



## IV506 - March 2017

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## Argentina's Life-or-Death Women's Movement

29 March 2017, by **Verónica Gago**

**Can you tell us a little bit about the history of the movement in Argentina?**

One of the key precedents for Ni Una Menos is Argentina's National Women's Meeting, now in its thirty-second year. The meeting has become the largest event of its kind — seventy thousand women attended last year's three-day conference. Because of the longevity and frequency of the meeting, it has become a space where the women's movement has been able to develop in light of shifting political contexts.

The clearest instance of this was at the 2003 meeting with the participation of the piqueteras, the movement of unemployed women that had been organizing neighborhood assemblies and street demonstrations against neoliberalism for years. From that moment on, the Women's Meeting

became a mass phenomenon, and increasingly Latin American in its scope. You find women coming from Peru, Colombia, and so on. It's become a special moment for women to come together and share experiences.

The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo also form an integral part of our genealogy. These women, the mothers of the victims of the military dictatorship, started confronting state terrorism in 1977 and remain one of Argentina's most important human rights organizations. We look to them for an example of politics where women are the protagonists; the tactics they used, street occupations and so on, are still important today.

This is our way of tracing the current movement's genealogy, of thinking about the current struggle in relation to a feminist tradition that, of course,

goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century.

New generations have to find fresh ways to relate to that tradition, to the ancestas, as we sometimes say, and discover the elements of that inheritance that provide strength in a given political context. It's an idea that comes up often in the assemblies of Ni Una Menos, an idea that basically contradicts the notion that these strikes and actions are spontaneous: recognizing our own part in a larger tradition, assuming responsibility for that legacy, and historicizing our own movement.

To cite a recent example, in an assembly held last week with the women of the Confederation of Popular Economy Workers (CTEP), we saw the piqueteras' daughters attending, the daughters of that anticapitalist movement from the early

2000s. This shows a commingling of temporalities and generations that is really powerful.

**One also thinks of the National Campaign Against Violence Towards Women and the National Campaign for the Legalization of Abortion in Argentina. These campaigns also have a significant historical trajectory and their own structures.**

Exactly, those campaigns have been sustained over the years through militant participation and concrete demands. Today we're seeing a convergence of different tendencies — not some spontaneous movement that appeared out of thin air. The current moment is actually the fruit of accumulated experiences, discourses, street tactics, and community activism, which of course all find expression within the current political context.

**March 8 will be the second women's strike in Argentina in less than a year: the first took place on October 19, 2016. The event that triggered the first strike was the murder of a young woman — a femicide, to be precise — but the specific issue of gender violence quickly assumed an economic and social dimension.**

Lucía Pérez's murder occurred during last year's Women's Meeting, so the violent nature of the crime felt like a reaction against such a clear manifestation of women's autonomy. The fact that Lucía was murdered by impalement also recalls, as Rita Segato has pointed out, a particular kind of colonial imagery, a reactivation of the colonial inheritance in Latin America. And the crime was committed on the eve of Columbus Day, no less!

So I would argue that there is some type of collective unconscious that is being exorcised on women's bodies through this kind of violence and cruelty. This was part of the background against which the October 19 strike took place.

I consider the intersection of gender violence and economic and social issues a huge step in the right

direction. The idea itself began to take shape through the assemblies that ultimately issued the call for the strike action, when it started to become clear that by striking we would leave behind the logic of victimhood. Naturally, there was a need for mourning after Lucía's murder, but the time had come to make a demonstration of our collective power in the streets.

Of course, underlying all this there is also a certain ambiguity. They're killing women all over the place, but as that's happening, women are the ones controlling the streets, the ones exercising a kind of power that has to do with the struggle over our bodies' autonomy. By combining these considerations with the strike tactic, the action assumed a different connotation.

This was especially evident in the period leading up to the demonstration: we drew a lot of attention by calling it a strike and declaring that we would perform a work stoppage in whatever place we might inhabit — be that at work, at school, in our neighborhoods, or on our streets. Even more, incorporating workers from diverse sectors of the informal economy, the shadow economy, and the domestic economy sent a powerful message: it pointed to an actual site where violence could and must be stopped.

Equally so, it made an important statement: the men who commit gender violence are not psychopaths or isolated cases, nor is the media responsible for the way they behave. There is a whole sociopolitical and economic framework that we need to understand in order to better see how women's bodies are converted into a territory subject to conquest (hence the reference to the colonial question). As Rita Segato says, there is a war being waged against women in Latin America right now.

But it's important to repeat: we can no longer think of these acts of violence as isolated incidents, as pathological cases, or "crimes of passion," as they're commonly called here.

**What is the best way to articulate the connection between**

**neoliberalism and patriarchy? How does neoliberalism enlist patriarchy in its service?**

The debate around neoliberalism helps us see the battlefields on which subjectivities are being formed and on which women are being subjected to exploitation through multiple forms of precarity. Another angle worthy of our attention is how the exploitation of men in the workplace reappears in the domestic sphere as violence.

This flaring up of domestic violence is significant: for the last two years in Argentina, if not longer, people have been wondering when the whole political situation will explode, remembering the massive social revolt that took place in 2001. Once again, we find ourselves in the midst of a social and economic crisis. My own reading of neoliberalism, however, tells me that what we're now seeing is an implosion rather an explosion, and that this is aimed at the domestic sphere.

In 2000, there were powerful social movements that could take decisive action within the community, but today there are other forces at work trying to manage the crisis in their favor. Today's social movements have effectively been deactivated — when they're not actively repressed — because they're forced to work within this oppressively conflict-ridden scenario.

In that sense, neoliberalism allows us to take a much more realistic measure of the terrain and the conflicts unfolding there. It's only after we adopt this perspective that we can begin to understand the connection between gender violence and economics. If we don't, the question always returns to that old theoretical ghetto: "Those women are victims. They're the one who are most victimized by the current economic model."

This victim-based analysis is very weak because it doesn't allow us to see that the assault on women is really a response to the different types of autonomy that women are pursuing over and against this broader social scenario. Clearly, it is difficult to attain any sort of autonomy when

women are being beaten at home and have no income of their own to escape that situation.

**What would it would mean to overcome the “ghetto” of victimization, especially in light of the statement made by Nancy Fraser, Angela Davis, and others, calling for a strike in the United States and for a rupture with “neoliberal feminism”? Do the ideas formulated there make sense in the Latin American context? In other words, is there a kind of feminism that we should be rejecting here, too?**

The case of the United States is interesting. What stood out for me in the January Women’s March was the voice of the African-American women, as well as the acknowledgment of the Sioux and the indigenous struggle. I get the impression that the discussion around neoliberal, white feminism is very complicated, although we are following that debate here in Latin America.

On a general level, we are seeing the emergence of a broad-based, popular feminism. Put differently, while feminism represents a very important and interesting tradition, its aspirations have often been academic, elitist, or just plain corporate — in any case more restricted in its ambitions. Which is not to detract from the fact that there is a long, rich history of struggle that can still guide us. But I think we are witnessing a new kind of feminism, a feminism of the masses.

In Latin America, there is a very interesting discussion taking place around the idea of community-based feminism, or popular, communitarian feminism. In practice, this has meant that feminism has taken part in the struggle for community control over territories, the defense of natural resources, and so on, which is all clearly part of the indigenous and peasant struggle. But it is important to highlight that this communitarian feminism is just as much present in the urban centers, lest we romanticize it.

In Latin America, the present moment is defined by the appearance of this

feminism of the masses. The word feminism used to provoke a sense of unease. I remember spending time among the popular sectors of Buenos Aires and hearing the women there describing a set of political practices that struck me as feminist, but they didn’t see themselves in that light. That’s no longer the case.

It’s no longer the case in the Villa 1-11-14 [one of Buenos Aires’ larger informal urban settlements], where cases of domestic violence are now being approached from a feminist understanding, or in Argentina’s provinces, where an array of political practices are developing and growing stronger under the feminist banner. This was not the case in the past. Feminism wasn’t regarded as capable of adding anything to our political practices, or being particularly useful in terms of framing experiences, narratives, or tactics. That’s all changed.

**It seems that the current feminist movement in Argentina has managed to achieve a certain unity in diversity that has proven elusive for the broader left.**

Absolutely. The movement has made diversity a strength rather than a weakness. It’s an extremely complicated task, but it just goes to show that the movement is sincere in its ambition to meet the challenges offered by the current social reality.

For example, among the principles we’ve established for the March 8 strike is the idea that feminism is capable of constructing its own genealogy; that is to say, through feminism, one can produce a feminist understanding of labor that would lead you through a whole discussion of the informal sector, the formal sector, and so on.

Effectively, you decenter the historical idea of March 8 — the date commemorating the death of women in the factory — by shifting emphasis to the present moment, where women are not only dying in factories but also being murdered in their own neighborhoods.

This becomes a question of mapping the terrain of the popular economy

— that is, the economy of all those excluded from the formal sector — and coming to a better understanding of other forms of exploitation that feminism can also illuminate. How do we relate the femicides in Latin America to current forms of exploitation and value extraction? How are these murders giving way to new kinds of struggle?

Autonomous bodies and sexual dissidents — this is the other principle that we have established. This principle acts as a charter for producing subjectivities, for connecting territories, and for building community. There’s something interesting in this relation between the intersection of subjectivities and the desire for a community — community understood not as something complete, the ever-romanticized, mythical community to which we are always trying to return, but as the desire to be together and, through being together, constituting political power.

Here too, the act of occupying the streets is clearly important. There is a dispute over who controls the streets, where occupying the streets produces a collective strength that you can bring back with you — to the neighborhood, the schools, the university, and so on — as a kind of mark that recalls a type of collectively built strength. The connection between these street demonstrations and the everyday organizing work taking place in different sectors of society is growing stronger and producing a very powerful dynamic of politicization.

**Is it possible to speak of a uniquely Latin American feminism? If so, what sort of lessons might it offer for those outside the region?**

Comrades throughout Latin America are now discussing the incidence of femicides in connection with land appropriation, particularly in Honduras and Guatemala. We have seen murders, like Berta Cáceres’s, that specifically target women who are leading the fight against transnational capital.

In these cases, we can see how Latin

America's specific contribution is toward a better understanding of how this new kind of warfare is unfolding in our territories, a kind of warfare where these femicides function almost like a counterinsurgency tactic. Likewise, how this kind of warfare is reconfiguring the current terrain, forcing us to think about what it would mean to build community power and a movement where women act as the protagonists. My sense is that Latin America offers a forceful example of the issues involved in this dispute over territorial control.

**In Latin America, we are seeing a new feminist movement that has largely broken away from traditional political structures emerge: a "women's vanguard," if you will. What can feminism offer to these other political struggles?**

In Latin America, the Left and the resistance to the right-wing resurgence has come to be embodied in the Vatican. The shadow cast by the Pope, who very vocally criticizes capitalism on the international stage, has meant that leftist critique tends to gravitate toward his example.

Meanwhile, feminism offers a woman-centered political subject with a markedly different orientation because, in the first place, it questions authority and maintains a basic attitude of insubordination with respect to existing organizations.

The call to strike has stirred up a bit of chaos within the existing trade union structure. Union leadership at all the major federations has emphatically and publicly said that they would not call for a strike because, they say, "the strike weapon is ours and ours alone."

As that's happening, young rank-and-file women are forming internal commissions where they are pressing for the appropriation of the strike method. For a younger generation of women in Argentina, participating in the feminist movement and being active in trade-union politics are part of the same experience. Granted, for a certain part of the older leadership one can't possibly be both a union leader and a feminist, but for the younger generation, the confluence of

the two political tendencies has been astounding.

Feminism today has the potential to insinuate a level of insubordination and noncompliance into all types of organizations "a type of transversal logic that cuts across all different types of institutions. As you can imagine, Angela Davis's ideas and the concept of intersectionality have also enjoyed a positive reception here.

In Argentina, the women's movement has managed to displace the Pope as the authority for left critique, and the Latin American church has been unequivocal in its reaction to this paradigm shift, branding this "ideology of gender" "as they call it" "as public enemy number one. Whether you consider the case of the evangelist movement in Brazil, or the mayor of Rio de Janeiro, or the way Dilma Rousseff's impeachment was littered with references to God, the institution of the family, and so on, it's clear that the church is mounting a counteroffensive against the "ideology of gender."

There is a significant amount of animosity toward the strike coming from certain parts of organized labor. Argentina's largest labor federation, the General Confederation of Labor (CGT), announced its plans for a march "not even a strike, mind you" on March 7, the day before the International Women's Strike.

The media has fallen in line, providing massive amounts of coverage for that march and the potential significance it might hold for the realignment of forces within the Justicialist Party [the Peronist party]. Meanwhile, the March 8 strike has become a sideshow, and on the rare occasion it gets some coverage, the media always seems to revert back to its fixation on the idea that these political mobilizations actually tend to aggravate gender violence.

It's as if women get to be in charge of feminism, while men are left to deal with the entire question of organized labor and "politics." It seems clear that the increased number of femicides is actually a disciplinary strategy and a way of challenging women's autonomy.

There have been fifty-three femicides in the last forty-seven days. The numbers are actually higher than the previous year. They also tend to be serial in their logic: a series of murders by impalement, and later, three cases taking place one after another in the prisons. No one seems to care that the perpetrators go free or that femicides are being committed inside the penitentiary system. Not to mention the latest trend, femicides where the aggressor kills everyone "the sister, the sister-in-law, family members, and so on.

These femicides are expressed as a kind of message "Rita Segato has called this type of message "a pedagogy of cruelty" "and the media tends to pick up on this and feed on it. The overall message is a disciplinary one. There is a strong campaign of blame in the works as we speak, one that will argue that the more women mobilize and struggle for autonomy, the worse the backlash will be.

Here too the question of self-defense becomes relevant. On the one hand, the movement can make demands of the state, and no matter how limited that horizon may be, we have to continue to demand some reaction from the state. This, indeed, should form an important part of our agenda.

Having said that, it's fairly clear that absent some self-defense mechanism, some tool for collective self-preservation, there's simply no way to alter the current course of things. It would seem that for every gesture of autonomy a new form of violence also surfaces.

