkey.

Turkey has long prioritized fighting Kurdish forces over deposing Assad. [15] On November 22, the country issued an arrest warrant for PYD leader Saleh Muslim, while brutally cracking down on representatives and members of the left-wing People's Democratic Party (HDP) at home. On January 7, 2017, the Turkish army announced the death of 291 Kurdish fighters of the YPG during military operations in northern Syria since August 2016. [16] In addition to this, more than 280 civilians were killed by Turkish fire since the beginning of its military intervention in Syria, while Turkish border guards killed around 170 fleeing civilians in 2016.

Iran, Turkey, and Russia met on December 20 to discuss Syria's future, adopting a joint declaration to end the conflict and work toward a nationwide ceasefire. The resolution calls on the armed forces to fight against terrorism, not for regime change. Following this first meeting, a nationwide ceasefire, sponsored by Russia, Turkey, and Iran, was implemented on December 29, although violated in some areas by the regime. There have been airstrikes against various opposition-held areas, while the main violations were in the northwest of Damascus in the Wadi Barada valley. Pro-regime forces and Hezbollah are trying to recapture this area, whose major spring provides most of Damascus's water supplies and which lies on a major supply route from Lebanon to Damascus used by Hezbollah.

Some armed opposition forces, both from the FSA network and Islamic forces, declared on January 2 that they had decided to freeze any talks about their possible participation in Syrian peace negotiations being prepared by Moscow in Kazakhstan unless the Syrian regime and its Iran-backed allies end their violations of a ceasefire.

At the same time, massive popular demonstrations with democratic and non-sectarian slogans took place on the last two Fridays (December 21 and January 6 [17]) in the liberated territories, taking advantage of the partial cessation of hostilities, just like in February and March 2016.

What Eastern Aleppo Means

Despite their stated goal of defeating ISIS in Syria, Assad and his allies were really interested in stamping out a democratic challenge.

Let us return to Aleppo. Anti-regime forces liberated the eastern neighborhoods in the summer of 2012. Alongside civilian groups, they set up a transitional revolutionary council that was replaced the next spring with a democratically elected local council.

The twenty-five-member council was renewed every year. [18] Representatives were not directly elected, but selected from lists by assembly members from the sixty-three area councils in the liberated regions. Representatives from professional trade unions, including lawyers, engineers, and teachers, also had a vote. The local council administered the territory, providing basic needs "education, infrastructure, hospitals, and so on" for residents, which they determined by meeting with neighborhood assemblies. [19] Six hundred people worked for the various councils.

Of course, the arrangement had its problems "women [20] and those from minority communities were underrepresented in the council's highest leadership. In other regions, council members were often also

chosen rather than elected, based on the influence of local military leaders, clan and family structures, and elders. In some cases, as argued by researcher Sabr Darwish [21], the dynamics of the establishment of local councils were closer to representing family and tribal "quotas" rather than democratic dynamics.

Still, it was impossible to ignore the way that popular power flourished in even dire conditions. Residents also established popular organizations and put together democratic, social, educational, and cultural activities. Local radio stations and newspapers sprang up. Many campaigns opposing both the regime and Islamic fundamentalist forces emerged. All the while, activists and grassroots organizations strove to deliver an inclusive message against sectarianism and racism. These organizers challenged some armed groups' authoritarian practices and opposed Islamic fundamentalism.

ISIS gained a foothold in the city in 2013, but was kicked out in early 2014 thanks to massive popular mobilizations and armed opposition groups linked principally to the FSA. Jabhat al-Nusra next faced this democratic opposition to its reactionary and authoritarian practices.

Other liberated Syrian areas look a lot like eastern Aleppo. As a result, they have been the Assad regime's and its allies' primary targets. Aleppo suffered under a stream of fire since the summer of 2013; Russian air forces joined the assault in October 2015.

In summer 2013, 1.5 million people lived in Aleppo and had most of their basic needs met by their democratically elected council. By just three years later, only 250,000 remained, and they lacked almost everything.

All the cities with a popular democratic alternative to Assad have been targeted. In August 2016, pro-regime forces captured Darayya, in the province of Damascus. In each area, Assad and his allies focus on destroying infrastructure. Between March 2011 and June 2016, 382

medical facilities were attacked, killing more than 700 medical workers. Assad and Putin are responsible for 90 percent of these assaults. They have also bombed other civilian institutions, including humanitarian workers, as well as bakeries, schools, and factories.

Since 2011, the regime has most feared these democratic organizations, even with all their imperfections. Assad worries much less about the corrupt and exiled official opposition and the Islamic fundamentalist forces. After all, the regime's authoritarian and sectarian practices encouraged and fostered ISIS's, Jabhat al-Nusra's, and other similar organizations' development — better to have a Islamic fundamentalist foe than one that could capture widespread international solidarity and popular legitimacy at home.

ISIS's invasion of Palmyra on December 11 testifies to this. [22] The regime concentrated its forces on eastern Aleppo, evacuating Palmyra just before ISIS fighters arrived. When they took the largely unprotected city, they found reserves of heavy weapons. The regime has repeatedly stated that ISIS is not a priority, and the Russian air force has concentrated its strikes on areas with little ISIS presence.

With Friends Like These

Western powers have done little more than express their regrets for what's happening in Syria. On December 19, the UN Security Council unanimously voted to deploy observers to oversee the Aleppo evacuation and to ensure civilians' safety. [23] This minor intervention does not, however, change the United States's and Europe's general orientation. Far from advocating for a democratic process in Syria, they offer little more than rhetorical opposition to Assad and his clique, despite evidence of war crimes, while seeking a political transition in which the main structures of the Assad regime are maintained. In addition, the US-led coalition, which has been bombing ISIS's Syrian and Iraqi positions since August 2014, has

killed almost two thousand civilians.

Global powers want to liquidate the Syrian revolution's democratic aspirations in the name of the "war on terror." Donald Trump's victory only strengthens this, as he has declared on several occasions that he wants to work with Putin on resolving the Syrian war.

Although Trump's international political positions remain volatile and uncertain, his appointment of Rex Tillerson — chairman and chief executive officer of ExxonMobil — as secretary of state, confirmed the president-elect's attitude toward Syria. [24] Tillerson is known for his pro-Russian positions, and in 2013, he received the highest Russian distinction for a civilian, the Order of Friendship, from Putin himself.

In this context, it becomes obvious that the conquest of eastern Aleppo was central to the Assad regime's plan to present the Syrian war as a fait accompli when the new American president takes office. The Western states' — and even certain left-wing forces' — so-called realist policy toward Assad rests on the belief that they can get rid of ISIS and its sister organizations by empowering the very elements that fueled their development. That is, they will continue to support the dictatorial regimes that enacted neoliberal policies and allowed Western military intervention to proliferate throughout the region, both of which directly produced groups like ISIS.

Our Destinies Are Linked

Faced with the Assad regime's and its allies' endless crimes against the Syrian people, faced with the main international players' desire to liquidate the Syrian revolution's democratic aspirations [25], we must reaffirm our support for the progressive groups fighting for democracy, social justice, and equality against all forms of sectarianism.

It is crucial not to separate the struggle for Kurdish self-determination from these

dynamics. [26] In 2012, the mobilizations across the Syrian population forced the Assad regime to withdraw from certain Kurdish-majority regions and to sign a non-confrontation agreement with PYD forces. The Syrian revolution's defeat will mark the return of Kurdish oppression under a chauvinist regime that has always opposed any recognition of the rights of Kurdish people.

Which leaves the obvious question: what kind of solution should leftists support? [27] In a complicated and dire situation, easy answers are hard to come by but there is little doubt about a few things. We must advocate an end to the war, which creates terrible suffering, blocks refugees and internally displaced persons from their homes, and benefits only the counterrevolutionary forces on both sides. We must also denounce all foreign interventions that oppose democratic change in Syria, whether it comes from pro-regime forces — Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah — or from those who proclaim themselves "friends of the Syrian people" — Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey. Again, the case of Syrian uprising has shown the blindness of those who believe they can conclude strategic agreements or trust imperialist states or regional powers to advance the struggle for popular emancipation.

Likewise, we must reject all the attempts, which are now multiplying, to legitimize the Assad regime at the international level and to allow it to play any role in the country's future. A blank check given to Assad today will encourage future attempts by other authoritarian states to crush their populations if they came to revolt. This is why any political transition to put an end of the war and towards a democratic system must include the departure of Assad and his clique, otherwise the war will continue and provoke more catastrophes in terms of human lives.

We must therefore reaffirm our solidarity with the democratic and progressive forces that are struggling against both Assad's criminal regime and religious fundamentalist forces. There are still forces that aim to build a truly internationalist and

The new anti-choice onslaught under Trump

13 January 2017, by **Nicole Colson**

Ohio Gov. John Kasich led the way in December, signing a ban on abortions after 20 weeks' gestation of the fetus, with no exceptions for victims of rape or incest, and an extremely narrow exception for the health of the woman.

Under the ban, doctors who perform abortions after 20 weeks can be sentenced to prison. The law also makes the bogus claim that fetuses feel pain at 20 weeks gestation.

Incredibly, the 20-week ban was considered a "softer" option to another bill that Kasich vetoed, which would have forbid abortions after six weeks, after a fetal heartbeat is detected. That ban passed the Ohio legislature by a large margin, but Kasich vetoed the legislation on the grounds that it was "clearly contrary to the Supreme Court of the United States' current rulings on abortion," he said.

Of course, that hasn't ever stopped the anti-abortion right in the past.

Many women are unaware that they are even pregnant at the six-week point—and others who do know are hampered from gaining timely access to abortion services because of prohibitive cost, lack of abortion providers, or restrictions like Ohio's mandatory "counseling" and waiting periods.

RESTRICTIONS THAT make abortion effectively impossible are an explicit strategy of the anti-choice right, which has pushed hundreds of such measures at the state level since the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision legalizing women's right to choose.

The attacks actually escalated during

the Democratic Obama administration: As of July, according to the *New York Times*, a total of 334 new state abortion restrictions had been enacted in 32 states over the previous five years. Ohio is the 18th state to adopt a 20-week abortion ban—though two of those bans, in Arizona and Idaho, didn't survive court challenges.

As lawyer and author Jill Filipovic noted in *Time* magazine, Kasich's signing of the 20-week ban in Ohio isn't a moderate "compromise," as some in the media have tried to portray it. Instead, anti-choice activists see it as a stepping-stone to overturning *Roe*.

In this case, the 20-week limit is designed to push the boundaries of the definition of fetal viability—the key criteria that the Supreme Court has allowed states to use to deny women an abortion. Fewer than 1 percent of abortions happen after 20 weeks, and no fetus delivered at 20 weeks or earlier has ever survived.

Filipovic notes that the strategy of anti-choice politicians like Kasich is to smear abortion procedures that happen in later stages of pregnancy:

as both common and morally indefensible...A full ban on abortion is the goal of every pro-life organization in the country. But they start by encroaching on women's rights and abortion access in ways that most Americans find acceptable...The real goal of this law is obvious: it's not to make women healthier or safer; it's to push the question to the Supreme Court.

And more such restrictions designed to push the question are on the way. In Texas, where the Supreme Court struck down an anti-choice law in June

that had shut down all but eight of the state's clinics, state Rep. Jonathan Stickland has vowed "an absolute onslaught of pro-life legislation" in 2017.

Stickland isn't alone. Anti-choice groups and Republican legislators are now salivating over the possibilities under a Trump presidency—in particular, the likelihood of multiple Supreme Court appointments—as an opportunity to strike down *Roe* once and for all.

BEFORE KASICH vetoed the measure, Ohio Rep. Christina Hagan, who championed the six-week ban, seemed surprised by its passage in the legislature, telling the *New York Times* that "President-elect Trump has drastically shifted the dynamics. I honestly could not have foreseen this victory a week or a month ago."

For women seeking abortions, the impact will be devastating. In a troubling sign, in Tennessee—where only four of the state's 95 counties have an abortion provider—a woman named Anna Yocca was recently charged with three felonies—aggravated assault with a weapon, attempted procurement of a miscarriage, and attempted criminal abortion—after using a coat hanger in an attempt to self-induce an abortion at 24 weeks' gestation.

The crimes she is charged with were designed in theory to protect women from unscrupulous back-alley abortion providers. That they are being used against a woman attempting to end her own pregnancy signals a frightening new form of attack on women's right to choose abortion.

And Yocca's case comes after the prosecution of Purvi Patel for "feticide" for allegedly attempting to self-induce an abortion in Indiana—her lawyers dispute this. Indiana, of course, is the home state of Vice President-elect Mike Pence. Patel was sentenced to 20 years and spent months in prison before an appeals court finally reversed her conviction in 2016.

Such cases prove that Donald Trump's talk during the campaign about criminal penalties for women seeking abortions is already a frightening reality in some instances—and likely to escalate under his administration.

"This is the strongest the pro-life movement has been since 1973," Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of the Susan B. Anthony List, an anti-abortion group, crowed to the New York Times last month.

Dannenfelser added that during the campaign, Trump committed in writing to "putting anti-abortion justices on the Supreme Court; passing a national 20-week ban like Ohio's; eliminating federal money for Planned Parenthood as long as its clinics perform abortions; and making permanent the Hyde Amendment, passed annually by Congress to ban taxpayer-funded abortions."

Nancy R. Starner, director of development and communications for Preterm, told the New York Times that the day after legislators passed the six-week ban in Ohio, "Our phones have been ringing off the hook, primarily with the simple question: Is abortion still legal in Ohio?"

That's the agenda for Trump and the right, making it a crime for women to exercise control over their own bodies—unless we push back.

A new movement that unapologetically defends abortion rights, without compromise, will need to be built from the bottom up to stand against further restrictions and win back some of the territory that women have lost since the 1970s.

But it can be built. As the New York Times noted, "Since the abortion bills passed the Legislature...thousands of protesters have marched, sent letters or made calls opposing them. Some protesters hung messages attached to wire hangers on the Ohio statehouse fence, reminders of an earlier era of unsafe abortion. One of the messages read, 'We won't go back.'"

That's the kind of resistance we can build on to push back the right as we head into the start of the Trump years.

January 4

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The sigh of the oppressed creature?

11 January 2017, by **Dave Landau**

Of course a party does not have to be fascist to be hostile to migrants and be Islamophobic. This is what unites all of these breakthroughs but is also shared by the mainstream parties, which are coming under enormous pressure to become more like their far-right cousins day by day, fearful of losing votes to them and perhaps always having some of those attitudes themselves which they now feel happy to declare.

So why and how did this happen? Before attempting to answer this question it is important to acknowledge differences in what has taken place.

Brexit

It would be grave mistake to think that all who voted Leave are racists and xenophobes. There are lots of good reasons for opposing the EU. It is a

capitalist institution. Much of what it does is wholly indefensible. Despite all the talk about freedom of movement, the EU is an anti-migrant anti-refugee state as we have seen by the treatment of refugees at the borders. It has seen the freedom of movement as being something primarily for European migrants for the benefit of employers. It has viciously put pressure on economically weaker states, in particular Greece, to wipe out its social programmes and implement austerity. Indeed it is a bulwark of the policies of austerity across the continent including in Britain. Yes it does have important regulations which defend workers rights, health and safety and so on. But so does the British State – they were concessions to the working class when the class was stronger and more organised.

Nevertheless the success of Brexit was a triumph for racism and xenophobia.

Why? Because the two main Leave campaigns – the Johnson and the UKIP – made it into a referendum about freedom of movement. Immigration was the only comprehensible content to the debate. The rest consisted of each side throwing bogus figures about, and coming up with quotes and counter-quotes about the economy which made little sense to anybody. You did not see much of the kind of issues I just made above. Migration was the visible issue, writ large after Farage launched his disgraceful poster.

Whilst leaving the EU is not an intrinsically racist there is a pre-history. In the last general election, UKIP did not win any seats but it did garner 14% of the vote. UKIP did win the most seats to the European Parliament. I think we can say that UKIP is a racist party and that whilst most of its members probably don't regard themselves as racists, they

enthusiastically cheer a leader whose political hero is Enoch Powell because of his rivers of blood speech. If you look at Farage's speeches about immigration you will see that they are largely variations on that infamous speech of Powell.

Immigration

A conjunction of crises has put migration at the top of the political agenda globally. Wars, climate change, famine and poverty, environmental degradation by multinationals, enormous inequalities – all these coming to the fore. Within Europe an economic crisis, which on the one hand encourages people to move for work and getting a decent life and on the other hand is generating cuts, unemployment, homelessness etc in all the other countries.

It is easy to see in this context that opposing migrants and refugees is a popular notion. It is the common sense response. If there are not enough jobs, social, health and education under strain, not enough housing etc this answer seems natural. Much easier than trying to understand the dynamics of these various crises. Sometimes this will be self-consciously racist but for many the racism is concealed from themselves.

Immigration controls are indeed racist. Any laws which criminalise people because of where they are born, where their parents are born, what language they speak, the colour of their skin – must be racist. But that argument needs to be spelled out again and again.

Arguing that migrants boost the economy is lost on people who have been experiencing economic decline and its effects. We need to point the facts out when the Mail, the Sun and the Express claim that migrants are a drain on the system, to break the myth. But it is not the principal argument and anyway it is contingent. Under other circumstances it will indeed be a strain on the system. Opening the doors to adult Jews, Roma, Gays, communists....from Nazi occupied Europe would have been a massive strain on the services in

Britain, but it would have been the right thing to do, rather than letting them perish in the death camps. It may be unpopular but only by pushing these arguments of principle can we hope to win people over in the long term.