**One of the standout topics in the months leading up to the strike was whether men would participate in the March 8 action. Do you see any signs suggesting the emergence of new subjectivities or new masculinities that could participate in building a new feminism and joining in the fight against patriarchy?**

The media became really obsessed with this question. There's an age-old strategy for infantilizing feminists that basically consists of accusing the movement of being overly sectarian,

and the media always runs with this. Later, the same debate reemerges in women's assemblies, but there the consensus usually focuses on the idea that female protagonism is paramount and that the men therefore ought to step aside; or better, they ought to begin to think about how to participate in a movement where they don't occupy center stage.

The task of sorting out the role that men will play is one that men themselves will have to figure out.

**I'm wondering too about this global convergence that we're witnessing around the International Women's Strike. What can you say about the processes that are driving this confluence?**

Italy has one of the strongest movements. But wherever you look, you can see that it's truly massive, with a great deal of organization and deliberation coming out of women's assemblies all over the place. Poland represents an important precedent, and there is also action taking place in Ireland around the issue of abortion. I also get the impression that in countries like Germany, France, and Spain the event will go forward but perhaps on a smaller scale.

Latin America is remarkable for the level of coordination and organization that has been achieved in the months leading up to the strike. We're in contact with all types of organizations, feminist and otherwise, with lawyers, community organizations, high-school groups, and so on. A multiplicity of

voices is contributing to the organization, and it's created a movement that can speak in many different political idioms.

For example, we've been talking with women from Paraguay who are at the forefront of the fight against big agribusiness and agrochemicals in their country. A multiplicity of struggles are finding a space within feminism and dragging that movement out of the ghetto, so to speak.

We won't allow ourselves to be labeled as separatist; we won't be painted into a corner as a movement that only thinks in terms of victimhood. I don't personally like the term "empowerment," but there is a process of building power and experimenting with power that is important.

The current moment's transnational dimension is very heartening because it represents a logic that operates within territorial conflicts rather than at the level of the nation-state. And unlike the antiglobalization movements from previous decades, I see this current movement as somehow more embodied and full-blooded. The focus has broadened beyond the march, beyond the political event. The idea of putting on a spectacular march is still there, but one senses that a substantial social base is supporting it now.

Likewise, it's interesting to think about the current situation in Latin America in light of the women's movement. It's become commonplace to recognize that the era of progressive politics in Latin America is

coming to an end — that we've effectively entered a neoconservative cycle. And yet the women's movement proposes a different political calendar and a different type of political analysis that goes beyond the temporal frame of political cycles, operating on a level that sees past the most superficially apparent aspects of these governments.

The feminist movement is actively involved in exploring topics that basically transcend the progressive/conservative dualism — topics like the latest strategies for exploiting women's bodies, the exploitation of territories, the ideology of security as it is used to impose discipline. These and other issues allow us to shift the center of analysis and politicize areas that deserve more attention.

One of the most valuable things we did over these last several months was to work with the trade unions, which gave us a better understanding of the inner workings of syndicalism. Between the October 19 action and the present, there's been an enhanced and reconceptualized appreciation of what the strike instrument can mean.

As opposed to the idea that the strike is an outdated tool useful only for a small labor aristocracy — the few who can still strike — this entire idea of the strike has been repurposed and put to work for other ends, and can hopefully even provide the impetus to rethink questions related to the nature of work and exploitation.

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## A Partial Peace in Colombia

27 March 2017, by **Kevin Young**

The accord includes mechanisms for disarmament and reintegration of guerrilla fighters, lenient sentencing for those who confess to committing acts of violence, and an allotment of 10 congressional seats for FARC

politicians for eight years. Separate peace talks with the smaller National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla force are now underway.

Most of Colombia's independent

progressive movements support the accord, but also stress its limitations. The Agrarian Summit (Cumbre Agraria), a nationwide "peasant, ethnic, and popular" coalition formed in 2014, sees in the accord a potential



"end to the enormous suffering that the armed conflict has caused." But as it said in November, the right is still "killing us."

In 2016 state and right-wing paramilitary forces killed at least 114 labor unionists, peasants, indigenous people, Afro-descendants and other human rights defenders, including 30 in the three months after the ceasefire began. The paramilitaries have publicly promised that these murders will continue.

Progressive movements like the Summit and the People's Congress, a nationwide peace and justice coalition, strongly reject a "neoliberal peace," one that involves simply "laying down arms" while ignoring the "structural causes" of violence. But the government has refused to challenge the power of capitalists. President Juan Manuel Santos has repeatedly promised that "our model of development isn't changing" and that "private property won't be affected."

The text of the accord does talk about returning stolen land and democratizing land ownership, but those provisions (as is the entire accord) are entirely dependent on "existing laws" and the "good faith" of the government and large landowners.

The peace will thus be partial, in both senses of the word: limited in its delivery of physical security for activists, and strongly biased in favor of capitalist interests.

Despite its many limitations, though, the accord could eventually open new political space for progressive and leftist forces. The extent to which it does so will depend on a range of actors, including capitalists, the U.S. government, and Colombia's own popular movements.

The struggles among and within those forces will determine whether the accord brings continued neoliberalism and violence in the guise of peace or, in the words of the Agrarian Summit, the "peace that we aspire to, with no more victims."

## Is Peace Good for Profits?

The final, revised accord followed four years of negotiations and voters' narrow rejection of a prior version in an October referendum. [1] Far-right former president Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010) had vehemently attacked the deal and his own former ally, President Santos (2010-present), demagogically accusing Santos of "handing the country to the FARC."

Uribe's campaign to derail peace also alleged that Santos was undermining "family values" by allowing gay rights reforms, rhetorically linking the guerrillas' attacks on the nation to the assault on the nuclear family. [2]

The Uribe-Santos feud is a conflict within the Colombian right, with the two leaders representing disparate capitalist blocs. Uribe represents the rural elites who specialize in cattle ranching, land speculation, and narcotrafficking. Those elites have repeatedly crushed agrarian reform initiatives since the 1940s.

They have created and funded the paramilitary death squads which, alongside the Colombian state, have historically committed "and continue to commit" the vast majority of massacres and other human rights violations. [3] And they have been the prime beneficiaries of the paramilitary theft of eight million hectares of land "15% of the national territory" since the 1980s.

This bloc, along with Colombia's military- and security-industrial complex, has been the biggest winner from the war and the repression it enables. Not surprisingly, the president of the cattle ranchers' federation (FEDEGAN) has been a vocal critic of the peace accord and of a 2011 land restitution law. This far-right faction is currently "strengthening paramilitarism and is designating anyone who advocates peace as a military target," says Afro-Colombian activist Francia Márquez.

Uribe and other far-right politicians have an added interest in scuttling the peace accord. Since the accord

promises light sentencing for military and paramilitary members who confess their crimes, the Uribistas are terrified that paramilitaries will disclose their connections to civilian officials like Uribe.

Some, like the notorious Salvatore Mancuso, have already done so, contributing to the "para-politics" scandal that engulfed Uribe's administration and forced the dissolution of his secret police agency. In 2008 Uribe furtively extradited 14 paramilitary leaders to the United States on drug charges, presumably so that they would not incriminate him in Colombia.

President Santos, on the other hand, draws support from a more transnationally-oriented elite power bloc, composed of sectors like finance, insurance, telecommunications, media, tourism, and some mining and agribusiness interests. The rising prominence of the National Business Council (Consejo Gremial Nacional) since its formation in 1991 is a measure of these sectors' strengthened influence in the country.

Many leaders in these sectors have come to see the impact of the armed conflict as net-negative. War offers an excuse to repress dissent, but is undesirable in other ways. It imposes "opportunity costs" by impeding "foreign and national capital investments," said Nicanor Restrepo, the late leader of the Antioquian Syndicate. [4]

Restrepo and many other business executives publicly supported Santos in his 2014 reelection showdown against the pro-war, Uribista candidate Áscar Zuluaga. Some in this bloc expect that peace will open up new geographic areas for mining, oil drilling and industrial agriculture.

In April 2016, the Canadian ambassador predicted that peace will mean "that businesses in the mining and energy sector" "many of which hail from Canada" "can enter socially conflictive zones that they haven't entered before." Juan Carlos Echeverry, president of Colombia's nominally public state oil company, told reporters around the same time that "with peace, we hope to be able

to enter Caquetá, Putumayo, Arauca,” and other rural regions “with greater strength.”

Capitalists are also salivating over government promises to create new Rural Economic Development Zones (zidres) that would hand over huge territories to large private interests, plans which the Agrarian Summit and others have strongly criticized.

The disagreement between the two blocs is strategic, not principled. Santos has continued the business-friendly economic policies of Uribe, and his promises to maintain those policies were one condition of elite support for the peace process.

Nor is Santos a genuine believer in peace. He was Uribe’s defense minister during the peak of the military’s “false positives” strategy, in which at least 4,300 civilians were murdered and dressed as guerrillas to inflate body counts. During his own presidency, Santos has continued counterinsurgent warfare and helped guarantee impunity for right-wing violence.

Rather than principle, it was capitalist reassessment of opportunity costs, the government’s inability to completely defeat the FARC, popular pressures for peace, and the mediation role of international actors — most notably the Cuban, Norwegian and Venezuelan governments — that led to the peace deal.

## U.S. Staying Power

Tepid U.S. support for the peace accord, like Santos’ own pursuit of the accord, seems to reflect a shifting strategic calculus. The Obama administration played an ambivalent role, rhetorically supporting peace and sending a special envoy but not rebuking the Uribistas’ sabotage of the process.

With the Colombian state incapable of totally vanquishing the FARC, and the peace accord’s preservation of basic capitalist prerogatives, many top leaders in Washington favored negotiations.

Moreover, an accord promised certain

benefits: it would guarantee a more stable environment for foreign investment and, in the words of U.S. peace envoy Bernard Aronson, send a “signal about American staying power” in Latin America, a region beset in the early twenty-first century by challenges to U.S. imperialism.

U.S. policy toward Colombia has historically pursued a consistent, bipartisan set of goals, though employing varying strategies over time.

Republicans have been avid promoters of terror in Colombia, and Donald Trump will likely continue that legacy. But it was a liberal Democrat, John F. Kennedy, who sent Special Forces General William Yarborough to Colombia to promote the use of, in Yarborough’s words, “paramilitary, sabotage, and/or terrorist activities against known Communist proponents.” [5] Those activities included the use of napalm and other scorched-earth tactics against rural villages.

Since the 1990s there continues to be relatively little difference among presidential administrations regarding Colombia policy. Uribe and Santos have both garnered bipartisan praise in Washington for their staunch support of neoliberalism and U.S. policy in the Americas.

The \$10 billion aid package known as Plan Colombia, initiated by Bill Clinton, has made Colombia the region’s biggest recipient of U.S. military aid since the 1990s. [6] Over that same time period, the Colombian government has by far the worst human rights record in South America, with thousands of progressive activists and social “disposables” murdered by state and paramilitary forces.

The correlation between U.S. support and state brutality is not coincidental. A systematic 2010 study by the Center for Global Development identified “a distinct, asymmetric pattern: when U.S. military aid increases, attacks by paramilitaries, who are known to work with the military, increase more in municipalities with [Colombian military] bases.”

A separate study by the Fellowship of Reconciliation and U.S. Office on Colombia found that “areas where Colombian army units received the largest increases in U.S. assistance reported increased extrajudicial killings on average.”

The U.S. government has always been aware of the Colombian military’s “death squad tactics” (as noted by the CIA in 1994), as well as its close ties to paramilitaries. The paramilitaries, as U.S. officials also know, have drawn a large share of their funding from narcotrafficking. Yet without batting an eye, the U.S. government has always publicly claimed that the FARC is the main source of drug trafficking and terrorist violence.

This dogma shaped Plan Colombia, which was purportedly designed to fight narcotics and terrorism. As anthropologist Winifred Tate notes, “Even though the vast majority of the drug trade was being conducted by right-wing paramilitary forces” — who were also committing most of the terror — “U.S. officials focused almost exclusively on the guerrillas.” [7]

Some Democrats have periodically expressed concern for human rights, but such concern has never interfered with the policy of U.S. support for the Colombian government. Under the Obama administration, the labor attaché at the U.S. embassy in Bogotá privately admitted that the 2011 “Labor Action Plan” that accompanied the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement was toothless, while the office of the U.S. Trade Representative frankly stated in 2015 that the continued widespread murder of labor unionists does not constitute a violation of the agreement.

Neither the peace accord nor the Trump presidency will dramatically alter U.S. policy. Formal peace may eventually undermine the pretext for high levels of military aid to Colombia, but that aid had already been tapering off somewhat in recent years, part of a geographic reorientation to Mexico and Central America.

Neither the close military partnership nor the basic goals of U.S. policy are likely to change in the near future. On

the contrary, top players in Washington see the accord as a way to advance those goals.

## Prospects for a New Left

One of the most important consequences of the peace accord could be the opening of new political space for the left, broadly defined.

Many on the left are justifiably scared of a repetition of the late 1980s and 1990s, when the right murdered between 3,000 and 4,000 members of the Patriotic Union, a leftist civilian party formed in the midst of peace negotiations between the FARC and government.

Yet an end to the guerrilla struggle is a positive development, even if a few on the international left still cling to a romantic view of the FARC. While the FARC's stated goals are indeed revolutionary, the group's actions have long since alienated it from the large majority of the population. Since the 1980s its frequent brutality against civilians and its increased reliance on drug money have foreclosed any chance of it leading a broad, cross-sector alliance.

The Colombian right, meanwhile, has benefitted tremendously from the FARC's unpopularity, successfully equating the FARC with "the left" in the public mind and using the guerrillas as a pretext to repress nonviolent challengers. Whatever the guerrillas' accomplishments in some parts of the countryside, their net effect on the left is decidedly negative.

To be sure, the right will remain perfectly willing to use violence. The early months of "peace" have seen no abatement of violence against civilian activists. Francia Márquez, who has organized struggles against dispossession by mining companies in her home region of Cauca, warns that paramilitaries will continue to play the role of "clearing the path" for businesses that "seek to enter our territories with greater strength" under the peace accord.

But the formal end to the war could also constrain the right's freedom to engage in extermination and its ability to discredit progressive demands. For this reason, the peace accord may create new opportunities for civilian social movements.

Those movements can build on existing foundations. In recent decades the indigenous and Afro-Colombian movements in departments like Cauca, Valle del Cauca, and Chocó have been at the forefront of popular struggles.

Starting with the historic 2013 agrarian strike, a broad, multiethnic peasant movement has mounted hundreds of marches, protests and popular assemblies in opposition to neoliberal trade agreements, rural inequality, resource extraction and racism. In June 2016 Agrarian Summit member organizations blockaded over 100 roads in 23 of Colombia's 32 departments.

Some of these mobilizations drew substantial support from urban workers, students and professionals. Students showed impressive mobilization capacity of their own when threatened with an education privatization reform in 2011.

There have also been several attempts at coalition-building around anticapitalist platforms in recent years. The People's Congress and Agrarian Summit are two such initiatives, and the Patriotic March formed in 2012 is another. These coalitions have played leadership roles in the broader peace movement, which has itself facilitated the "unity of popular, democratic, and progressive sectors," as the People's Congress hoped in 2013.

Overall, however, left fragmentation and weakness remain the dominant patterns. Only a tiny portion of the population is involved in grassroots political activity. In many poor urban neighborhoods, the only organizations are gangs and evangelical churches. Unions have been decimated by violence and neoliberal labor laws.

As anthropologist Lesley Gill has noted, the hegemonic framework of "human rights" in progressive circles reflects the weakening of collective, class-based politics in recent decades. [8] At the level of political parties, the Alternative Democratic Pole is a significant opposition force, but lacks a mass membership base and connections to popular struggles.

The growth of a mass-based left will require building new organizations at the local level that can address popular grievances while fostering solidarity across geographic and sectorial boundaries. The cities, home to two-thirds of Colombians and long neglected by the left, must be a special priority.

## A New Historical Era?

There is some reason for hope. Recent years have seen impressive levels of civilian political mobilization. An industry coalition, the Mining and Energy Committee, recently warned that the peace accord may bring "an increase in nonviolent social protest." And despite the horrific repression and violence for which Colombia is known, the country's history is filled with courageous resistance movements that might serve as inspiration. [9]

What sort of peace will emerge is still unclear, for the implementation of the accord will be fiercely contested in practice. But as the People's Congress argued in 2013, the process may "make possible the construction of a popular bloc that allows us to alter the correlation of forces on the national level," a bloc that can confront both the "militarist sectors" of the elite that continue to sponsor death squads and the "sectors that opt for peace but are unwilling to accept change."

The peace accord offers the potential, at least, for "the opening of a new historical era: that of greater popular mobilization, constructing a country with social justice."

[Against the Current](#)



# The storm and the compass

26 March 2017, by **Léon Crémieux**

Even though unexpected situations have multiplied over the last few weeks, the most probable outcome now is that neither the PS nor LR will be present in the second round of the presidential election on May 7th. This unprecedented situation will have ripple effects on the election of the National Assembly. In France, the electoral mechanics introduced since 2002 have made the presidential election the lever for the election of the Assembly, which takes place a few weeks later, with the party of the president-elect systematically receiving a boost for its candidates.

We are therefore probably on the eve of a serious reorganization in the field of institutional political parties and perhaps a wider political crisis.

Three new phenomena have been at work in recent weeks:

## - An unprecedented crisis of the LR party

This was triggered by the revelation of embezzlement and misappropriation of public funds by François Fillon, the LR candidate for president. The investigative journalists of the *Canard enchaîné* and *Médiapart*, in particular, have for two months been distilling new elements that highlight practices which, although there is nothing new about them and François Fillon has no monopoly of them, have a deleterious effect. Fillon, who had built his campaign, during the primaries of the Right, around an image of "Mr. Clean", appears as the champion of misappropriation of funds for personal benefit. For more than a month, his campaign has been inaudible, totally stifled by his "affair" and his narcissistic obstinacy to maintain his candidacy. Little by little, during the month of February, practically all the leaders of the LR, with Sarkozy at their head, became convinced of the major risk represented by maintaining Fillon's

candidacy and tried to find an alternative solution so that the Right would be present in the second round. But if Fillon succeeded in winning in the December primaries against the "natural" candidates of the right - Sarkozy and Juppé - it was because of the weakening, the discrediting of these leaders with the most reactionary electorate, who preferred to plebiscite a conservative and ultra-liberal Catholic. Between March 1st and 5th, with the announcement of the coming indictment of Fillon, almost all the LR leaders asked him to withdraw - starting with his spokesperson and his campaign manager. The ally of LR, the centrists of the UDI, "suspended" their support.

But the leadership of the party did not have the strength to compel Fillon to resign. First of all, it did not succeed in agreeing to put forward an alternative candidate who could bring together the various currents. Then Fillon himself proclaimed that he would maintain his candidacy come what may, conducting a battle against the apparatus of his party. Totally isolated within it, but understanding the weakness of its leadership, he played the card of mobilizing, outside the party, the most conservative, the most reactionary wing of his supporters, organized by the movement "Common Sense" (set up in 2014 from the activists of the "Demo for all"; the opponents of gay marriage). With the support of Common Sense and the far-right weekly *Valeurs Actuelles*, Fillon organized a demonstration on March 5th to support him, aiming to denounce "the judges" and to force the party apparatus to accept him. He pulled off the *coup de force* of staying in the race, building on the success of the rally of 40 to 50,000 demonstrators in the Place du Trocadéro in Paris.

Within 48 hours, the leadership of LR had capitulated "in unity", and

renewed its support for François Fillon, for fear of seeing whole layers of his most reactionary electorate go over to Marine Le Pen. The same people who, in the name of probity in politics, had criticized Fillon the day before and demanded his withdrawal finally put their hat on over their "morals". Similarly, the UDI centrists, who could not find harsh enough words for Fillon a few days before, renewed their support in exchange for twenty more candidates for the legislative elections... All this would just make us laugh if it was not the sign of a decay of LR, of its submission to its most reactionary wing under the pressure of the National Front, of a strong political polarization to the right. On the other hand, disaffection multiplied in the wing of the party around Alain Juppé, several of whose supporters joined the campaign of Emmanuel Macron.

## - The announced break-up of the Socialist Party

There too, centrifugal tendencies are at work. Hamon exchanged the benevolence of the leadership of the PS - which accepted him as its official candidate - against a dull, colourless campaign, putting aside any criticism of the record of the Hollande governments. A campaign without any sharp edges, which could only manage to obtain the withdrawal of the EELV (Green party) in his favour, there too in exchange for about forty constituencies reserved for them in the legislative elections [10].

Some people compared Hamon's victory to a French-style "Corbyn effect." This was partially true from the point of view of the action of left-wing voters in the primaries, who wanted to sanction the liberal policies of Valls [11] and the presidency of Hollande. But the comparison stops there. As soon as he was elected, Hamon started to behave himself and took his place in the PS apparatus,

even asserting that he defended the bulk of Hollande's record.

There is not a shadow of popular mobilization around Benoît Hamon's campaign and even his flagship measure of a universal income has become bogged down in the necessary compromises with the PS leadership. Hamon is in no way an anti-austerity candidate, a candidate breaking with the liberal rules of the European Union. His allegiance to the apparatus has not prevented a slow hemorrhage for two months of PS members of parliament and party officials joining the ranks of the supporters of Emmanuel Macron: the latest to date are Bertrand Delanöe, former PS mayor of Paris and Jean Yves Le Drian, Minister of Defence.

The certainty of the absence of Hamon in the second round is leading to a particular climate within the PS. The leadership officially continues to assure Hamon of its support and makes threats of expulsion and refusal of the party's nomination against all those who would sponsor Macron's candidacy. At the same time, more and more leaders and elected officials are preparing for after the first round. An appeal of PS MPs is being circulated surreptitiously and Claude Bartolone, Socialist President of the National Assembly, considers that he is ready to vote Macron "if democracy is in danger and it is the only alternative." His political friend Manuel Valls, beaten by Benoît Hamon in the primaries, has just publicly announced his refusal to support Hamon. The vast majority of ministers remain on the sidelines of the PS campaign, expressing a silent sympathy for Macron. Francois Hollande himself displays this silent support.

Many are hoping for a scenario that is unlikely to happen. In this scenario, the second round of the presidential elections opens up a space for the PS to make an alliance with Emmanuel Macron, mitigating the consequences of the failure of Hamon during the legislative elections. Because the PS, just like LR, is afraid that the Macron effect will sweep away its candidates in the legislative elections in June. In any case, the upcoming elections will have a corrosive effect on the Socialist Party. Although the candidacy of a

"dissident" has blocked any rise of Mélenchon (see below), combined with the push of the social-liberal Macron it will certainly lead to an explosion of the PS if Macron wins. The project of Manuel Valls, of a democratic party like the Democratic Party of Matteo Renzi, is likely to be concretized... without the PS, or at least on its ashes! Indeed, faced with Macron the PS as such will have no relationship of force against him.

### **- The catch-all offensive of Emmanuel Macron.**

Coming from the social-liberal orientation of Hollande and Valls, having emancipated himself from the PS and its balance sheet, he has succeeded, for the moment, where many had failed before him, in creating a centre-right movement capable of overcoming social democracy and the Christian-Democratic allies of the Gaullist movement.

He comes across in the media as breaking with the old parties, portraying a young, modern image on questions of society and a liberal one on economic issues. He proclaims his intention of at least half of his candidates for the legislative elections coming from "civil society", that is to say without any political background. From the outset, he has refused any apparatus type of agreement with currents coming from the PS or the Right, and his strength in the polls, the success of his meetings and the polarization of the media behind him give him the means to maintain this position.

Obviously, the policies proposed by Macron are nothing new. They have their source in the liberal measures developed under Sarkozy and Hollande, of whom he was an adviser and a minister. The main author of his programme is Jean Pisani-Ferry, an economist and senior civil servant, a social-liberal with a long experience in ministerial circles, notably around Dominique Strauss-Kahn. The economic programme is not innovative, focusing on lower spending and public revenues, the perpetuation of employers' exemptions on wages and taxes, new de-structuring of the Labour Code and

the gradual transition to retirement income based on pension funds.

To organize the "rejuvenation" of his elected representatives and correspondents in the regions, he has appointed an old political operator, who was a parliamentarian under Chirac, Jean-Paul Délevoye. But the image is that of renewal. Moreover, Macron can polarize more effectively in the PS as well as in LR because the profiles of candidates of these parties obviously create a force of attraction towards the centre... Valls and Juppé would have considerably reduced the space of Emmanuel Macron.

Moreover, the polls over recent weeks have made him "the only one capable of beating Marine Le Pen", polarizing even a left electorate that fought the Macron and El Khomri laws. Today, even without a previously constituted party, Macron benefits from enough defectors from the PS, UDI and LR to structure his campaign and prepare the legislative elections. In the event of a victory in the presidential elections, he can therefore afford to maintain an official position of refusing any agreement for the legislative elections with the apparatus of the PS or the partisans of Juppé. As a result, the question of alliances would be postponed until June. In any case its success would have an explosive effect on the PS and a corrosive on the UDI-LR Right.

## **A polarization to the far right**

All these elements reinforce the polarization towards the far right through Marine Le Pen, so much so that her presence in the second round is assured and her election in the second round is not to be ruled out. As in many European countries, the far right has reaped the fruits of the social crisis by playing on the mechanics of a nationalist withdrawal into identity, to which, in the absence of an anti-capitalist political pole active in the popular strata, many voters affected by austerity policies can be attracted. The liberal policies pursued by social democracy have accentuated these phenomena.

In addition, security policy, state Islamophobia and the institutional racism of the Valls government have also brought grist to the mill of the National Front. The influence of the FN has developed on a broad scale within the army and the police, whose most reactionary tendencies have been flattered by Socialist governments. The refusal to accept migrants and the ultra-security policies developed after the terrorist attacks were also capitalized on by both the most reactionary wing of LR and the FN. The polls show that in the present electoral maelstrom, Le Pen's electorate remains stable, even being not very sensitive to financial affairs, in which the National Front is also involved.

To the left of the PS, the perspectives do not match the scale of the political crisis.

Jean Luc Mélenchon has succeeded in imposing his candidacy on his partners of a Left Front which he himself scuttled so that no one could control his self-proclaimed candidacy with "France insoumise" (Unsubmissive France, FI) whose local representatives and campaign themes are under the exclusive control of Mélenchon himself. This autocratic campaign, which claimed a few months ago to be the alternative to Sarkozy and Hollande, has been destabilized by subsequent vicissitudes. Stuck on around 10 per cent, it only appears as the fifth wheel of the electoral competition. From that point, the purely personal aspect of his campaign, in a posture inherited from Mitterrand, has a catastrophic boomerang effect.

He explicitly refused to base his campaign on an organized convergence of political forces and fronts of social mobilization. His programme, even though it takes up a whole series of questions that have been present in the social mobilizations of recent years, moulds them and reconfigures them along republican and chauvinistic lines, such as the way its meetings close with the singing of the national anthem. The forces which, alongside the Left Party,

support him, are reduced to the role of extras and spectators, the spokespersons of the campaign being personally appointed by JLM. The PCF continues up to now its fight to ensure that FI does not present candidates against 15 PCF candidates, including 10 sitting MPs. JLM's refusal to sign up to this commitment led the PCF to block its 850 elected representatives from signing his nomination papers, delaying until the end the confirmation of JLM's candidacy [12]. This episode of electoral bargaining is similar to the one between the PS and EELV or between LR and the UDI. This illustrates above all the lack of dynamics of the Mélenchon campaign, freewheeling on the axis of the supreme saviour of the Left. It is therefore certain that it brings together many militants of the trade union movement and the social movement who are backing him in order to express a vote to the left of the PS which has some weight.

But this leaves open the essential question for those who, on multiple fronts, are fighting against liberal and reactionary policies. One year after the most powerful social movement in the country since 1995, the only real political polarization is to the right. Tens of thousands of protesters managed to paralyze the Notre Dame des Landes airport project, tens of thousands of activists mobilized in the country to welcome migrants, numerous workers' strikes, some more important than others, mark each month the different regions of the country, on questions of wages or employment. Important mobilizations have taken place and will take place against police violence and state racism, such as the murder of Adama Traoré last summer in the Oise department and the rape of young Theo in the woods in Aulnay in February. This violence, benefiting from the climate of impunity of the police, reveals not "regrettable incidents", but a racism structured by the practices of state institutions and government policies. To counter it, a political anti-racism is being built.