Islamophobia

Islamophobia is not new just as anti-Semitism goes back a long way. But from 11 September it has been a dominant theme in political discourse. Again the easy arguments are Islamophobic. You want to stop terrorism – then keep out the Muslims! One of the main powers of Trump's and Farage's arguments are their simplicity. Never mind the crises that leads to this, that imperialism has been courting the most reactionary of warlords and leaders, Britain's closest ally after Israel, being Saudi Arabia, the heartland of the most reactionary strains of Islam which spawned Al Qaida and Isis and are the people the UK sells arms to and trains their military. Never mind that there is a struggle by many Muslims, women and men, in these regions against these despots who preach a travesty of Islam.

Betrayals

The simplicity of the reactionary responses is not sufficient on their own to account for their success. After all, historically reaction is not always in the ascendancy. There is of course a wealth of history of working class opposition to racism, xenophobic, bigotry and fascism, and such resistance is still very much alive. But reaction is given strength by the fact successive governments have let people down again and again. So in Britain towns and cities have been de-industrialised under Thatcher and under Blair, whilst Labour councils carry on applying cuts and pursuing austerity to these already devastated areas. So Labour is seen as part of that 'elite'. In the absence of a fight back by Labour, or a substantial party to the left of Labour then along comes Farage saying, 'I stand up for ordinary British Workers, blah blah.' With his easy answers and successive betrayals it is clear why people are

drawn to UKIP.

Marx's Nightmare

There can be a dialectic between revolution and counter-revolution which Marxists tend to overlook but which Marx picked up on. 'The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionising themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time honoured disguised and this borrowed language' (18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte). So those who would overthrow the imperialists and neo-liberals of Washington, Westminster and Brussels end up draped in the flags of nationalism, racism and xenophobia. In this case the nightmare wins, at least for the moment.

The nature of the social relations of capitalism is not spontaneously visible to those who are in them, they are just there, unconscious. So when a crisis throws them into disarray so our place in the world is confused. We have a need to make the unconscious conscious, asserting our identity – sadly this can be done falsely through race and nation. As Marx said of religion – it is 'the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions' so it is with reactionary forces within the working class more generally. Strange to see the likes of UKIP or Trump as a heart or a soul of anything – but is a counterfeit heart, where the real heart of the community has been ripped out by capital.

So is it all just gloom and doom?

No, but it's pretty bloody bad. But history has not just gone one way. Look at the strong challenge by Bernie Sanders to the Clinton dynasty. This could be been a genuine challenge to

the elite. Look at the mass demonstrations in London in support of refugees, the turn out in Germany to welcome refugees as they came off the trains. Look at the confirmation of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour party. There have been tremendous struggles of detainees in detention centres, anti-raids groups and so forth. There is a progressive momentum (no pun intended) in all these developments, which stands out against reaction but it clearly is not enough. So what to do?

Marxist forces inside and outside the Labour Party and Momentum must work together to ensure that the Labour leadership do not retreat on immigration but rather insist on defending and extending freedom of movement.

Build solidarity with migrants and refugees fighting back against the state.

Solidarity with victims of hate crime including organising defence – this is not just important in itself but is a way of relating back to the issue of a sense of identity – rebuilding communities means forging links with new communities.

Fight for equal rights in the work

place – secure contracts for all, no undercutting minimum wage as per the EU direction, which allows employers to employ workers at the minimum in the country they have come from e.g. Romanian minimum for Romanians working in Britain – Europe wide working class campaign against the rule.

Build the fight back against austerity in public services, health, education, housing, benefit entitlements – work to make sure that migrants and disabled people are an integral part of these campaigns; the very people who get blamed are the people discriminated against. That fight will often be against the local Labour administration. Socialists inside and outside the Labour Party should not shirk campaigning against these administrations, to defend the working class and because failure to do so will leave a vacuum for UKIP.

Defiance not Compliance – trade union encouragement and defence of those who refuse to act as immigration police. Encourage landlords and employers to refuse to play these roles.

Listening to People

When people in all the mainstream parties, especially the Labour Party, say ‘we must listen to what people are saying about immigration’, after some defeat at the hands of parties like UKIP we know that what this really means is an intention to join in the chorus of those calling for more controls not less or none. But actually it is vital that we really listen to people whilst being prepared to vigorously argue in favour of immigration not against it. To dumbly parrot what people say is actually a patronising politics. Arguing things out is not. More importantly it’s a teasing out of what are the underlying issues – drilling down to where people are or should be ‘revolutionising themselves and things’ and to abandon ‘the battle cries and costumes’ of the past. Identifying those we can work in the community to help develop a programme and above all unite and fight around that programme.

[Socialist Resistance](#)

“Out with Peña!” – Mass Protests Across Mexico against Gas, Electrical Price Increases

10 January 2017, by **Dan La Botz**

The protests so far are not as well organized, as disciplined, or as large as the recent teachers’ strikes over the education reform law or the demonstrations in protest of the forced disappearance of 43 Ayotzinapa Teachers College students, but the demonstrations against the gasolinazo are national in scope and involve broader sectors of society.

The demonstrations will almost surely have an enormous impact on the country’s 2018 presidential elections,

where Peña Nieto’s dominant Institutional Revolutionary Party seems doomed to suffer a serious defeat and Andrés Manuel López Obrador, populist candidate of the Movement of National Regeneration Party (MORENA) leads in the polls. The radical Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), has called for an indigenous woman candidate for president in 2018, though whether that is a propagandistic campaign or a serious electoral bid is not yet clear.

Marches, Seizures of Highways, Looting

Throughout Mexico, shouting “Out with Peña!” protestors “truck drivers, taxi drivers, and public health workers prominent among them” seized PEMEX gas stations and other company facilities, blocked highways and commandeered toll

stations, took over shopping centers and looted more than a thousand stores in various cities of millions of dollars of merchandise.

Thousands of police and soldiers have been mobilized to suppress the protests and looting, resulting in hundreds arrested, many injured, and several dead. The federal, state, and local police in many areas as well as the army have been repeatedly accused of human rights violations, as arrest in Mexico is generally accompanied by beating and torture. Those detained by police sometimes also disappear, not to be heard from again.

Widespread Opposition

All of the opposition political parties—the conservative National Action Party (PAN), the center-left Party of the Democratic Revolution (PD), and the populist Movement of National Regeneration Party (MORENA)—have called upon the president to reverse the price increases. They have also come out to one degree or another in support of the citizens' protests.

The opposition parties have been joined by the Mexican Catholic Bishop's Council (CEM) and by the government controlled labor unions who also stand opposed. El Barzón, the national debtors' union, and the Plan de Ayala coordinating committee, a peasant organization too came out against the price rises. The EZLN, the largely indigenous movement in the southernmost state of Chiapas called the gasolinazo "a catastrophe."

All of the small far left parties—the Trotskyist, Stalinist, Maoist—have not only opposed the prices increase, and supported protests, but have also issued calls for action of various sorts, though their reach is not very great.

Some citizens took their petition to stop the price increases to the Mexican Supreme Court, arguing that they violate the Constitution, since they worsen people's lives. With 52 percent of Mexicans living in poverty, the government's price rises threaten to make millions even more miserable, but the precarious middle class is also affected by these policies.

President and Ex-President

President Enrique Peña Nieto took advantage of his New Year speech to defend the increase in petroleum prices arguing that had the prices not been raised it would have been necessary to cut the budget for social programs for the poor, for example, health programs such as surgeries. His party, the PRI, and its allies the Green Party and the New Party of the teachers union refused the demand of the opposition parties to hold an extraordinary session of the Congress to consider the price increase.

President Felipe Calderón—discredited for initiating the drug war that has taken the lives of over 200,000 Mexicans, led to as many as 50,000 forced kidnappings, and killed some 80,000 Central Americans passing through Mexico—did not defend the price increase (a practice which he had also

engaged in) but attributed the protests to "anarchists, moochers, and common criminals."

Where Do Things Go From Here

If these protests had a centralized organization, they would verge on a national rebellion, but Mexico has no political party or organize labor movement prepared to give leadership. The Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) long ago became a corrupt, capitalist party like the PRI and the PAN.

López Obrador of MORENA, who has recently veered further to the right, may put himself forward as a leader of the protests, as he attempted to do with the teachers' protests against the education reform and the widespread demonstrations against the forced disappearance of the Ayotzinapa students, but if so, he will attempt to restrain the movement and redirect it to his presidential campaign.

The EZLN, while it joined in the condemnation of the gasolinazo as a catastrophe, has in the past taken a sectarian attitude generally refusing to join in alliance with both political parties and other social movements or left organizations—except on its own terms.