All these social mobilizations

demonstrate the resistance of the popular strata, they all point to the need for a global political project of social justice in the face of capitalist exploitation and discrimination. Fillon's affairs have, once again, revealed the practices of politicians who enrich themselves, engage in all sorts of shady dealings and impose on the working classes the questioning of the basic rights of workers. They are really no more than the reflection of the big capitalist corporate executives who enjoy generous bonuses while implementing redundancy plans and productivity gains. The struggles of workers at Air France and Goodyear were the echo of these social demands. The Fillon affair brings to the forefront democratic demands for popular control and for questioning how institutions function. The Nuit Debout movement expressed these democratic demands. We would not be able to understand the shock waves that the revelations of the *Canard enchaîné* about Fillon produced if we did not relate it to the disaffection and the profound rejection of political institutions on the part of the popular strata, among whom abstention is steadily increasing.

All these elements of mobilization, these social and democratic demands are present, in a fragmented way, in the background of the political situation but they have not exerted much influence up to now, they do not provide a compass in a presidential campaign polarized by the centre-right of Macron, the extreme right of Fillon, and the far right of Le Pen.

The activists of the NPA have succeeded in obtaining the 500 signatures necessary for Philippe Poutou to stand in the presidential election. The aim of the NPA in this campaign is precisely to put forward the need for a new representation of the exploited and the oppressed, to be the bearer of the project of a society rid of all oppressions. This demand, this project can echo the expectations of many activists of the social movement. The coming weeks, whatever happens, will make this necessity even more urgent.

# The 15 March was a great starting point: Pensions yes! Temer no!

25 March 2017, by **Fernando Silva**

But beyond the universal anger at the attack on Brazilians' right to retire, the streets also rang with a significant and sharp rejection of the coup-mongering, Temer government itself. It was no accident that one of the most important slogans of the Women's Day demonstrations a week earlier, appeared again on 15 March - "Pensions stay, Temer go!". Even the cameras of TV Globo, with their "prudent" coverage of the 15th, could not hide the banners and placards that people placed next to their reporters, saying "Out with Temer!".

The 15 March, following on from the big mobilizations in Brazil on 8 March, could open a new opportunity for social resistance against the ultra-liberal reforms, and also against the conservative advance in Brazil and the region. To succeed in this, the organizations that led the 15M demonstrations will have to maintain their unity in action, with the aim of organizing new mobilizations and initiatives to block the pension reform in particular.

## Deepening political crisis

The possibility of social resistance is strengthened by the political and institutional crisis "upstairs", among the elite, with the publication, that same Wednesday, of Janot's "second list" (of political figures to be investigated over the Petrobras and Odebrecht corruption scandals), which is a direct blow to the Temer government.

The federal Attorney General, Rodrigo Janot, sent to the Supreme Court requests to investigate 107 politicians enjoying parliamentary or other immunity. These include the

government's two main political operators, senators and federal deputies from the main governmental parties, the speakers of the upper and lower houses, many of the top leaders of the PMDB, the PSDB and, once again, the PT. They are being investigated for electoral crimes, corruption, money laundering and criminal association, based on testimony from the plea bargain by executives of the country's biggest construction group, Odebrecht, as part of the Petrobras corruption scandal. Janot also sent to the Supreme Court requests to investigate 10 of the country's 27 state governors.

Add to this steaming cauldron the extreme unpopularity of the Temer government, as well as the deepening of the economic crisis, and we have a situation in which there is a real possibility of blocking the pension reform. That would not be any old victory, because it could politically destroy the Temer government and its usefulness to capital in Brazil. This may be the best way of bringing about the "Out with Temer", because the issues raised in the streets, and the growing strength of the struggles "downstairs", are closely tied to the crisis "upstairs".

In spite of the scale of the attacks the government is preparing against workers and the people, in spite of the importance of the labour reforms for big capital, and in spite of the resonance that the slogan "Out with Temer" has at all the demonstrations, including at Carnival, it is the struggle against pension reform that has the greatest potential to mobilise and unite. This is the counter reform that affects everyone, and which will end the right to retire, with a ferocity and to a degree unparalleled on our continent. It is a proposal that involves making working time equal for men

and women, when it's well known that men and women do not work the same in this world; it involves paying contributions for 49 years to have the right to a full pension; it ties social assistance for the poorest to readjustments in the minimum wage, in an attempt to phase out this help to those in acute poverty. All of this is easy to explain and easy for the majority of the population to understand. In fact it is already well understood, as the 15 March made clear.

The challenge now is to build another day of action, which combines street demonstrations with new strikes and all sorts of other initiatives (petitions, referendums, etc.), that can help to draw the immense majority of the population into one big push to block the pension reform. This is the moment to build on the momentum and take advantage of the breach opened up by the protests of 15 March.

## Unity and contradictions within the left

We also need to mention the controversial presence of Lula on the 15 March, at the rally on the Avenida Paulista in Sao Paulo. Although this is a time for the broadest possible unity in action (and that means nobody should be vetoed from taking part in this broad front of unions, social movements and parties opposed to the Temer government and its reforms), we also need to make clear that this movement is not about supporting Lula standing for election in 2018. Among other reasons because, as president, his first big project was to begin a drastic reform of public sector



pensions. More importantly, because the failed model of class conciliation to protect the privileges of the bankers and landowners, which characterised the series of PT governments, is what opened the door to the defeat that the whole movement suffered with last year's parliamentary

coup.

The struggle against the pension reform unites all of the movement and the left. Lula does not unite them. For the left and the social movements face two big challenges. The first is

practical: to defeat the Temer government and its reforms. The second is more long-term and strategic: to fashion a project and a programme for Brazil that can also go beyond the class conciliation model of the pink period that has just come to a close in Brazil and in Latin America.

## The Freedom to Say "No":

24 March 2017, by **Uraz Aydin**

Whole cities are plastered with giant "Evet!" (Yes!) posters, which also dominates the TV channels, but opinion polls are still running surprisingly close. To shore up the nationalist vote, the state even produced a deliberately calculated diplomatic scandal with the Netherlands over the latter's unwillingness to have Turkish ministers campaign on its territory. At the same time, dozens of "Hayir!" (No!) rallies/ events are banned for mysterious "security reasons."

Indeed, the elimination of bases of opposition, which was intensified after the unsuccessful coup of July 2016, is now in full swing. While initiated to eliminate the sources of the coup, the state of emergency has now turned to leftist and Kurdish forces, generously applying to them the "terrorist" label. A particularly widespread form of silencing the opposition has been the firing of civil servants.

Talking to LeftEast about all this is Uraz Aydin, an editor of the Marxist journal Yeniyol, who has recently been fired from his faculty position at Marmara University. To support fired academics like Uraz, the Union of Educational Workers, E?itim Sen, has set up a solidarity fund. You can contribute to it (anonymously or publicly) by donating [here](#).

**Rossen Djagalov (RD): What I wanted to start with is the experience of being fired. At LeftEast we have been listing numbers of fired civil servants, closed media outlets, but that's a**

**rather impersonal picture. What did the firing look like from your point of view? What does it mean in practiced, being so fired? Do you have a sense of who produced those lists?**

Uraz Ayd?n (UA): Who made those lists is another question: I'll return to it later on. What happened to us is not simply being fired. We have been excluded from all public service positions. With this decree, our citizenship status was downgraded. Now we are second-class citizens. Some of our rights as citizens have been removed. For example, I don't have a passport now: it has been annulled. The technical justification is that the state can launch a court case against me and I should remain in the country. In practice, the state doesn't want the formation of an oppositional Turkish diaspora of the kind that appeared after the 1980 coup.

While I can be legally employed by, say, a private university, given this regime of fear, I cannot imagine a private university agreeing to put on its faculty lists black-listed people like me. All my professional careerâ€"my PhD, my scholarship, my teaching, my service for my university; I am 40 year-old-now now and still a research assistant because my university administration has made a point of not promoting activist facultyâ€"has been annulled with this decree.

The question who did it would take a longer answer. Who decided on the lists of people to be firedâ€"we don't know. I can speak most knowledgeably

about the category I belonged to, namely, signatories of the January 2016 petition "We will not be a party to this crime." The crime being referred to is what the Turkish state was doing at the time [second half of 2015] in the Kurdish Southeast and the choice of war Erdogan made with respect to the Kurdish movement. Erdogan had decided, "No more negotiations with the Kurdish movement. We have to go to war." Kandil (the PKK leadership) was ok with this. That's another problem we can talk about.

So, this petition was a protest against the destruction of Kurdish cities by the Turkish army. As soon as it came out, Erdogan burst out in anger against the signatories, calling us dark people, traitors, vowing that we would pay the price.

**RD: But were the lists composed by the university administratorsâ€"deans, presidentsâ€"or were they composed somewhere above.**

UA: You don't have to be a detective of course, to find the list of signatoriesâ€"they were online, but the work of compiling lists was done by universities and passed on to state. Some universities ditheredâ€"they didn't want to let go of some of their better-known professors. Some, like Marmara, my university, waited, but there was big pressure to produce and pass on the lists. The same kind of pressure is put now on Galatasaray U, Bogazici U, Mimar Sinan U, Middle Eastern Technical U.



**RD: So in your universities, the list comprises petition signatories and who else?**

UA: In my university, it was primarily petition signatories, but taken as a whole, the biggest part of dismissed Turkish academics are suspected members of the Gülen movement (or FETO, Gülenist Terror Organization, as the regime likes to call them). We'll never know for sure who is and who is not. I cannot speak particularly knowledgeably about them. Until the two fell out in 2013, AKP had promoted many Gülenist cadres in the academy as a counterpoint to secularists.

But specifically, the campaign against the petition signatories had three distinct functions. The first was to expel leftist militants (trade-union related or not) who had been visible in various social justice struggles at their universities. People who were on the first line of resistance. The message was also to the second line: if you are like them, you, too, will end up like this.

Another target was specifically the word "peace." The regime wants to say to us: be careful. Never let anyone put your name and the word "peace" on the same page. This was the punishment for the West (Istanbul, and the big cities in Western Turkey) expressing solidarity with the (Kurdish) Southeast. You are in the West—so shut the fuck up—and don't talk about what we are doing in the Southeast.

The third function has a more historical importance. In Turkey, and elsewhere as well, but in Turkey specifically, leftist ideas never achieved social hegemony, but in the sphere of cultural production, they have been hegemonic. Internationally, in the world of Turkish poetry, who do you know—Nazim Hikmet, of course; in prose—Yasar Kemal; in film—Yilmaz Guney. In cinema, poetry, social sciences, universities, the producers of qualitatively valued products are inspired by leftist ideas, which came in a certain way from Marxism, of course. So the expulsion of academics is part of the regime's attempt to break the left's cultural hegemony and make the conservative-

nationalist perspective hegemonic. Just last week, the government created the National Culture Council. They have—the AKP has—the social base. They are consolidating it, but they need the cultural means of production. Ideology is always an abstract thing, but it is produced and reproduced in concrete, and distributed in concrete, material ways. Until recently, they lacked media. They have the media pretty much under control now. So they need cinema, they need universities, they need TV series. Cinema may be more difficult. Universities, where we are working, are a part of this terrain of cultural production that AKP wants to conquer to achieve hegemony.

**RD: Just to return to the practical consequences for you and all the other people who were dismissed, your passport has cancelled, and you are—I assume—unemployed. What do you live on?**

UA: Just to make this clear, we were waiting to be dismissed. And waiting is really boring, paralyzing, unbearable. So when I heard that a new decree had been published, I prayed: may my name be there.

The particular decree in which my name was listed was a little too much even for some Islamists and conservative journalists. Many well-known professors were listed in it. There was big uproar and more importantly for us, big solidarity, within our colleges and departments.

**RD: Could you tell me a little bit more about the forms of solidarity. Are they organized through unions or your departments?**

UA: Both, really. Friends whom I've been working with, even colleagues who were not members of the union, who weren't leftist, but who knew me and knew that in the past I've supported people. They organized rallies in front of every campus of Marmara University. Just for Marmara University, 7 demonstrations were organized, one for each day. Even departmental administrators spoke out. The union organized this, but others contributed to this demonstration.

For the next couple of months we can live. But it will take some macro-political change for us to come back to our university.

**RD: Does this happen at every campus? Even at Kocaeli (a university in Anatolia, where signatories were immediately arrested)?**

UA: Well, when it's not the big cities, it's more difficult. In many conservative Anatolian cities local administration and nationalists regard the signatories as traitors and treat them accordingly. At places like these, they could do that with relative impunity and any form of solidarity could be quite physically dangerous.

**RD: I wanted us to shift to the more general discussion of resistance. The universities are only one of the bases of the anti-regime opposition. Resistance against the government seems consolidated in the form of the "no" campaign in the April 16 constitutional referendum that Erdogan initiated to transform Turkey from a parliamentary republic into a presidential one, that is, to make his presidency, which is legally speaking, a ceremonial position, an executive one.**

UA: You're right, every form of resistance these days is being articulated around "no." This is the latest stage of mobilization against the AKP regime in the last four years. In 2013, Gezi was a major rebellion. And partly, it was a victory. We didn't lose then: the resistance could not have continued for years, but the regime temporarily retreated. After the elections of June 2015, we also had hope. AKP's votes fell to 41% (from 50%) and the HDP vote rose 13.1%, assuring it a place in parliament. HDP is a coalition of the Kurdish movement with other leftists and was also, for this period, supported by some sections of secular republicans. We saw the possibility to break AKP's hegemony. But the coup attempt of July 2016 has provoked a huge demoralization for the left and secularist sectors of society. We were of course against the coup but we saw also that, for Erdogan, it proved a

perfect opportunity to rebuild the regime around himself. The failed coup created the best conditions for Erdogan to amass all the power to reshape society. What is happening now is a peak into how he will administer the Turkish society if he wins the referendum for executive presidency.

It is the paradise he has been dreaming for himself. But only for himself. This is why the AKP is struggling to explain its case for the new presidential system. There is no other beneficiary to the proposed constitutional reform but Erdogan and his family. The model that is being developed is not unlike that in Russia. There will be parties in the parliament that oppose the government, its policies, but all have to accept Putin's leadership. Putin is the national will. Erdogan, too, seeks to transform himself into "the man of the nation" (milletin adamı?). Indeed, Trotsky, in his analysis of fascism, was quite right when he pointed out that the leader is not an issue of the leader's personality its individual peculiarities. It's a social relation between collective demand and individual supply. He further adds: "Not every exasperated petty bourgeois could have become Hitler, but a part of Hitler is lodged in every exasperated petty bourgeois". I think this is also valid for Erdogan.

Anyway, after all this demoralization following the coup, the fact that people have the courage to say "no," to put "no" on their facebook status, is really important. This may not be the last, but one of the crossroads. (Well, we Marxists, especially of the Benjaminian school, never say "the last one." We know that even the smallest social problem or protest can potentially open up a revolutionary crisis. People think "we have to say something now.") We may be unable to go out in the street, we may be unable to challenge the police now, but we at least have the freedom to say "no."

At this moment, all the other struggles—ecological, trade union, gender rights struggles—are being articulated through the "no" language. In the movement for solidarity with dismissed faculty, the most important word is "no": no to the decrees, no to the state of emergency, no to the

coups—the military and the civilian ones. There are several construction projects, which have been extremely environmentally destructive. "No" these days is the slogan of the ecological movement, which is becoming integrated into the political campaign.

But it's important to realize that it's not only leftists or Kemalists who are opposed to the constitutional changes. A significant part of the nationalist base is also unhappy with Erdogan's plans. After the elections of October 2015, the MHP leadership was challenged by an internal opposition and after the coup attempt it submitted to Erdogan to exclude the leaders of this opposition supposedly guided by FETO. But their base failed to get on board. They oppose the new dictatorial regime for very different, even opposite, reasons to ours. Another extreme right-wing party—BPP—declared itself in favor of the presidential regime after one hour-long meeting with Erdogan. We don't know what transpired during that hour and what was promised, but their base remains opposed. Even the Islamist party from which today's AKP originated—Saadet—it's a minor party now, but historically important for the Islamist political tradition—is also on the side of "no."

Even within the left, there is no common understanding what "no" stands for. Human rights questions and fear of dictatorship are the main arguments for "no," and social issues are largely absent. But the implication of a "yes" vote for the rights of workers and the general social landscape would be enormous. The new regime would empower Erdogan to completely transform legislature, labor or otherwise. For the past three years, for example, strikes have been forbidden as a threat to national security. We can expect such measure to multiply with an executive presidency. However, few sections of the "no" campaign, even avowed leftists, are talking about this.

Thus, it won't be like the French referendum in 2005, where both the radical left and Front National campaigned against the proposed EU constitution, but the leftist "no" was hegemonic. There is a possibility for

"no" to be successful. But it won't be necessarily our "no."

It's important what will happen afterwards. If yes is successful, the authoritarianism of the regime will increase. If no, there will probably be a reaction, too.

There are many different "no" campaigns, which for the most part rarely intersect. There are, however, some neighborhood councils of "no," at places like Sisli and Besiktas, where members of CHP, HDP, and others, work together.

**RD: I don't want to finish this interview without asking you the kind of solidarity from abroad Turkish leftists need. We write an article now and then, tell how bad it is under Erdogan, but I am struggling to come up with practical forms of solidarity we could engage in.**

UA: Maybe three-four years ago, international pressure could have had meaning. I saw it work at my university a few years ago, when we were having an internal struggle, and MESA issued a letter that had a palpable effect. But now the universities are much less authoritarian than the whole regime, which has become increasingly impervious to foreign pressure. Of course, we are happy and grateful to see international articles, petitions—I ceased believing in petitions for a few years ago and it's ironic that the one I did sign turned out to be probably the most important one in Turkish history and got me fired [laughs]. Maybe money? I don't know how to formulate it: there is no hope for us. Make revolutions in your own countries. [laughs]

**RD: One last question: You said there will be reaction, no matter what the result. What does the future hold for the Turkish left?**

UA: Of course, there will be a period of reaction either way, but it's certainly not the same what the outcome will be. If "no" is successful, it will give us the courage to resist the new wave of repression and persecution. We will be more ready to fight with this. But if it's a "yes," that

would be a statement that the majority of the population supports this regime. It would be a lot more difficult then. This is a little too grim. To finish it on a more optimistic note, let me quote

Selahattin Demirtaş, the HDP leader who said, I think already from prison, "Even in times when you are most pessimistic, look not at the tips of your toes but to the horizon, you will see

hope, certainly. If you do not see it, look again, keep looking until hope appears."

[LeftEast](#)

## Some elements of the political situation

22 March 2017, by **Marouane**

### The grip of foreign capital and the monarchy on the economy

The European Union is Morocco's main trading partner and its companies are increasingly relocating segments of their production there. The implantation of European enterprises in Morocco (especially those from France and Spain) is growing and covers all areas of activity: agro-alimentary, cars, aeronautics, banks, insurance, the pharmaceutical industry, telecommunications, electrical and electronic equipment and so on. The holding of the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Marrakesh was the opportunity to attract more investment in the areas of the environment and energy. US enterprises are trying to make up for lost time in relation to those of the EU. They also face competition from Chinese enterprises that are extending their areas of intervention in the country.

One of the main attractions of Morocco is a cheap and flexible labour force. But the country has also made significant public investments to develop its road and rail network and its airports and ports. The signature of a series of free trade agreements (with more than 55 countries) has strengthened the penetration of foreign capital and commodities. Morocco is the only African country with which the USA is linked by a free trade agreement. The EU is

negotiating a new free trade agreement with Morocco (DCFTA) which completes and deepens the already existing agreement so as to integrate other more profitable areas, homogenise Moroccan regulation with European standards and ensure legal protection for investors.

Foreign investment follows the old strategy of big capital of relocating niches of production towards low cost countries. This is the case with the assembly factories of the big car and air constructors who have established themselves in the free trade areas of Tangiers or Casablanca. They do not contribute any strong added value at export and do not permit any transfer of technology. It is rather investment of portfolios and sub-contracting linked to the privatisation of public enterprises and services and transfers in the context of public sectoral strategies. On the other hand, the process of production of the country is very dependent on imported industrial and technological inputs which constitute nearly half of its intermediary consumption. Morocco is increasingly constrained by the industrialised countries in the context of the international division of labour to continue to export primary products (phosphates, sea products, tomatoes and citrus fruits) and manufactured products at weak added value, while also importing industrial products at high added value, high tech and food products. Its structural dependency is growing, as is its trade deficit. The repatriation of profits on foreign investment and capital flight increases inexorably. The external and internal public debt is also growing.

The royal holding dominates several sectors of the Moroccan economy, notably real estate, construction, banking (Attijari Wafa Bank is the biggest banking and financial group in the Maghreb and indeed Africa), telecoms, energy, industry, large scale distribution, mining extraction, agriculture, newspapers, radio, tourism and so on. The king's business affairs are intertwined with those of the multinationals and the Western powers promote the stability of the regime as exceptional in the Arab region and in Africa to grease the machine of business.

At the international level, the monarchy continues its role as political ally of imperialism, offering its services to NATO and the USA in the "war on terror" and collaborating with the Gulf States to defeat the struggles of the peoples of the region. The question of the Sahara is an essential element in the country's foreign policy. The monarchy is waging an intense diplomatic offensive which goes hand in hand with the efforts to consolidate its economic and political position at the Africa-wide level. Morocco is trying to play the role of platform of imperialism for the different regions of Africa in terms of trade, investment and conquest of resources of African countries.

The monarchy underpins a system of nepotism and corruption for the benefit of a minority of families who profit from their grip on the cogs of the state to increase their fortunes. They try to seize the context of neoliberal transformations to extend their monopoly situation. The other layers of the bourgeoisie suffer from

this favouritism benefiting the royal clan and its acolytes. They demand transparency in business contracts, tax breaks and financial facilities. But at the political level, their initiatives are very weak and they remain historically attached to the monarchy as guarantor of political stability to ensure their profit shares before the threat of a violent social explosion. The anger of some layers of the petty bourgeoisie, above all in the informal sector, finds however its expression in the variants of Islamist fundamentalism radically opposed to the monarchy.

## **Legitimacy of monarchy strengthened**

The death of Hassan II has allowed the monarchy to acquire a new breath, placing culpability for repression on him and intelligently giving way on a certain number of important problems: family code, the past of repression, the Amazigh (Berber) question and so on. It has co-opted the main women's and Amazigh organisations active on these questions. This "transition" has been facilitated by the consensus of the political parties and the historic bourgeois opposition and trade union bureaucracies. The new king is trying to directly initiate social programmes like the so-called Initiative Nationale pour le Développement Humain (INDH - National Initiative for Human Development) which is intended to improve popular living conditions through the development of social infrastructures and incentives for the creation of small projects generating income for young people and women in particular. There is also the royal initiative "a million satchels" to encourage the education of children from poor families, royal food aid to the most deprived during Ramadan and so on. The media and institutional opposition parties eulogise these various royal initiatives. The associative network has largely become a partner and a transmission belt for the cooption of local élites.

The current context in most countries in the Arab region, the support of the

imperialist powers and the decline of the February 20th movement (M20) is allowing the monarchy to consolidate its legitimacy. The parliamentary elections of October 7, 2016 attest to the stability of the representative institutions set up by the monarchy to the political forces accepting participation in its democratic game. They were won by the Islamists of the Party of Justice and Development (PJD) who obtained 32% of the seats. The parties of the palace scored 47% in total, led by the Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM), set up in 2008 by the king's closest friend and official councillor, Fouad Ali El hima, which scored 26%. The rate of abstention was certainly high, with only 43% participating, and this reflects the broad distrust felt by many citizens with respect to this game, although this discontent lacks concrete political expressions. The PJD is a political channel to control a fringe of the Islamist movement and integrate it with the political mechanism of the monarchy as supreme religious authority (King as commander of the faithful). In government for nearly five years, the PJD was the instrument for the passage of violent measures dictated by the imperialists. The monarchy will promote it more to assume this role for a new mandate. The context of the world crisis of capitalism and the outward-orientated nature of the Moroccan economy requires going further in the application of neoliberal policies. The latter involve reducing the cost of labour and increasing incentives and tax breaks for companies. The employment code follows the rules of flexibility and a draft law which would end the right to strike is being passed. The repayment of the public debt requires more austerity: dismantling of the compensation fund, pension systems, generalisation of fixed term contracts in the public sector and privatisation of public services (health, teaching, distribution of water and electricity, urban transport and so on). All these measures lead to a deepening of poverty and unemployment and increasingly precarious living conditions for the majority of the population.

The offensive is also being waged on the front of civil liberties (right of association, expression,

demonstrations, sit-in and so on) with increasingly strong repression of any form of protest. But social opposition continues, although it remains fragmented and without a dynamic of unity and solidarity. The organisations of struggle are weak and do not offer credible horizons.

## **The crisis of the trade union movement and the radical left**

The Moroccan working class is afflicted by a low rate of trade union membership. In the private sector production is dominated by small and medium enterprises which are in crisis and fiercely opposed to trades unionism. The same spirit reigns in the big private groups, which are increasingly commonly found in the free trade zones, aided by the trade union bureaucracies and authorities who are there to defend a social peace which will encourage investment.

As to the public sector, which was historically linked to the bastions of Moroccan trades unionism, union work is increasingly threatened by the violent reforms of the civil service including fixed term contracts, attacks on pensions, redeployments, voluntary retirement and so on. And more generally, the series of attacks on the rights and conquests of the working class pursued since the structural adjustment programme of the 1980s has profoundly undermined the credibility of the trade unions.

The trade union movement is very divided, with more than twenty unions. The union bureaucracies have allowed the main measures dictated by the international commercial and financial institutions to pass and have strengthened their attachment to the monarchy. They are all opposed to the broad movement of popular revolts and struggles which broke out in 2011 around M20. They supported the new Constitution granted by the monarchy in July 2011, which was a superficial concession whereby the king continues to hold all his prerogatives as absolute monarch by divine right.

They coordinate their efforts to neutralise any combative trade union tendencies which could develop the *résistance* in an explosive social situation. The big mobilisations of M20 pushed a large part of the trade union rank and file to seek other areas of expression and alternative initiatives to the bureaucratic stifling which reigns in the existing union organisations. Democratic trade union currents have emerged, the most significant being a split from the Union Marocaine du Travail (UMT - Moroccan Union of Labour) in spring 2012. This affected three federations, those of agriculture, teaching and local government - and they created a national coordination, the Democratic Current, with the civil service trade union. This current criticizes the lack of democracy in the UMT and the capitulation of the UMT leadership, calling for broad mobilisations as sole means of defending gains. It organised two marches in February 2013 and February 2014 and participated in various social mobilisations. The Democratic Current is growing and embodies the hope for a combative trades unionism.

Two broad orientations dominated internal discussions:

- One wishes to deepen this objective need of several trade union sectors for a fighting trade union alternative, building the Democratic Current as a rallying of democratic trades unionists from all unions, and preparing for an organisational break with the UMT. This was the position of our revolutionary Marxist current, Al Mounadil-a, supported indirectly by other small radical left currents.
- The other vision, defended by Voie démocratique (VD - Democratic Road), the main component of the radical left, argued there should not be a break with the UMT and the conditions for an honourable return to the union should be negotiated with the bureaucracy. The VD used its majority in the bodies of the Democratic Current to impose its line, as well as using undemocratic methods. From early 2015, the Democratic Current negotiated with the general secretariat of the UMT through the federations in agriculture and local government which had not left the union. The teaching

federation, which had set up an independent union, remained out of the process with a majority which rejected any idea of negotiation with the UMT bureaucracy or any return to this union. By stifling the discussions inside the bodies of the Democratic Current the VD undermined the bases of a counterweight to the bureaucracy, which demanded the simple liquidation of this current, alignment on the official positions of the union leadership and respect for the existing organisational functioning. The 11th national congress of the UMT in March 2015 strengthened the bureaucracy and weakened the Democratic Current, leaving the teaching federation to fight alone. Its most recent congress in April 2016 reflected this situation of impasse and the pressures of the VD activists to return to the UMT. This union is now experiencing great erosion and waves of resignation in its combative sections.

The Democratic Current inside the UMT has practically been liquidated. This has led to great disappointment in the broad union vanguard. The experiences of democratic currents, above all in the second biggest union, the Confédération démocratique du travail (CDT - Democratic Confederation of Labour) have been stillborn. This union is also undergoing a worrying evolution, and its leadership has completely capitulated.