Perhaps this latest upheaval can create the long awaited left political organization that both expresses the movement and has the authority to lead it. We will see.

Source *New Politics*. January 6, 2017.

Who Put Trump in the White House?

9 January 2017, by **Kim Moody**

While he didn't actually win the popular vote, Trump did carry the majority (58%) of white voters. Furthermore, he won the key

"battleground" states in the Rust Belt that are the basis of the media story, which raises serious questions. Who were these white voters? Was this the

major shift that sent Trump to victory?

Exit polls taken during the primaries, when the Trump revolt began, showed

that the whole election process was skewed toward the better-off sections of U.S. society, and that Trump did better among them than Clinton. Looking at those voters in the general election from the 26% of U.S. households earning more than \$100,000, who are unlikely to be working class these days, we see that Clinton got 34% of her vote, and Trump a slightly larger 35% of his, from these well-to-do voters. [28]

In other words, upper-income groups were overrepresented in the voting electorate as a whole, and both candidates drew a disproportionate part of their vote from the well-to-do, with Trump a bit more reliant on high-income voters. This in itself doesn't rule out a working-class shift to Trump, but the media's version of this is based on a problematic definition.

Among other problems, a large majority of those without a college degree don't vote at all. Furthermore, people who don't vote are generally to the left of those who do on economic issues and the role of government. Of the 135.5 million white Americans without degrees, about a fifth voted for Trump — a minority that doesn't represent this degreeless demographic very well.

Another problem is that there are only about 18.5 million white, blue-collar production workers — the prototype of the defecting white industrial worker. [29] If we double this to account for adult spouses to make it just under 40 million, and assume that none of them have degrees, it still only accounts for a little more than a third of those white adults lacking the allegedly class-defining degree.

Of course, there are another 14 million or so white service workers who are working class, but even if we include them and their spouses we still account for only about half of the huge 70% of white adults in the United States who lack a college degree.

There are also millions of Americans who don't have a college degree, who are not working class, and who are actually more likely to vote than the "left behind" industrial workers. There are some 17 million small business

owners without that degree. As a 2016 survey by the National Small Business Association tells us, 86% of small business owners are white, they are twice as likely to be Republicans as Democrats, almost two-thirds consider themselves conservative (78% on economic issues), and 92% say they regularly vote in national elections.

They drew an average salary of \$112,000 in 2016 compared to \$48,320 for the average annual wage. [30] Add in the spouses, and this classically petty bourgeois group alone could more than account for all the 29 million of those lacking a college degree who voted for Trump. [31]

There are also 1.8 million managers, 8.8 million supervisors, and 1.6 million cops whose jobs don't require a college degree. To this we could add insurance and real estate brokers and agents, and so on. [32] Some may have a degree, but it is clear that there are tens of millions of non-working class people in the United States who lack such a degree, and who are more likely to be traditional and frequent Republican voters than a majority of white, blue-collar workers.

The relatively high-income levels of much of Trump's vote point toward a majority petty bourgeois and middle-class base for Trump, something The Economist concluded in its earlier survey of Trump primary voters when they wrote, "but the idea that it is the mostly poor, less-educated voters who are drawn to Mr. Trump is a bit of a myth." [33] The first point, then, is that Trump's victory was disproportionately a middle-class, upper-income phenomenon.

Trump's Union Vote

To test the extent to which white, blue collar or related workers handed Trump victory, we will look at the swings in union household voting in national elections. This is far from perfect, of course, since only a minority of workers belong to unions these days, about half are public employees, and non-white workers make up a quarter of the total.

Nevertheless, we can safely assume that any swings toward the Republicans came mostly from white union members and their families. It is important to bear in mind as well that the union household vote has declined as a percentage of the total vote in presidential elections from about 26-27% in 1980 to 18% in 2016 so that the impact of the union household vote has diminished though not disappeared. [34]

Union Household Vote in Presidential Elections, 1976-2016

Year Dem. Rep.

2016	51%	43%*
2012	58%	40%
2008	59%	39%
2004	59%	40%
2000	59%	37%
1996	60%	30%
1992	55%	24%
1988	57%	43%
1980	48%	45%
1976	62%	38%

*Additionally, in 2016, 6% other/no answer; in 2000, 1% Buchanan, 3% Nader; in 1996, 9% Perot; in 1992, 21% Perot; in 1980, 7% Anderson

Source: Roper Center, "How Groups Voted", 1976-2012; CNN politics, election2016, "Exit Polls, National President".

Two things are clear from the table. First, an average of about 40% of union members and their families have been voting Republican in presidential elections for a long time, with the Democrats winning a little under 60% of the union household vote for the last four decades. Only in 1948 and 1964 did over 80% of union household members vote for the Democratic candidate, Harry Truman and Lyndon B. Johnson respectively. [35]

Nevertheless, in 2016 a relatively small number shifted to Trump from 40% for the Republican in 2012 to

43% in 2016. This three percentage points represents a shift of just under 800,000 union household voters across the entire country.

Even more interesting is that the Democratic vote fell by seven points from 2012 to 2016 as union household members defected to a third party, refused to answer the question when surveyed, or didn't vote and weren't surveyed. While the unspecified "no answer" group of those surveyed lends some credibility to the theory of the "silent Trump voter," this drop nonetheless points to the fact that the Democrats have lost votes since 2012.

Putting this in historical context, Trump's shift of union household voters is actually less dramatic than the swing from 1976 to 1980 for Reagan, and even less so than the 14-point desertion of union household voters from Carter in 1980, half of which went to independent John Anderson rather than Reagan, in an election when union householders composed 26% of all voters. [36]

In other words, Trump attracted both a smaller proportion and number of these voters than Reagan or Anderson. These same voters have swung for some time between Democrats, Republicans, and high-profile third-party candidates such as Anderson, Ross Perot who got 21% of union household voters in 1992, and Ralph Nader, who got three percent in 2000. [37] The meaning of the 2016 shift was more sinister to be sure, but it was also long in the making as the Democrats moved to the right.

This is not to say that the swing of union household or white working-class voters away from the Democrats doesn't reflect the conservative social views, racism, and in the 2016 election, sexism of many white working- and middle-class people as well as their anger at their deteriorating situation.

Clearly Trump won almost 10 million union household votes, compared to almost 12 million for Clinton. These numbers are significant, but we know that many are not as new to voting Republican as is often thought. This, of course, is not something to take

comfort in, but it is an indication of the results of the Democratic Party's choice to emphasize higher-income people that began under Bill Clinton and the Democratic Leadership Council. [38]

It seems clear that a significant number of white working-class people voted for Trump who had voted for Obama in 2008 or 2012 — even if more just didn't vote.

The Democrats' Self-Made Debacle

While there was a swing among white, blue-collar and union household voters to Trump, it was significantly smaller than the overall drop in Democratic voters.

While recent voter suppression laws demanding state-issued photo IDs in some 17 states along with the racial cleansing of voter rolls in many states have undoubtedly limited voting for Blacks, Latinos and low-income whites, most non-voters don't vote because they don't see anything compelling to vote for.

At the same time, working-class voter participation has remained low in part because the political parties have reduced the direct door-to-door human contact with lower-income voters in favor of purchased forms of campaigning, from TV ads to the new digitalized methods of targeting likely voters. [39]

Vast amounts of personal data are accumulated by firms specializing in this, turned into voter-targeting algorithms, and sold. According to John Aristotle Phillips, the CEO of Aristotle, they can provide customers with "up to 500 different data points on each individual." [40] The parties or campaigns that purchase this service, in turn, use it to spread targeted messages to specific groups or even individual voters mostly via the internet through various platforms, including Facebook which apparently made a bundle off the 2016 election.

Spending on digital political ads rose from \$22 million in 2008 to \$158

million in 2012, and is expected to hit \$1 billion for the 2016 election and over \$3 billion by the 2020 elections. No doubt they will continue to soar as they are increasingly available for elections way down the ballot to the local level according to the Democratic digital outfit DSPolitical. [41]

Aside from the soaring costs this invasive digital targeting adds to U.S. elections and the further erosion of our privacy, it further removes political campaigning from any direct human contact. As reporters for The Guardian put it, "campaigns of the future will depend as much on being able to track people across screens and apps as knocking on doors or sending out flyers." [42]

It's not that no doors are knocked on or phone calls made, but the algorithm that decides the limited number of actual voters to be visited or called to turn out the vote in practice has meant identifying the better-off part of the population. The Get-Out-The-Vote campaign has become the Get-Out-The-Well-To-Do-Votes canvass. More importantly, the shaping of the political process, already an auction, is being even further outsourced to the profit-making "expert" firms that provide this service.