Our current, Al-Mounadil-a, tried to fight this abdication of the VD in the meetings of the Democratic Current. It issued open letters explaining our point of view. We stressed the need to continue the fight to build a democratic and combative trade union pole which would constitute a concrete tool of struggle. We invoked the broad outlines of an action programme meeting the aspirations of the working class to mobilise against the class offensive and against the union bureaucracy's policies of compromise and social peace. We believe the context of the M20 has created real possibilities to initiate democratic currents for unity of struggle in all the union organisations. But we are not strong enough to advance concrete initiatives despite our implantation in some regional

sections and also in a national fishing trade union.

The perspectives for a fighting trade union current are today very obscure. Several struggles are developing outside the unions: the national coordination against pension reform, the struggles of interns against the separation of training and hiring, the different categories of students (doctors, nurses, engineers and so on) and unemployed graduates, and so on. The challenges lie in the reunification of this *résistance* to build a relationship of forces which can challenge the bourgeois offensive. The radical left has certainly missed a political opportunity to build a credible union alternative. Some time will be needed, but we will continue our efforts to intervene in the dynamic of current struggles and initiate concrete co-ordinations on the ground of the class struggle.

## The fight for global justice

The institutional opposition parties and trade union bureaucracies justify capitalist globalisation and accept the diktats of the international financial institutions and the governments of the imperialist countries while adopting the neoliberal programme. The associations affiliated to the regime have kept their grip on many initiatives such as the Moroccan social forum and those related to migration, women, climate change and so on.

Voie démocratique consider themselves as anti-imperialists and opposed to neoliberal globalisation. But their actions leave much to be desired. They do not give enough importance to the campaigns against free trade agreements and the problem of the debt, above all since the capitulation of Syriza in Greece with whom VD had tried to build alliances. VD has not been able to maintain its own association which it had created after failing to impose its control over Attac Maroc during the early years of its existence (2000-2005). The fight for global justice in Morocco remains practically the province of the Al Mounadil-a current through the association



ATTAC-CADTM-Maroc, which continues its own initiatives against the policies of the international institutions and for the cancellation of the debt, and is involved in the various global mobilisations against capitalist globalisation with an internationalist spirit.

## **The danger of the fundamentalist forces**

The fundamentalist Islamist organisations continue to attract many radicalised youth as well as broad popular sectors of the deprived, above all in the suburbs of the big cities and the small urban centres. The Justice and Beneficence Organisation (Al Adl Wa Ilhssane), not legally recognised, constitutes the main political religious organisation and has considerable organisational strength. Its radical opposition to the monarchy places it in a good position to potentially benefit from any social explosion in Morocco. Al Adl left the M20 at a crucial time. It is now trying to regain credibility through involvement in social mobilisations (unemployed graduates, co-ordinations of trainee teachers and so on) and also in certain trade unions. If their Islamist approach facilitates contact with the rank and file, their rather conciliatory practice limits their audience in the struggles. The various forms of workers' and popular struggles initiated by the M20 continue and show the real possibilities of a retaking of initiative by the radical left. But the most important component of this left –the VD – is currently consolidating its alliance with Al Adl.

The VD considers that the world context marked by the re-emergence of imperialist wars of intervention means that Islamist oppositions are objectively in opposition to imperialism in several countries. They argue that the role of the radical left is to help the transformation of these oppositions which reject globalisation for religious reasons into currents which oppose the capitalist and imperialist globalisation which threaten our identity. Political Islam has become a dominant force and has

a strong attraction among popular layers. The alliance of the left with its currents which are independent of imperialism and the monarchy, and which do not employ violence, could deepen their contradictions and develop these parties towards positions of popular struggle. The democratic transition in Tunisia illustrates this alliance of the left with the Islamists, they claim. Voie démocratique has heightened its alliance with Al Adl, with the participation of its leaders in the former's internal activities and the organization of public debates and common dialogues.

Al Mounadil-a considers this alliance dangerous, since it mixes banners and conceals the fact that the fundamentalists are class enemies. We could participate with them in struggles, but what counts is to develop a critique of their project and dispute their hegemony by a programme of clear transitional demands. It is a debate which concerns all the currents of the radical left and our region and elsewhere and which requires special attention.

## **A mediocre bourgeois opposition under the monarchy's thumb**

The historic bourgeois opposition – the Istiqlal Party (IP) and the Union socialiste des forces populaires (USFP – Socialist Union of Popular Forces) – is fully allied to the monarchy. It is integrated in the institutions and government and is completely discredited. The failure of the USFP as a social democratic opposition and its complete social-liberal transformation has left space for parties who wish to occupy the space it has vacated. These are the Parti socialiste unifié (PSU – United Socialist Party) and the Parti de l'avant-garde démocratique (PADS – Party of the Democratic Vanguard), who have set up an electoral alliance called Fédération de la gauche démocratique (FGD – Federation of the Democratic Left). The FGD elected

two deputies at the last parliamentary elections of October 2017. But their political line is neoliberal and their political influence is limited. The breakup of the CDT and its total capitulation is one of the worst consequences of the integration of the USFP.

## **Social protest continues**

In late 2015 and early 2016 there was a rise of social protest affecting all social categories: unemployed graduates, students, rural dwellers, judges, women, urban youth the Amazigh movement, human rights activists, political prisoners and so on. They took different forms: sit-ins, marches, demonstrations, street meetings, hunger strikes and so on. The ministry of the interior says that there are 50 demonstrations a day in Morocco. These include:

- Protests against the cost of living in northern Morocco. In October 2015 the "revolution of the candles" began in Tangiers and other towns in the north of Morocco against the French company Amendis, a subsidiary of the Véolia group, which since January 2002 has been responsible for managing waste disposal and water and electricity distribution in the area. The inhabitants received very high bills and went en masse onto the streets for some days demanding the removal of the company. The government intervened to calm spirits without resolving the basis of the problem.

- Medical student protests. Also in October, thousands of medical students demonstrated in Rabat against a draft law instituting an obligatory medical service of two years in rural areas after the end of their studies, without any guarantee of a job in the public sector. The state promised to review the draft.

- Trainee teachers have demonstrated in their thousands since 2015 in Rabat and other towns to demand the withdrawal of two decrees from the ministry of education seeking to end their automatic integration in the state sector (introducing a competition for places instead) and reducing their monthly payment by half.

â€¢ Nurses demonstrate against unemployment. Unemployed nurses demonstrated in February 2016 in front of the health ministry to demand the creation of more posts and their employment in hospitals which are cruelly understaffed.

â€¢ The struggles of the various categories of unemployed graduates. The latter have been in the streets on a virtually daily basis to demand the right to work despite the crisis of the student movement in general. Since the early 1990s, the struggles of unemployed graduates have been organised by the Association nationale des diplômés chômeurs au Maroc (ANDCM - National Association of Unemployed Graduates in Morocco) which was very combative and had a real presence in most of the country's towns and villages. In the late 1990s other co-ordinations appeared according to categories (doctorate, masters, licence and so on). This movement was however at the margin of the workers' movement, and suffered from repression and a lack of

premises, financial resources and solidarity.

- Social protests for basic infrastructures (dispensaries, schools, roads and so on) and for a decent living minimum standard are spreading in different marginal localities of Morocco. The inhabitants of the big cities also protest to demand more security and protection against the rise in crime, rapes and theft.

- Co-ordinations against the cost of living, which spread to most towns in 2008, have had a somewhat meagre balance sheet, showing the persistent contradiction between the real and objective potential of the mass struggles and the inability of the radical and revolutionary left to construct activist social movements.

We can see that submission and acceptance of the status quo is no longer the rule, social mobilisation is taking place against the various offensives. In this general context, the February 20th Movement has been the catalyst for more than a year, forcing

the regime to make major concessions. The objective situation is now more promising than in the past for the construction of a radical alternative. The essential factors underlying the revolutionary process in the region persist: deterioration of social, economic and cultural conditions, an offensive against political liberties and so on.

The capacity of the radical left to influence the struggles remains weak. We are part of this weakness. And despite the difficulties, we continue our efforts to convince the vanguards of the social struggles by a revolutionary project of society. Which will take place through a deep involvement in the workers' and popular everyday struggles, a strengthening of trade union organisations, and the defence of a class struggle perspective. But also through the initiation of forms of organisation of women and youth in the various teaching and university institutions.

# Making Trump's America Ungovernable

21 March 2017, by **Malik Miah**

There is a lot of disgust toward Trump and his white nationalist strategist Steve Bannon, former executive chairman of Breitbart News, a leading promoter of conspiracy theories and white supremacists. The Princeton economist and NYT columnist Paul Krugman calls the Trump government the "Trump-Putin regime." However, the attempt to label Trump a puppet of Putin (the Russian president) is an easy way out for liberals, who failed to speak to their own failures or to the decline of unions and working-class political influence.

The fact (a swearword to Trump) is that the Republican Party is now under Trump's control. The official leaders, including House Speaker Paul Ryan and Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell, are on board with

Trump's America.

Power, especially white power, is behind what they agree will "make America Great Again." African Americans, Mexicans and Muslims especially, Trump says, make America weak. Many white working people accept this dark vision of reality promoted by Trump.

## Lessons from South Africa

During the struggle against the apartheid white supremacist regime of South Africa, the African National Party (ANC) coined the phrase: make the country "ungovernable." The ANC and the liberation fighters rejected apartheid rule as illegitimate, since it

excluded the clear majority of the population from basic political freedoms and human rights.

That strategy â€" inside and outside the country â€" worked. Especially with the rise of Black South African workers' organizing and a powerful mass democratic movement, apartheid's central allies, Washington and President Reagan, could not prevent the Black majority from taking political power.

Is that possible here?

Since Trump's Electoral College "victory," there have been unprecedented protests by a wide cross-section of the population. They include the largest marches ever in Washington, D.C. and other cities, with some three-four million people

under the banner "National March for Women's Lives;" protests by Native Americans at Standing Rock Reservation; immigration rights activists defending the undocumented; and the stance by Movement for Black Lives to step up resistance to police violence.

Trump is the bombastic figurehead for the super-rich who rule the country. If the rhetoric and policies begin to hurt their interests because the majority sees Trump's presidency or bizarre behavior as illegitimate, it can become a problem not only for domestic stability but international alliances.

A weathervane historically is the Black population. Resistance by African Americans, as slaves and then as second class citizens, stimulates others to fight back. The two greatest struggles in U.S. history were the movements for abolition of slavery and to end Jim Crow segregation. The vanguard role of African Americans in those and other struggles has shaped the country.

## "My African Americans"

Trump's view of Blacks fits his vision of what makes America great again, which is why all social progress has made the country a "disaster" in his view. He refers to his Black supporters as "My African Americans." He is condescending because he sees Blacks as lesser to himself and other whites.

At the same time, he seeks to use more police terror to put down resistance. It is not a surprise that he targets the Southside of Chicago and talks about sending more (unspecified) federal force to the city.

Trump met with Black supporters on the first day of Black History Month. He praised the fact that an African American National Museum exists and the greatness of Frederick Douglass (d. 1895). Trump referred to Douglass, "someone who has done amazing things and is being recognized more and more, I notice," as though he were still alive.

It's his view of all non-whites. There's not a single Latino in his cabinet — the first time since Ronald Reagan — even though they are the largest minority in the country.

A statement by the White House on National Holocaust Day failed to mention that Jews were targeted by Hitler for extermination. His spokesman said it was by design because many others (e.g. Catholics) also were murdered by the Nazis. This reflects the anti-Semitism of the "alt-right" white supremacists.

Racism is about power, as Malcolm X and many radical Black nationalists and militants explained in the 1960s. It doesn't matter if Trump likes African Americans or not. Whites who back Trump's or Steve Bannon's white nativism and nationalism know it is about returning to a pre-civil rights era.

Blacks — women especially — will likely be in the vanguard of the new resistance. Black women gave the largest "No" vote to Trump, and initiated the Movement for Black Lives, and were a key leadership component of the January March for Women's Lives.

## Why Blacks Step Forward

The historical context is important to grasping why African Americans have always been the main concern of the ruling class, and stepped forward in struggles that benefitted all of society.

The Constitution gave southern slave states extra votes in the Electoral College, increasing their voting power by adding slaves to the total (three-fifths per person). The population of the new country of 13 states was 40% slaves. If the slaves were not counted, the northern states would have dominated the new Congress. Of course, if the slave states did not get those votes, a civil war by the southern states would have likely occurred then.

The Electoral College allowed the United States to exist as a unitary state. Once slavery was abolished its

original purpose should have made it obsolete. But the rulers saw the value of limiting the voting power of common citizens for the direct election of president, the most powerful branch of the state.

After the Civil War the issue was: Should the freed slaves get the vote and shift power in the South and the entire country? Radical Republicans supported it; Democrats, including in the North, were against full equality. Lincoln understood this, which is why even during the Civil War he limited freedom for slaves to only those in the rebelling states.

Lincoln opposed slavery but sought to appease slave holders with compensation. Frederick Douglass initially did not trust Lincoln. He first met Douglass at the White House in 1864. Douglass entered through the front door, a revolutionary moment in that time. When Lincoln sought his help with the war, an issue for Douglass was the fact that Black soldiers were paid less than white soldiers.

It took a long time for presidents to open the door of the White House to African Americans. President Teddy Roosevelt (1901-09) was the first president to invite an African American to a White House dinner — Booker T. Washington in 1901, shortly after his inauguration. The outcry led him never to do that again.

Franklin Roosevelt never invited an African American to the White House for meetings or official events, even though Eleanor Roosevelt was against racism, hired only Black servants and met with Black leaders. FDR's base included southern Dixiecrats; it is noteworthy that his New Deal policies effectively left many African Americans out as he refused to challenge racist laws.

After the 1936 Berlin Olympics, the white U.S. athletes were invited to see and meet Roosevelt. No such invitation was made to the African American athletes such as Jesse Owens, who had won four gold medals. A widely-believed myth about the 1936 games was that Hitler had snubbed Owens, something that never happened. Owens said, "Hitler didn't

snub me” it was our president who snubbed me. The president didn’t even send me a telegram.” (Wikipedia) Roosevelt also refused to support an anti-lynching bill for the same reason.

## Immigration and African Americans

African Americans for the most part are not descendants of “immigrants.” That phrase “we are a nation of immigrants” misses the broader and deeper point of institutional racism and white supremacy. (Immigrants from African countries Libya, Somalia and Sudan are included in Trump’s anti-Muslim ban. Those immigrants living here, however, are considered African Americans first and treated as such.)

Trump is just the latest of a long line of presidents who are condescending to those who don’t look like them. The ruling elite have always shared the same view of white power and attitudes towards African Americans (and other minorities).