In short, despite all the vast amounts of money raised and deployed, all the digital and "expert" sophistication available to this "party of the people" and Clinton's allegedly massive "ground game" force in the "battleground" states, the Democratic Party as a whole no longer can or tries to mobilize enough of those among its traditional core constituencies — Blacks and Latinos, as well as white workers and union members — to win national and even state offices in these key states.

To be sure, Clinton won the popular vote nationally, perhaps as John Nichols gloated in *The Nation* by an "unprecedented" margin that might run as high as two million or more. The problem is that 1.5 million of that can be accounted for from Clinton's margin over Trump in New York City alone. [43] The majorities in the coastal states of California and New York by themselves accounts for more

than her net majority; the rest of the country continues to see its Democratic vote stagnate or decline.

The Democrats are and have been for decades the party of the (neoliberal) status quo when millions of all races have seen their living standards shrink and future prospects disappear and, as a result, have come to despise the status quo. And as the many millionaire Democrats in Congress (average wealth of a Democratic Representative is \$5.7 million) and their business buddies demonstrate for all to see, they are part of the nation's elite.

The decline in manufacturing jobs, the shrinking of union representation, the creation of more and more lousy jobs, the withdrawal of aid to the cities, etc. have created not just "angry white men" who voted for Trump, but angry white, Black, Latino and Asian men and women who, for good and sound reasons, no longer see the Democrats as their defenders.

Many in this legion have voted with their feet, and it wasn't to the polls. In 2014, the last off-year Congressional election, non-voters numbered almost 128 million adult citizens — a majority of eligible voters [44] — the vast majority of these were middle-to-lower income working-class people.

Strong evidence that the Democrats can no longer motivate or mobilize the majority in much of the country is the fact that the millions of non-voters are on average and in their majority politically to the left of those who do vote on key economic issues.

As one study put it, "Nonvoters tend to support increasing government services and spending, guaranteeing jobs, and reducing inequality" more

than voters, by about 17 percentage points. This includes whites as well as Black and Latino non-voters. [45]

The Democrats cannot mobilize the forces needed to defeat the right, in part because they cannot implement any policies capable of addressing the plight of the majority that might attract these left-leaning non-voters.

Nationally the Democrats have been losing elections at just about every level since 2009. In that year, during the 111th Congress the Democrats had 257 members in the House of Representatives. By 2015, in the 114th Congress that was down to 188 Democrats, the lowest number since the 80th Congress in 1947-49, over which time voter participation rates fell from 48% to 42% in off-year Congressional elections.

In 2016 the Democrats won back just six seats in the House. [46] Between 2009 and 2015 the Democrats lost 203 seats in State Senates and 716 in State Houses or Assemblies. An indication of what was to come in Ohio and Pennsylvania in 2016 could be seen in the loss of 21 Democratic seats in the state legislatures of each of these states between 2009 and 2015. [47]

Consequences of Failure

This time, however, the falling Democratic vote meant the victory not of a run-of-the-mill conservative or even a Tea Bagger, but of a racist demagogue bent on doing serious damage. And he will.

There will be resistance. Rather, there

will be increased resistance. And this will offer new possibilities for organizing, even in a more hostile atmosphere. At the same time many, including not a few on the socialist left, will run for cover in the Democratic Party's "Big Tent," arguing that now is not the time to take on the Democrats, that the great task is to elect a Democratic Congress, any Democratic Congress, in 2018 to rein in Trump just as the Republicans blocked Obama after 2010, and so on.

But such a political direction will only reinforce the Democrats' neoliberalism, digital-dependency, and failed strategies. We had better bear in mind what this approach has not done for the past four decades and will not do in the coming years.

It will not significantly or permanently increase voter turnout for working-class people, especially African-American and Latino voters. The rate of voter turnout has fallen for the past few decades and particularly for off-year Congressional elections.

Both Black and Latino rates of voter participation in off-year elections, long below average, have nose-dived since 2010 and did not recover in 2016 despite the threat of a Trump victory. [48]

Nor will the centrist liberalism, much less neoliberalism, of Democratic incumbents and most likely candidates win back those white working-class people or those in union households who have been voting Republican for decades, much less the recent angry Trump converts.

Politics as usual have failed! Who put Trump in the White House? The Democrats.

The Green Party After the Election

5 January 2017, by **Howie Hawkins**

But lacking a large, well-organized membership base to provide local legs

for the campaign and a sizable cohort of Green elected officials to give the

Green Party political weight, the campaign was marginalized by the

media and discounted by the voters. So the limited gains for the Greens should not be surprising at all. (See box below.)

Until the Green Party has built a real power base of well-organized, dues-paying members and elected Green caucuses in city councils, state legislatures and the U.S. House, it will not be taken seriously in a presidential run by most media and most voters. It is now time for the Greens to go back to grassroots organization and movement building.

As we enter Trump time, the Greens and the broader left should learn from their mistakes during the Bush II era when too many got caught up in the Anybody-But-Bush strategy to get the Democrats back in power. For the Greens, that approach yielded the divisive and self-defeating safe-states strategy of 2004 by one faction of the party, which undermined the party's very rationale for existing as an independent alternative.

Greens should be friendly with grassroots Democrats in the Sanders/Warren wing as they quixotically try (again) to replace corporate Democrats with progressive Democrats.

Greens should work with them in the fightback against Trumpist scapegoating and oppression of immigrants, minorities and women, expansion of the security and surveillance state, imperial wars, climate madness, cuts to public health care and schools, union-busting and on many other fronts.

But the real power structure of the Democratic Party — the corporate donors and their political representatives, led now by the corporate neoliberal Chuck Schumer — will do what corporate Democrats always do with progressive Democratic personalities: use them as bait to lure progressives into a supporting corporate Democrats as the lesser evil.

Meanwhile, the greater-evil Republicans are smoothly incorporating Trump into their rightwing faction of corporate America centered on the big financial,

real estate, fossil fuel, manufacturing, prison and military interests. Indeed, beneath the high-profile appointments of hard-core racists and militarists, the Trump transition is drawing mainly on the premier Republican-oriented conservative think tanks and lobbies like the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute for staffing and policy.

This corporate hard right — now in control of the presidency, both houses of Congress, and soon the Supreme Court — will move quickly after inauguration to enact an extremist version of neoliberal trickle-down economics featuring tax cuts for the rich, deregulation, union-busting and privatization of Medicare, Social Security, and public schools.

Trump's racist campaign was despicable. The consequences of his election are dangerous. Open racists feel license to harass and harm minorities; closet racists with power over employment, education and housing opportunities will feel more license to discriminate.

But Trump's election cannot be explained by white racism alone (the racist vote has been a solid Republican bloc since Reagan, or even Nixon). Working-class resentment against the arrogance and elitism of Clinton and the corporate Democrats also played a big role.

What I heard from working-class Trump voters in the upstate New York Rust Belt, mostly white but also several Black folks, was that their vehement dislike for Clinton (and affinity for Sanders) was based on their perception of her as the epitome of the professional and managerial class that condescendingly orders them around at work and rips them off in the marketplace as representatives of utilities, banks, insurance companies, the health care system, lawyers and the courts.

Being a woman no doubt rubbed it in for some of the men, as the gender gap in the vote indicates. But Clinton's closing appeal of her competence vs. Trump's bad temperament, rather than a class-based economic appeal, only reinforced these perceptions of her as being on the other side.

Where Greens Need to Go

Hope for economic populist change was the common thread in white working- and middle-class people's votes for both Obama and Trump. It trumped their racism in the votes for Obama, and their racism excused Trump's racism in their vote for change in 2016.

Greens should also engage the disgruntled Trump populists of the working class and middle class who voted for Trump as an outside change-agent promising economic relief and an end to elite insider arrogance and corruption, and who will be quickly disappointed as it becomes clear that Trump fails to deliver.

Both major parties have discontended, economically insecure working-class and middle-class voting bases, for which the campaigns of Sanders and Trump became outlets. We can expect a resurgent liberalism trying (again) to reform the Democratic side and, after a brief honeymoon, renewed anger among the economic populists on the Republican side.

These populists won't stop supporting would-be reformers in their respective parties until they see an alternative to support that is credible and competitive. An alternative left party with a mass-membership structure and financing will necessarily have to gain a foothold in the electoral system through local elections where grassroots education, public actions, door-knocking, phone banking and fundraising can compete against the corporate-funded Democrats and Republicans.

Local governments have real powers: legislation, regulation, taxation, hiring, contracting, purchasing, even eminent domain to socialize essential public services, utilities and key local industries such as banking, housing and commercial development, and business development, including worker and consumer cooperatives. Local elected officials become viable as candidates for state and federal offices.

But a strategy of building a left political alternative from the bottom up cannot limit itself to municipal and

county elections. A local Green Party that can run effective campaigns for municipal or county offices can also run effective campaigns for state legislatures and Congress. State budgets and policies have enormous impact on local government and school funding.