President Obama was an unexpected break from this racist past. Even whites who voted for him hoped that the issue of race and racism would be consigned to history. Instead, racism increased in the Obama Era.

Obama’s actual policies were mainstream Democratic and Republican. He did little for African Americans directly. Despite this, hardcore white supremacists see

America as a “white country” that has been undermined by the “other.” Obama’s “colorblind” approach to racism did not mollify them.

After the Civil War, for a brief 10-15 year period, former slaves won some real freedom and could vote. Some were even elected to office. But the counterrevolution against the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments reversed all that progress.

Slavery as a system never returned. It was less efficient and profitable than wage slavery. But Blacks were not paid equal wages. White workers falsely believed that their situation was improved because of the super exploitation of African-American labor.

It took 100 years to get back the vote in the post-slavery South. Some 50 years after the vote was won, it is being suppressed again; civil rights are under attack.

White nativism is again on the rise and more blatant under the Trump regime. Steps are being systemically prepared to suppress voting rights as occurred after Reconstruction, and now after the election of Obama.

## Resistance is Key

The mass protests show that African Americans, women and others know that the electoral system is not the solution to real life institutional discrimination.

Although Trump and his white nationalist advisers and counselors

seek to use executive orders, the Congress and Supreme Court to impose a new presidential dictatorship, the public is not ready to give in. But while a majority are opposed to racist and anti-immigrant policies, sentiments alone aren’t enough to stop the right.

The ruling class knows that its control of the state depends on public acceptance of the system as it is. Immoral and unjust laws and orders by Trump and his backers must be met by civil disobedience” the active, public, conspicuous breach of the law to bring about a change in law or public policy. The Civil Rights movement broke segregation laws by design, to force Federal action and fundamental change.

Congressperson and civil rights leader John Lewis of Georgia says Trump is an illegitimate president. Trump angrily replied that Lewis never accomplished anything and should fix his “inner city.”

The authoritarian president will always blame those he fears as the enemy. He hits the “fake media” first, then all critics. The battle to defeat Trump’s regime will require the same determination as that of earlier generations.

The goal of opponents, including those of the far left, should be to make the Trump presidency ungovernable. In that struggle revolutionary change is possible.

[Against the Current](#)

# The Netherlands: a further shift to the right

20 March 2017, by **Alex de Jong**

The most remarkable development was the implosion of the center-left PvdA (Partij van de Arbeid, Labour Party) from 38 to 9 seats. This loss was larger than expected; the party broke its own 2002-record and suffered the largest electoral loss in

Dutch political history. But that the PvdA would lose badly was foreseen. In the elections of 2012 the party had tacked left to stave off a left-wing challenge from the SP (Socialistische Partij) but afterwards chose to form a government coalition with the VVD

and for four years implemented right-wing policies. That the Labour Party would be punished for this was to be expected and this is nothing to mourn.

More worrying is that the rest of the left has not profited from the

implosion of the PvdA. Many former PvdA-voters instead went to rightwing parties or did not vote at all. The right-wing as a whole gained new seats.

For many progressives the news of the growth of GroenLinks (GreenLeft, GL) from 4 to 14 seats was a spark of light. Polls indicate a quarter of the disappointed PvdA-voters chose GL this time. GL had a campaign that was not only attractive in its style (gutsy and optimistic) but also put forward political points such as climate change, anti-racism and in general a rejection of the nationalism that has come to dominate Dutch politics.

GL was organized in the nineties as a fusion of different left-wing parties, among them the Communist Party. The party moved to the political center and after the turn of the century embraced a self-described 'progressive liberal' course. In 2012, GL supported a right wing coalition, enabling it to implement austerity measures and neoliberal reforms such as raising the retirement-age as well as the sending of Dutch police to Afghanistan. This orientation was punished in the following elections, which saw the party lose heavily, and since then GL has again adopted a leftist profile. But the party has not clearly said goodbye to the earlier orientation and during the elections, its leader Jesse Klaver attacked from the right people like Yanis Varoufakis and Jeremy Corbyn. He also didn't rule out the possibility of a coalition with the right.

It is disappointing that SP lost a seat, going from 15 to 14. This was the third election in a row that the SP lost votes in national elections. This time, the loss was especially severe because the PvdA, for many years the most important rival of the SP, lost dozens of seats as well. For over a decade and a half, the SP's strategy was aimed at capturing the base of the PvdA, but this strategy failed in the last elections. Politically, GL is considered to be in between PvdA and SP. It managed to attract many disappointed PvdA-voters with a campaign that had a relatively left-wing profile, so it is not very convincing to say the SP is simply too much to the left for these voters. Instead, GL appealed to them

with themes that are neglected by the SP.

## New parties and issues

One of these themes was racism. Correctly or not, GL has an image as the party of anti-racism and there is no doubt this was part of their appeal, not only for disappointed PvdA-voters, but also for many young people who voted for them. The SP-campaign had tried to make healthcare, already for years an issue on which the party has a strong profile, a central issue in the elections but failed to do this and the party was unable to grow. The SP not only neglected anti-racism, but prominent SP-figures even went along with anti-immigration sentiments. One SP-parliamentarian declared the SP was in favor of 'our own workers first'. Such statements cost the party votes.

Another issue was ecology. Another leftist party that grew in the elections was the Partij voor de Dieren (Party for the Animals, PvdD). Founded in 2002, they started out as a single-issue party opposing cruelty to animals and the treatment of animals in agro-business. It has developed into an ecologist party. It grew from 2 to 5 seats, another example of a party with an idealist, and especially ecological profile, attracting new voters. A weak point of this party is that outside the parliament, it hardly exists and only plays a very limited role in (ecological) movements. In addition, although it is considered more radical than GL, this party as well does not link its ecological demands to social struggles or to the contestation of capital.

These elections also saw an unusually high number of new parties participating. One of them is Artikel 1, named after the first article in the Dutch constitution, which declares that everybody deserves equal treatment. Anti-racism, feminism and opposition to the discrimination of LGBTIQ people are the central issues of this party. Artikel 1 is also remarkable for the prominent role of people of color and women in it. Its head of the elections list and spokesperson, Sylvana Simmons, is a Black Surinamese-Dutch woman

known for her anti-racist activism.

However, this party was organized only shortly before the elections and was unable to win a seat. This was disappointing for many people who see the need for its principled anti-racist positions, but not unexpected. Considering it only had a short time to prepare, the 0.3 per cent of the vote it took seems to indicate there is a potential for future growth.

Another new party is Denk; Dutch for 'Think'. This party was founded by two former PvdA-parliamentarians of Turkish descent and won three seats. This party combines a center-left social-economic program with opposition to Islamophobia. Simmons was associated with Denk, but left it, saying there was not enough room in the party for feminism and LGBTIQ issues. The party is often attacked in the Netherlands as a puppet of Turkish president Erdogan and supposed softness on Islamic fundamentalism. Clearly, many of these attacks are motivated by racism and Islamophobia, even though it is true the party is equivocating on issues such as the growing authoritarianism in Turkey and the Armenian genocide. Denk in particular attracted voters of Turkish descent who formerly supported the PvdA.

## Gains for the right

Another clear winner of the elections is a party named D66, growing from 12 to 19 seats. This party is sometimes considered 'progressive' but is a strong supporter of neoliberal economic policies. However, it combines this with liberal feminism and anti-racist rhetoric. Like GL, the party attracted many who feel it can oppose the far-right.

The far-right did not do as well as was expected, but still made progress. The PVV increased its seats by a third, taking votes from the center-right VVD but also from the PvdA. Elections were a disappointment for Wilders only compared to the extremely high expectations created by the polls and it is far too early to conclude that the rise of the far-right has come to an end. In addition, a new far-right party, Forum voor Democratie, entered the



parliament with two seats. This party's leader, Thierry Baudet, cultivates a respectable, intellectual image but he represents a sexist and racist current that is at least as far to the right as Wilders.

Not only did the far-right bloc in parliament grow, but two of the traditional center-right parties, the VVD and the Christian-democratic CDA, ran campaigns that were heavily based on nationalism, Islamophobia and anti-immigrant sentiments. This is a dynamic that can be missed if the analysis only focuses on numbers of seats or on who forms the government coalition. Wilder's PVV was for the CDA and VVD the standard against which they measured themselves, and both tried to win over PVV-voters by presenting themselves as the 'respectable' version of Wilders' anti-immigration and islamophobic agenda. Without being part of the government, the PVV is still one of the country's most influential parties. The diplomatic conflict VVD-primeminister Mark Rutte provoked with Turkey was a successful attempt to win over potential PVV-voters by posing as a strong Western leader opposing a Muslim country.

## **A reorganized center**

For decades, the Dutch political center was based on three large parties; the PvdA, CDA and VVD. One of the traditional pillars of this center has now collapsed, and CDA and VVD are not as large as the political mainstream parties used to be. For 15 years, the political center has been under pressure from the left, by the SP, and from the right by the PVV and its predecessors. Because of the political system in the country (nationwide proportional representation) coalitions are necessary to form a government. However, the relative decline of support for the center-parties and the rise of new parties make this system unstable. The previous cabinet was the first since the turn of the century that completed its term.

The election results show the political center in the country is being reorganized. The center-right parties CDA and VVD have reinvented themselves by taking over elements from the far-right.

Forming a new coalition in this fragmented landscape will be difficult, at least four different parties are needed to form a majority coalition. Whatever its exact composition, the new government of the Netherlands will be rightwing. It will give more

power to big corporations, social inequality and precarity will grow. This will be combined with anti-refugee and anti-immigrant policies and a continuation of the existing Islamophobic and nationalist political climate. This means, among other things, discrimination in the job market, police violence against people of color and other forms of social exclusion of minorities. The right and far-right will continue to benefit from this dynamic.

Despite the progress of some of them, none of the leftist parties have an adequate answer to this situation. The SP thinks that racism can be ignored, or even gives in to it. GroenLinks has not convincingly renounced its previous economic liberalism. It also lacks the social roots and links with trade-unionists that the SP has.

Given the decline of the parliamentary left, social struggles will become even more important. That there is potential for such movements has been shown in the last months, in mobilizations around climate change, racism, and TTIP. The Women's March in Amsterdam of March 11 was one of the largest demonstrations in recent years, with over 15,000 people. Combined with the building of such movements, the Dutch left urgently needs a process of collective discussion and political clarification.

# **What could be the international implications of Donald Trump's election? Questions on the evolution of the global geopolitical situation**

**19 March 2017, by Pierre Rousset**

The accession of Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States most likely represents a turning point in geopolitical disorder and global instability. However, it is too early to measure its consequences. Trump himself and a large part of his team have no political past in government that would offer a reliable point of

reference. Presidential power is limited in the USA (much more so than in France!), by the powers of the Congress, the judiciary and the states, as evidenced by the trial of strength after the decree prohibiting the territory's access to nationals of seven Muslim countries (even those who had a residence permit or were residents) -

a decree whose application was suspended by judges.

Therefore, we cannot base a judgment on just the vengeful Tweets, phone calls and peremptory statements in which Trump specializes, nor on the many corrections, sometimes made in haste: on Taiwan and the One China

policy, on Russia in Eastern Europe... It is nevertheless necessary to start now to locate the major issues that are being or may be affected by the constitution of the new US administration - we are talking here only of the international implications; the consequences of his election in the United States itself will not be discussed here.

**Trump and... instability.** The election of Donald Trump is in itself a new factor of international instability. Indeed, it was neither intended nor desired by the dominant sectors of the American bourgeoisie: control over the electoral process escaped them. That this could have happened in the principal imperialist country is a matter of great concern for the rulers in the rest of the world. How can you foresee anything when US governance becomes so random?

Trump's initial measures have increased this concern: the withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP), the criticism of NATO, and so on. The frameworks of concertation between states and bourgeoisies seem to be threatened by an administration that appears unilateralist. The meaning of the slogan "America First" would then become "America Alone". The multiplication of bilateral agreements - where the US is in a position of strength in relation to its interlocutors - would take the place of multilateral agreements.

There is, of course, continuity between the policies announced by Donald Trump and those of previous administrations, including Obama; but there are also possible points of rupture, a general inflection and an escalation that is at least verbal. The United States presented itself yesterday as the leader of various alliances (without necessarily being able really to assume this function); Trump threatens to go it alone. He thus allowed Chinese President Xi Jinping to present himself as the successor during his speech in Davos: do not worry about the US withdrawal, we are ready to ensure the continuation of the process of capitalist globalization!

**Trump and... the global ecological crisis.** Donald Trump was elected at a

moment when in terms of atmospheric warming, in particular, we are already on a razor's edge. However, a climate sceptic is at the head of the United States Agency for the Environment. The new president is the mouthpiece of the extractive industries and rejects the conclusions of the scientific studies in this field. The extent of the multifaceted ecological crisis that we face and the extreme gravity of its consequences are being ignored and denied.

The commitments made by governments at COP21 were very inadequate and the policies advocated (geo-engineering ...) are dangerous: they do not make it possible to limit global warming to 1.5 per cent. To limit it to 2 per cent (a level already far too high) seems very difficult. That would become unattainable in the event of US withdrawal, if it was to be confirmed.

Major recent intergovernmental climate agreements have been "set up" through prior bilateral negotiations in Washington and Beijing. Admittedly, China and other "big" countries are now promising to maintain their targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas- but Trump's backward step will serve as a pretext for other countries. Each government will tackle major national problems (such as pollution in China...) or develop industrial sectors that it deems to be internationally promising, but the sum of these egoisms will not be the foundation of an overall policy.

**Trump and... women.** Donald Trump has decided to cut off all funding to NGOs that bring up the issue of abortion (not just those who practise it). Republican presidents have done this more than once in the past. The consequences are very serious on the international level, as many of the associations concerned do not have the financial means to continue their activities of aid to women once these funds are withdrawn.

The price to pay for Trump's policy is likely to be particularly high today, because the reactionary (especially religious) far right is getting stronger. Churches are often themselves on the offensive against women's rights: in

fact, we are seeing a dramatic decline in the status of women in much of the world. The role of the Trump administration can be particularly baleful in this situation - which certainly explains, in part, the international echo of the Women's Marches in the United States during the inauguration of the new president and the announcement of other world days of action.

**Trump and... ideological reaction.** Donald Trump literally "oozes" reaction. What is true for women probably will be for LGBT+, for racism, for obscurantism.