A serious municipal reform program has to address state budgets and policies. Independent left candidates for state legislature running on that reform program gives all other lobbying and public action in support of it more leverage because incumbents have to worry about losing votes to the independent challengers.

The same holds for federal budgets and policies. Only in federal races can the left present alternatives to regressive federal taxation, deregulation, privatization, and militarization.

The program should center itself around an Economic Bill of Rights that revives and updates the Economic Bill of Rights demanded by the Poor People's Campaign of 1968. The Poor People's Campaign carried forward the program of Freedom Budget of 1966, which grew out of the demands of the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

The Freedom Budget called for a job guarantee, a guaranteed minimum income, universal public health care, and quality desegregated housing and schools for all.

Building out from the leading theme of an Economic Bill of Rights, the program must address other pressing problems including a crash program of conversion to clean renewable energy to minimize global warming, demilitarization for peace and funding economic rights, restoration of civil liberties and civil rights, and desegregation of housing, employment

and schools.

The 1966 Freedom Budget's premise was that racial justice for African Americans would not be secure until there was economic justice for all Americans. The election of 2016 shows that premise remains as relevant as it was 50 years ago.

Building the Green Party from the bottom up on the mass-membership model is the only way to have the organized and energized mass base, democratic accountability and morale, and funding necessary to compete for power against the corporate power structure and its political representatives in the Democratic and Republican parties.

A grassroots mass-membership party is also the only way to give the biggest cohort of voters a political home. There are 100 million eligible voters who did not vote in 2016. They are disproportionately in the low-wage working class. The mass base for left parties the world over, the working class, largely abstains from U.S. elections. A grassroots mass-membership party can give these people a home where they feel their participation is welcome and makes a difference.

The new age of Trump will be worse than what would have been under the reign of President Clinton II. But what the Green Party needs to do now would have been pretty much the same under either as president:

- 1) Build a mass-membership party rooted in locals with dues-paying members.
- 2) Focus on local elections for municipal, county, state legislative, and U.S. House seats.
- 3) Be active on the issues and organizing between elections.

- 4) Build a political base and working class unity around a program centered around an Economic Bill of Rights.

Stein-Baraka Ticket

THE STEIN-BARAKA TICKET tripled the Green Party presidential vote from 2012 to nearly 1.4 million, or 1.0%. That is up from 469,627 votes (0.4%) in 2012 but still well below Ralph Nader's 2.9 million (2.7%) in 2000.

The campaign kept aloft the banners for popular progressive reforms that both corporate parties reject, including a job guarantee, single-payer health care, 100% renewable energy by 2030, free public college and student debt relief, police demilitarization, a scaled-down military and surveillance state, and a pro-democracy and human rights foreign policy. The increased lists of donors and volunteers developed can be put to use right away in issue and electoral campaigns.

On ballot access, the Greens come out of the election with no net gains: 22 state ballot lines. The vote for the presidential ticket or another statewide Green candidate secured ballot lines for the next election cycle in 12 states. But while the Greens secured new ballot lines in Connecticut and Missouri for the next election cycle, they lost ballot lines in Massachusetts and Texas.

January-February 2017, ATC 186.

The Black Hole of Conspiraciesâ€™ Hong

Kong Under Beijing's Factional Fight

4 January 2017, by **Au Loong-Yu**

The Sing Pao Saga

Hong Kong's media is divided between the pro-Beijing camp and the pro-pan-democrats camp. While the other side is much less homogenous, the pro-Beijing camp has never launched attacks amongst itself publicly until Sing Pao did last August. The daily has a long history in Hong Kong, but in 2015 after it fell into financial crisis it was bought by Gu Zhuoheng, a Mainland Chinese businessman who is believed to have strong connections to certain high ranking party officials in Beijing. It is widely believed that his mission, as many other similar cases show, is to help Beijing to take over the media in Hong Kong, a process which began a long time ago. Since the change of ownership, Sing Pao has become even more pro-Beijing. But things began to take a sharp turn towards the end of last August when the daily began to attack C.Y. Leung for being the person who was responsible for intentionally provoking the rise of Hong Kong's independence movement, with the support of the Liaison Office of the Central Government stationed in Hong Kong. Sing Pao's accusation is quite convincing to many because it was C.Y. Leung who helped to boost these people when, in his policy address in 2015, he loudly criticized a pro-independence booklet published by certain students, which in fact was not that popular at all. The daily also correctly prophesied Leung's downfall. Not only did further attacks follow Sing Pao's initial attack on Leung, but it also started targeting those even higher up. This included:

? That two major organisations agitating for Hong Kong Independence were actually from the very start sponsored by "ultra-leftists" among the pro-Beijing camp. The two sides have been in close collaboration since then. (These two organizations are Youngspiration and Hong Kong

Indigenous. Two of the leading members of the former were elected as LegCo members, only to be disqualified by a local court soon after for their insulting remarks made against China when taking their oaths, which triggered off the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress to make new interpretation to the Basic Law governing oath taking and which the local court must follow. The latter organization had led a riot against police early this year but with no good cause at all. - Au)

? That Leung, the Liaison Office's Zhang Xiaoming, Jiang Zaizhong of the Ta Kung Wen Wei Media Group and a fourth person constituted what the daily called "ultra-leftists". Sometimes the daily has also referred to them as the "Gang of Four" who are trying to bring chaos to Hong Kong. It later implied that the fourth person was former Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa, who is himself a big tycoon.

? That Zhang Dejiang, a member of the Standing Committee of the Politbureau and head of the Standing Committee of the People's Congress, is the mastermind behind a joint effort by the Liaison Office to continue their corrupt practices across China, including Hong Kong. According to Sing Pao, Zhang is an ally of ex-leader Jiang Zemin, who has been allegedly involved in a power struggle with Xi Jinping.

? That Xi Jinping should investigate the China Liaison Office.

Soon after the first commentary by Sing Pao was published, the daily Wen Wei Po which is run by the Liaison Office, fought back and accused Sing Pao's chairman, Gu Zhuoheng, of being a "fugitive" who was involved in illegal money lending and is wanted by Shenzhen police. Gu denounced the accusation, saying that it was "false" and "libellous".

The Fall of C.Y. Leung

But the downfall of Leung seems to suggest that even if Wen Wei Po is correct in its characterization of Gu, the latter does have some powerful houtai, or patron. That may explain why C.Y. Leung had earlier taken a pan-democrat daily to court for supposed "defamation" against him but did nothing in relation to the deadly serious charges made against him by Sing Pao.

Instead of celebrating the fact that Leung is not running again, as many pan-democrats politicians are, Hong Kong people should worry about what the whole saga of the Sing Pao event has revealed. It is impossible to verify the claims of Sing Pao. But one thing is certain; the CCP's inner party struggle is not only carried out in Mainland but is also now definitely being carried out in Hong Kong, and the tragedy is that Hong Kongers have no escape from it. Surely, it was already crystal clear that the writing was on the wall back in the 2012 CE election campaign when Jiang Zemin's alleged favoured candidate Henry Tang was kicked out and replaced by C.Y. Leung. It was also around this time that Xi Jinping was to be appointed as the head of the CCP. According to a senior Japanese journalist Kenji Minemura, the transition from the leadership of Hu Jintao to those of Xi Jinping involved a triangular power struggle between Hu, Jiang and Xi, not only a two sided struggle between Jiang and Xi as some might think. Minemura argues that it was actually the fierce struggle between Hu and Jiang at first that eventually benefited Xi. Again, we cannot verify these claims, but one thing is also sure, the fact that Henry Tang was abruptly replaced by C.Y. Leung must have taken place with the intervention of the top CCP leaders

who were fighting among themselves, although we cannot be sure who is the real patron of C.Y. Leung. Different factions used Hong Kong as leverage to bring down the other sides. That this has been happening for a long time is proven by the floods of reports and counter-reports relating to corruption stories by different factions, which make full use of Hong Kong's freedom of the press. What is particularly alarming to local tycoons, however, was the way their representative (Henry Tang) was replaced. His secret - that his house had an illegal structure- was reported on the news and deeply discredited him as a trustworthy candidate. It was also widely believed that the leaking of his secret was a conspiracy.

Inner Party Fight and Hong Kong

If the 2016 Sing Pao saga was slightly different from what happened in 2012 it is only because it revealed even uglier revelations as far as the inner party fight is concerned. Long before Sing Pao's report, circumstantial evidence already pointed to a scenario where suspicious agents might have been involved in the sudden rise of the far right localists / Hong Kong independence advocates. Surely one must not dismiss these people as having no roots at all in a highly insecure society such as Hong Kong, along with growing politicization and polarization. These people do represent a rising far right mood among certain sectors of the population. But the fact that they rose up so quickly and that many of their very young leaders suddenly had so much money to run for election, and that many things that they said or did simply did not add up to what they publicly stood for, should lead us to cast suspicion on most of these leading Hong Kong independence advocates. The Sing Pao report only confirmed our distrust of these people.

Actually even without relying on Sing Pao, every sensible person in Hong Kong knows very well that the Communist Party has not only been doing vote rigging here, it has also recently started to pay money to politicians to run for election against

pan-democrat candidates, either under the banner of "localist" or "Hong Kong independence". A Hong Kong court case proved this. Last October a certain Cheung was found guilty and sentenced to four years imprisonment for having bribed many localist candidates to run against pan-democrats in the 2015 district board election. Cheung admitted in court that he received money from a person from the United Front Department of the Communist Party, and that this person was ready to pay 150,000-250,000 HK dollars to each candidate in forty electoral districts.

Why is the way that the CCP's inner party fight affects Hong Kong so deplorable? It is because it shows no concern for the welfare of the people, and least of all for Hong Kong's autonomy. It is entirely conceivable that, for the opposing faction, in order to destabilize Xi Jinping, the option of purposefully destabilizing Hong Kong is always lying on their table. This does not require us to believe everything Sing Pao told us, especially its accusation that the Liaison Office chief and C.Y. Leung are all gang members of Beijing leader Zhang Dejiang, or that they manufactured the rapid rise of the Hong Kong Independence movement. Both the bitter experiences of the party struggles in the past decades and the equally bitter experiences of power struggle in the Chinese Empire for centuries could lead people like the Liaison Office chief and C.Y. Leung to purposefully provoke the Hong Kong Independence movement just in order to stay in power. In the history of party struggle, subordinates in the party hierarchy have only been able to survive when they have not only fully implemented the "class struggle" policy laid down by the top, but have implemented it in even more extreme ways. The lesson drawn by the bureaucrats is known by the unfortunate term Ningzuowuyou, or "always better being more leftist than being rightist" (????) - by leftist it actually means more authoritarian and repressive, while by rightist it means more moderate. As for the history of the Chinese Empire, it is the old trick known as yangkouzizhong (????), which means that generals guarding the country borders would sponsor the enemy rather than exterminating

them, because it is only so long as the enemy is still there that these generals can continuously keep their titles and power. Far away from the court these generals had no other reliable tools with which to win the trust of the Emperor.

But how about the role of Zhang Dejiang, who is one of seven most powerful persons in China? Unlike the Liaison Office chief and C. Y. Leung, he is no general guarding the borders. It is widely believed that he is linked to the Jiang Zemin faction, and the latter is struggling against Xi Jinping. We have no way to verify this account. What is certain is that there is a faction fight among the top leaders and no one gives a shit about the consequences of undermining Hong Kong's autonomy. Even in the colonial period, when the CCP's faction fight was somewhat contained along the border of Hong Kong, when the fight became explosive, as was the case during the Cultural Revolution, it still directly affected Hong Kong, causing the 1967 big riot there. With the handover of sovereignty and nearly twenty years of re-integration with Mainland China, any serious faction fight among top leaders today definitely destabilises Hong Kong and erodes its autonomy.

The Logic of One Party Dictatorship

Surely there are also other possible factors which contribute to the political chaos and the rise of the Hong Kong independence movement other than the factional fight. We must bear in mind that undermining Hong Kong's autonomy is beneficial to the party state in general and hence to all of its factions. To imagine that the CCP's dictatorship can be compatible with democracy in general and with Hong Kong autonomy in particular is pure fantasy. Hence we should not be blinded by the Sing Pao report and overlook the fact that with or without the initiative of the Liaison Office and C.Y. Leung, the United Front Department of the CCP and the secret police still need to do their job in undermining Hong Kong's autonomy. One of the ways to do this is to provoke an independence movement

so as to give an excuse to the Central government to crack down on Hong Kong. This was exactly what happened when the Standing Committee re-interpreted the Basic law last month so as to make the Hong Kong court disqualify properly elected LegCo members who has nothing to do with the pro-independent movement.

For the past dozen years there have been private reports circulating among activists about how this or that party or organizations have experienced infiltration or how individual members have being tempted or forced to be the CCP's informants and/or collaborators. Then came the Umbrella Movement, which revealed in one-go how the CCP has been working under the table for years. Hundreds if not thousands of "home village associations" pretending to be "mass organizations" suddenly sprang up from nowhere to

campaign against the democratic movement, new far right and "patriotic" (read "pro-Beijing") political organizations were founded to combat the Umbrella movement, mafia was used in great numbers to beat up or scare away occupiers etc etc. At the same time certain far right localists, instead of targeting Beijing and the Hong Kong government, attacked the pan-democrats in general and the Hong Kong Federation of Students (which led the occupation in the first place) in particular until they successfully dismantled the latter. What is funny is how during last September's election some of the old associates of this far right current came out publicly accusing their leader, the infamous Raymond Wong, who in past years had already split several pan-democrat parties, as being the CCP's accomplice. All of the above could not have been done without

years and decades of preparation.

Sadly, Hong Kong people have been trapped in multiple conspiracies serving multiple purposes, public and private, of the top leaders of the CCP, of all its factions and all of its institutions and individuals which are directly involved in Hong Kong. On top of this, there is the rumour that Xi Jinping may want to stay in power even after his second term, which implies, if it is true, that a more fierce faction fight can be expected in the years to come. Even worse is that while everyone is aware that autonomy is disappearing quickly, no common citizens know exactly who the real actors behind the screen of the puppet show are.

22nd December, 2016

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We Must Understand Syria as a Popular Struggle Despite Its Complications

3 January 2017, by **Joseph Daher**

Alarmingly, some sections of leftist discourse on the Syrian revolution often emulate the rhetoric offered by the mainstream bourgeois, media, and even extreme right-wing groups. For example, writing for The Guardian in September 2013, Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek characterized the Syrian uprising as a "pseudo struggle." As he wrote: "there are no clear political stakes, no signs of a broad emancipatory-democratic coalition, just a complex network of religious and ethnic alliances over-determined by the influence of superpowers."

In an interview with RT a year earlier, journalist Tariq Ali similarly declared that what we are witnessing in Syria is "a new form of re-colonization by the West, like we have already seen in Iraq and in Libya." In Ali's view:

[M]any of the people who first rose against the Assad regime in Syria have been sidelined, leaving the Syrian people with limited choices, neither of which they want: either a Western imposed regime, composed of sundry Syrians who work for the western intelligence agencies, or the Assad regime.

Others, like veteran journalist Seymour Hersh, described the uprising in overly-simplistic terms as a near conspiracy to "destabilize Syria" that was planned at the time of George W. Bush's presidency and continued into President Barack Obama's term.

Political figures like former British Member of Parliament, George Galloway, have supported anti-war movements like Stop the War Coalition, but have also defended

Bashar Al-Assad's criminal regime on many occasions. In 2013, for instance, Galloway declared that Assad is "quite a man" because "he opposes Israel, Britain, America and Qatar."

These are only a sampling of the many left-wing figures who analyze the Syrian revolutionary process using a "top-down" approach. They characterize the popular Syrian uprising in Manichean terms as an opposition between two camps: the Western states, the Gulf monarchies, and Turkey (the "aggressors") on one side, and Iran, Russia, and Hezbollah (the "resistance") on the other. In so doing, they ignore the popular political and socio-economic dynamics at the grassroots level. Moreover, they often focus disproportionately on the dangers of ISIS while ignoring the role the Assad regime played in its rise. These discrepancies must be

addressed within leftist circles and movements. Authoritarianism and Popular Resistance

Citing the expansion of ISIS and other extremist forces, some sections of the left claim Syria is no longer experiencing a revolution, but, rather, is in the grips of a war of conspiratorial proportions. Because of this, they argue, we must “choose a camp,” in order to find a concrete solution to the conflict. In effect, this means we must throw our support behind Assad and his allied Iranian and Russian forces. Tareq Ali declared, for example, at a rally in 2015 that “If you want to fight ISIS, you should be going in and fighting alongside Russia and alongside Assad.”

Sadly, baseless discourse like this became particularly prominent after the Paris attack in November 2015, when ISIS affiliates killed nearly 140 Parisians in an act of terrorism. After the attack, many in the West began advocating for a “global war against ISIS.” Those on the left and right alike argued for the need to collaborate with the Assad regime, or at least seek a solution in which the Assad dynasty remains in control of the country.

Those, like myself, who oppose this outlook are charged with being idealistic. Our critics tell us we must take “more realistic” approaches toward Syria, in order to save lives.

What these individuals fail to appreciate, however, is that it is not enough to destroy ISIS. Brute military force alone only ensures that other militant groups will take its place, as al-Qaida in Iraq demonstrates. Real solutions to the crisis in Syria must address the socio-economic and political conditions that have enabled the growth of ISIS and other extremist organizations.

We have to understand that ISIS’s expansion is a fundamental element of the counter-revolution in the Middle East that emerged as the result of authoritarian regimes crushing popular movements linked to the 2011 Arab Spring. The interventions of regional and international states have contributed to ISIS’s development as

well. Finally, neo-liberal policies that have impoverished the popular class, together with the repression of democratic and trade union forces, have been key in helping ISIS and Islamic fundamentalist forces grow.

The left must understand that only by ridding the region of the conditions that allowed ISIS and other Islamic fundamentalist groups to develop can we resolve the crisis. At the same time, empowering those on the ground who are fighting to overthrow authoritarian regime and face reactionary groups is part and parcel of this approach.

Complex Dynamics

The revolutionaries in Syria who are struggling for freedom are not unlike the revolutionaries in Tunisia, Bahrain, Libya, Egypt, and elsewhere, who oppose both the authoritarian regimes that brutalize them and the fundamentalists who reject meaningful notions of freedom and liberty.

This popular resistance has been the most neglected aspect of the Syrian uprising. Since the revolution began, Syria has witnessed remarkable levels of self-organization—more than any other country in the region faced with similar circumstances.

It is true that the uprising’s militarization has impacted this self-organization. Indeed, the war’s evolution has stifled the space for mass demonstrations and civic engagement, which was common during the uprising’s early years. Remnants of the original revolution still exist, however, in the form of democratic and progressive movements, which have consistently opposed all counter-revolutionary elements, including the Assad regime and extremist forces. Far from being dead, these popular forces made themselves and their democratic aspirations known in February 2016. Following the partial cessation of Russian and regime airstrikes, hundreds of civil demonstrations occurred throughout liberated areas of Syria. The chants and flags of extremist forces were notably absent from these protests.

Among the civic initiatives in Syria, citizen-driven local councils, elected or established on consensus, exist in some regions and provide services to the local population. It is not a coincidence that the free regions of Aleppo and Douma, both run by local councils, are among the most brutalized targets of regime and Russian bombing. That these areas represent democratic alternatives, apart from the regime and fundamentalist movements, is something Assad and his allies fear.

Local councils are not the only civic organizations that have been established during the conflict. The Syrian Civil Defense, commonly known as the White Helmets, works to save victims of airstrikes and deliver public services to nearly 7 million people. Other popular organizations have also undertaken a range of activities and campaigns around education, health, human rights, and empowering women, to name a few. These include Women Now For Development, Keshk, The Day After Tomorrow, the Fraternity Center, and Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently, among others.

There has also been a surge of free and democratic newspapers and radio stations in the country, especially in liberated areas. Examples of these include Arta FM, Syrian Media Action Revolution Team (SMART), ANA Press, Enab Baladi, and Souriatna.

It is imperative for leftists to appreciate these realities, and separate the aspirations of besieged Syrians from those of international and imperialist actors. Approaching Syria from a “bottom-up” rather than “top-down” perspective can help with this.

Imperialism at Work

It is important to remember that, even though conflicting interests exist between international and regional powers that are intervening in Syria, none of these actors care about the uprising or the revolutionaries. Instead, they have attempted to undermine the popular movement against Assad and successfully worked

to strengthen sectarian and ethnic tensions in the country. These intervening forces have, for example, helped stabilize the Assad regime in order to oppose Kurdish autonomy (in Turkey's case) and to defeat extremist groups such as ISIS (in the case of the United States).

The intervening powers are united in their opposition to popular struggle. They seek to impose the status quo at the expense of the interests of the working and popular classes. This is precisely why viewing the Syrian revolution only through the lens of imperialist competition and geopolitical dynamics will not suffice. This lens inherently obscures the political and socio-economic frustrations endured by the Syrian population that sparked the uprising.

The Enemy at Home

Some sections of the left and anti-war movements, especially in the UK and the United States, have refused to act in solidarity with the Syrian uprising under the pretext that "the main enemy is at home." In other words, it is more important to defeat the imperialists and bourgeoisie in our own societies, even if that means implicitly supporting the Assad regime or Russian state.

Among these sections of the left, communist thinker Karl Liebknecht is frequently cited. Liebknecht is famous for his 1915 declaration that "the enemy is at home," a statement made in condemnation of imperialist aggression against Russia led by his native Austria-Germany. In quoting Liebknecht, many have decontextualized his views. From his perspective, fighting against the enemy at home did not mean ignoring foreign regimes repressing their own people or failing to show solidarity

with the oppressed. Indeed, Liebknecht believed we must oppose our own ruling class's push for war by "cooperating with the proletariat of other countries whose struggle is against their own imperialists."

Among many Western leftists, there has been neither cooperation with the Syrian people nor collaboration with like-minded anti-war movements. They also have failed to oppose the policies of their own bourgeois states in crushing the revolution in Syria.

The left must do better. Solidarity with the international proletariat means supporting Syrian revolutionaries against various international and regional imperialist forces, as well as the Assad regime, all of which are trying to put an end to a popular revolution for freedom and dignity. No leftist organizations or anti-war movements today can ignore the necessity of supporting people in struggle, while opposing all foreign interventions (international and regional), especially from our own governments.

Re-Orienting the Left

The role of progressives and leftists today is not, contrary to suggestions from figures like Ali and Higgins, to choose between two imperialist or "sub-imperialist" forces that compete for political gains and the exploitation of resources and peoples. It is, instead, to support the popular struggle, which very obviously exists in Syria. To do otherwise not only undermines that struggle, but also ignores the fact that progressive forces must always support the interests of the working and popular classes. To choose one kind of imperialism or authoritarianism over another is to guarantee the stability of the capitalist system and the

exploitation and oppression of peoples.

This is why, when activists demonstrate in front of Russian embassies throughout the world to demand an end to Russian bombing of the Syrian people, we should not problematize or refer to their actions as "fuelling anti-Russian sentiment." As argued by Alex Kokcharov, principal Russia analyst at the research center IHS Country Risk, "Russia's priority is to provide military support to the Assad government and, most likely, transform the Syrian civil war from a multi-party conflict into a binary one between the Syrian government and jihadist groups like the Islamic State." This means, the vast majority of Russia's air strikes do not target ISIS at all.

In Solidarity

As leftists, our support must go to the revolutionary people struggling for freedom and emancipation. Only through their own collective action can the Syrian people achieve their goals. This concept, which is at the heart of revolutionary politics, faces profound skepticism from some sections of the left. This should not prevent us, however, from building our solidarity on this basis.

As Liebknecht said: "Ally yourselves to the international class struggle against the conspiracies of secret diplomacy, against imperialism, against war, for peace within the socialist spirit." We can exclude none of these elements from our struggle to build a progressive leftist platform on the Syrian conflict.

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New Trial for Rasmia Odeh

1 January 2017

This is an important victory for Odeh and her defense team, who

successfully argued on appeal that the Federal Judge Gershwin Drain hadn't

properly considered the admissibility of testimony about her torture under

Israeli interrogation in 1969, and her expert witness, Dr. Mary Fabri, regarding post-traumatic stress that affected her memory of what happened.

When an appeals court panel in Cincinnati sent the case back to the trial judge for review, Judge Drain scheduled a hearing for November 29. The day before it was to take place, the court announced that the hearing was cancelled and the judge would rule in writing.

A December 6, 2016 statement from the Rasmea Defense Committee explained:

“Michigan Federal Judge Gershwin Drain reviewed written arguments, and ruled today that Palestinian American community organizer Rasmea Odeh will be granted a new trial.

“Last year, Rasmea was sentenced to

18 months in prison and deportation after being convicted in 2014 of Unlawful Procurement of Naturalization, a politically-motivated immigration charge, for failing to disclose on applications for U.S. citizenship that she had been arrested decades earlier in Palestine by Israeli authorities.

“At the original trial, Rasmea was not allowed to tell the entire story of Israel forcing her to falsely confess to alleged bombings in 1969, when she endured over three weeks of vicious sexual, physical, and psychological torture at the hands of the Israeli military.

“The government argued that Judge Drain should again exclude Fabri’s testimony. Despite recently subjecting her to 17 hours of clinical mental examination[ordered by the court to test her PTSD claim “ed.], the government’s own expert affirmed the diagnosis of PTSD, and reported that

Rasmea was not faking any symptoms.”

The new trial is scheduled to begin January 10. Defense attorneys are hopeful a jury that finally gets the opportunity to hear testimony about torture and PTSD will find Rasmea not guilty. In what has always appeared to be a politically motivated prosecution, how the pending change of federal administration may affect the government’s stance is difficult to assess.

UPDATE: As we go to press, U.S. attorney Barbara McQuade has announced a “superseding indictment” bringing a new charge of “terrorist activity” against Rasmea. Please call McQuade’s office (313-226-9100) and ask her to drop the charges. For information visit www.justice4rasmea.org or email justice4rasmea@uspcn.org.

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