Trump is not against "science." He is against scientific research where it can create problems for the economic interests that he defends - he then becomes negationist. Like Harper before him in Canada (who wanted to destroy the databases that made it possible to trace the history of the climate), he wants to control research and muzzle researchers. To do so he has taken exceptionally brutal measures to isolate and censor climate scientists and environmental agencies - provoking the organization of a great march of scientists on Washington in April.

Even though it is "targeted" on environmental and climate issues, Trump's denunciation of the scientific approach has general consequences: legitimizing obscurantism at a time when creationism (including its "intelligent design" version) continues its offensive, in particular conducting a long-term battle over school curricula in many countries.

**Trump and... the far right.** For the far-right movements in Europe, the victory of Donald Trump at first appears to be very good news. Breaking on the right with "globalism" is possible, there is the proof! The rejection by the right of the "elites" too.

However, it is not obvious that the Western far-right movement want to identify too closely with Donald Trump. The great-power nationalism of "America First" is a threat - and no one knows whether his administration will succeed in stabilizing itself. Ridicule can end up by killing.

Predicted for the moment to win the first round of the presidential election in France, Marine Le Pen has not started talking "À la Trump".

The fundamentalist Islamist far-right movements, for their part, salute the election of Trump as a gift from heaven. This was already the case in France, after Prime Minister Manuel Valls supported illegal decrees adopted by some municipalities against wearing the burkini - dismissing the advice of the Council of State (he was thus playing at being Trump before Trump: "The Council of State says what the law is, I do politics" - so a Prime Minister can ignore the law?).

Valls was just a story on the inside pages (except for us in France) that people abroad had a good laugh about. We are no longer laughing with Trump's "Muslim Ban", forbidding access to the United States for nationals of seven Muslim countries. The spontaneous mobilizations in the USA, at the airports, to allow the entry of stranded foreign residents, and the suspension by judges of the decree signed by Trump have a very important impact internationally. They are breaking the extreme bipolarization desired by both Trump and the fundamentalist far right.

## Impact on the relationship of forces between powers

**Trump and... Latin America.** Imperial arrogance did not keep Donald Trump quiet regarding Latin America, the "private hunting ground" of the US. The heads of state of this region must not have appreciated the brutality with which he repeatedly humiliated the Mexican president by a torrent of Tweets, each of them more lapidary than the one before.

The same is true of the threat of a unilateral challenge to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the United States, Canada and Mexico. The policy of the protectionist coup de force concerns

primarily the entire continent. The militant Left in Latin America will have to mobilize against the new imperialist dictates, without, however, defending the present order and the neoliberal agenda [13]

Mexico is the country on the "front-line" with the United States, particularly with regard to the international implications of the anti-immigrant, anti-Latino xenophobia and racism of the Trump administration, symbolized by a policy of mass expulsion, a forced march, and by the construction of the border wall. All Latino immigration is concerned! Muslims are far from being the only ones concerned, far from it.

**Trump and... the Middle East.** Donald Trump banged his fist on the table to denounce Obama's and NATO's failure in the Middle East; he announced a disengagement from the Iraqi-Syrian theatre for the benefit of the Russian Federation; he promised to move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (which would amount to recognizing it as Israel's capital - but he will not do it); he broke with the two-state (Palestinian and Israeli) policy, the basis of the peace negotiations; he is targeting as a priority Iran and the nuclear agreement with Tehran, while opening up to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies; he advocates a regional military alliance including these states and Israel to "contain" Iran...

That said, everything suggests that Trump does not have the slightest idea of the complexity of the Middle East "game" or, perhaps, of the fact that in this domain the decisions are not within the mandate of his presidency, but of Congress in particular. Even more so than on other international issues, it is better to wait to conclude what will become the policy of the new administration.

**Trump and... Russia.** In the diplomatic field, one thing seemed clear: among his priorities, Donald Trump wanted a rapprochement with Russia, and Moscow was counting on it. Since then, the picture has become somewhat blurred. We will see.

In the world of Trump, where great-power geopolitics is used very directly

to do business, this choice (if it is confirmed) makes sense: Unlike China, Russia is not a global competitor. The extractivist (petroleum) industry that he wants to embody has forged close ties in Russia. There can be convergence in the Middle East. A Washington-Moscow axis would isolate Beijing, the main enemy...

If this schema is confirmed, Russia's position would emerge consolidated in the Syrian-Iraqi theatre of operations and in Eastern Europe, at the expense of the EU.

**Trump and... the European Union.** Russian-American collaboration would have many implications for the European Union, of which Donald Trump has made his low opinion quite clear. In spite of the flights of fancy about Europe as a great power, it has not been able, nor known how to, nor wanted to constitute a global geopolitical power. The new US presidency has threatened to reduce its commitment to NATO, refusing to pay *ad vitam Æternam* for its defence. The EU is under pressure, while it is in crisis: Brexit, increasing heterogeneity, unpopularity...

The recent Munich conference on security - called the "Davos of Defence" - did not reassure the EU. Admittedly, many Washington envoys tried to clear the minefield of Trump's remarks (for example, describing NATO as "obsolete"), US Vice President Mike Pence did not even pronounce the words "European Union" in his speech - and no concrete dossier has made any progress. [14]

The question of really arming Germany is becoming increasingly pressing for European leaders. There is no European army. The British and French armies only filled this absence very partially, being mobilized especially within the framework of national choices. They have had to cope with contradictory demands: to reduce costs in the name of austerity policies while increasing their exterior and also interior (France) commitments. The equipment and military personnel are worn out to the extent of risking "burn-out", which is probably already the case in Britain, whereas this "brutal withdrawal" is

likely soon to be announced in France. [15]

In this situation, even the unthinkable happens. Kites are flown on issues that are taboo. Thus, a member of the Christian Democratic Party, Roderich Kiesewetter, said that if Trump's America "no longer wants to offer a guarantee of nuclear security, Europe still needs a nuclear umbrella." An editor of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* drove the point home: considering Russian rearmament and the smallness of the Anglo-French strike force, let us think "the unthinkable" - our "own nuclear deterrent". [16]

Is British Prime Minister Theresa May also wondering about the consequences of Trump's election for European defence? For a long time, the United States has been asking the EU members to do more and criticizing NATO - but Trump is capable of putting his words into action, while Obama, who is more aware of the complexity of the dossier, did not. May is (was?) an unconditional supporter of NATO. The *Financial Times* has published an article by Anne Applebaum urging the United Kingdom to promote a new security pact, despite Brexit. [17]

The uncertainty does not only come from across the Atlantic. Nothing serious can be discussed in the EU before the outcome of the next French and German elections. European construction is in structural crisis. The Union is incapable of playing its role on the international level in maintaining an imperialist order. Whoever is President of the United States, Washington does not know what it can hope for from the Europeans.

**Trump and... China.** How will the US-China confrontation evolve under Trump? This is one of the most serious issues we have to follow in the period ahead. A growing number of commentators even talk about the possibility of a new world war (in what form?) that the situation in East Asia is prefiguring.

Without venturing into the debate on "the coming war," we should note that Trump is faced with a problem that

Obama could not answer: how to take things back in hand in East Asia after leaving the initiative to China for too long? Especially since Beijing has recently consolidated its regional hold. Its economic hold has increased in the region, as well as its political and diplomatic weight. The militarization to its benefit of the South China Sea is now almost accomplished. The construction of artificial islands is sufficiently advanced to make it an operational defence network: aviation runways, the installation of numerous surface-to-air missiles, etc. The Chinese fleet is thus navigating in its environment. A qualitative threshold has been crossed.

No pressure will force Beijing to withdraw. The stakes are too great: the control of access to the oceans, the question of who will have the dominant influence in the region (the USA or China), great-power nationalism (the ideological cement of the regime)...

The bar has been placed very high. The US Seventh Fleet can certainly show its presence in the South China Sea, but it cannot drive back the Chinese army - without at least engaging in an active conflict of which no one can measure the consequences.

The situation is more contentious and fluid in North-East Asia with the belligerent face to face between Japan and China; the North Korean factor and the latent crisis in the peninsula; Taiwan's assertion of its own identity and the need for Beijing to bring Hong Kong's population under control. However, the relationships of forces are not fixed in this part of the world, contrary to what many people seem to believe. The new capitalist China has emerged from the defensive strategic posture inherited from Mao. The United States must reestablish its leadership there, particularly as it has lost it in the South-West.

Uncertain of the future, the militarist right in Japan is pushing for a complete rearmament of the country. North Korea is playing the nuclear game of the weak deterring the strong, but it is triggering a new chain of reactions: the establishment by Washington in South Korea of a base

of Thaad interceptor missiles likely to cover a large part of Chinese territory, reducing China's deterrent capacity. Beijing has therefore decided to deploy its submarines armed with nuclear warheads in the oceans to protect them from an enemy first strike. [18]

This has not been done and it is easier said than done. Chinese submarines are still "noisy" (easily detectable), the range of their ballistic missiles is too short, they need to produce more technologically reliable multiple-headed weapons, the establishment of a chain of command capable of acting in times of crisis is problematic - and all this is very expensive...

The military escalation in North-East Asia, however, is today taking on a nuclear dimension. The "minor" powers must then show that they have a serious second-strike capability, in case Russia on one side and the United States on the other try to destroy their launch sites all at once. France, Great Britain and China cannot do that. The question is still theoretical in Europe. Beijing is now worried about its vulnerability, as its nuclear submarine deployment programme seems to attest.

## China and Russia

Russia is asserting itself as a "world power" (with its stock of nuclear weapons in particular), but with a "regional zone of influence". We do not see Putin displaying himself in Davos, as Xi Jinping did, as guarantor of capitalist globalization.

China is a world power with a much more discreet military profile, although it is steadily rising. However, its zone of economic and diplomatic influence is already almost universal. This is the result of a policy of expansion that has been systematically implemented for nearly thirty years - and of the relationship between national issues and international deployment. As a capitalist country, China is experiencing the crisis and will continue to do so. Today, there are strong overcapacities of production, the real estate crisis, indebtedness, very bad debts, tensions on the labour



market, capital flight...

International deployment responds in part to these "internal" factors of crisis. It must guarantee the regular supplying of the economy with raw materials (purchase of land, mines, transport companies, ports...). By investing heavily in the building and public works sector abroad, it provides markets to a sector in great difficulty at the national level and outlets for surplus production (cement, steel, etc.). It makes it possible to export labour. It reinforces the ideology of the regime - great-power nationalism.

In various countries, these investments (financed by Chinese banks) are politically risky. A debt-stricken state can easily mobilize the population against "the Chinese" to get rid of the debt, once the work has been done, but for now China's expansion is maintaining its dynamism. Until when? A big question.

Because it is the world's leading power, the United States has lost the strategic initiative: unable to assume all its responsibilities, unable to expect much from the Europeans, it has left a free hand to the Russians in Syria and the Chinese on the international level. Because he seems to know nothing of the complexity of global power relations and regional geopolitical combinations, Trump began by asking the European Union and Japan "to pay more" (give me my money!) , and institutions such as NATO to comply with the priorities unilaterally defined by his administration. Reality will not bend to his imagination. How will he try to counter China, by provoking what chain reactions? We can be worried about that.

## Period and solidarity

The election of Trump expresses and enhances the contradictions of capitalist globalization as a mode of domination. Freedom of movement of capital results in popular disaffection in a growing number of countries, through national or regional crises of legitimacy and governability.

Moreover, the sovereign functions of states are not globalized in the same way as capital. There is no harmonization between predatory economic policies on the one hand, and on the other ideological frameworks, security policies and wars, which are still the responsibility of the (nation-) states.

There is at present no solution to these contradictions. For several decades, the bourgeoisie has been conducting a frontal class offensive to take back all that it had to give up after the Second World War and the revolutions of the twentieth century. Since the implosion of the USSR, this offensive has taken on a truly global turn. Since the financial crises of 1997-1998 and especially of 2007-2008, it has become increasingly clearly counter-revolutionary. The extreme violence with which multiple counter-revolutionary forces have been mobilized in the Middle East to break the extraordinary popular momentum initiated in 2011 testifies to this.

We have entered a new era. I spoke in my report of a counter-revolutionary period, which provoked considerable reticence and incomprehension. Because of the word "period", which seemed too "long", too "dark"? I would say a "moment" (in the sense of a time of indefinite duration), but I fear that such a term does not pass the test of translations! Counter-revolutionary does not mean that the counter-revolution has prevailed - but that is what we are faced with, whether openly, as in much of the Muslim world, or more insidious, as often in the West.

Let us look for words that best express the nature of the present times, but let us not prettify them.

In one part of the world, the violence of the attacks provokes sometimes spectacular mobilizations, as in the United States after the election of Trump: women's marches, support for the victims of the "Muslim Ban", march for Earth Day and scientists... It is a wave of protest on a rare scale. The "rightward evolution" of the rulers also provokes the emergence of political processes on the left, as with Corbyn in Great Britain. This offers

many opportunities for action for our organizations.

To this extent one can speak of bipolarization - reactionary and progressive; still, it must be made clear that it is a very unequal bipolarization. Theresa May is in government, not Jeremy Corbyn. The really existing Brexit has opened the way to a racist and xenophobic explosion, not to an offensive of the working class.

On the other hand, in another part of the world, opportunities are being rapidly reduced. The popular struggle continues in the Middle East, but in terribly more unfavourable conditions. I would like to give an example that has marked me personally. For several consecutive years, I have been in Pakistan in solidarity with struggles that are exemplary for their tenacity. The religious fundamentalists, the secret services of the army, the henchmen of the possessing classes were already conducting a reign of terror, but the popular resistance continued nevertheless with great force. I was able to speak in meetings involving several thousand people. In the military farm of Okara - where all the peasant cadres are now imprisoned and tortured. With the textile workers in Faisalabad - whose trade union leaders are now imprisoned and tortured. I met Baba Jan, an indefatigable Gilgit-Baltistan militant, today sentenced to life imprisonment after being tortured. Terrorist attacks follow one another in Lahore, where I lived. In a few years, the situation has become brutally marked by defeat. Resistance continues - and obviously still deserves our support - but in a qualitatively worse situation than before.

I will not return here to aspects of the discussion which have concerned other items on the agenda (the "revolutionary subject" and the social movements, the construction of "useful" parties. [19]. But I would like to conclude on our tasks of solidarity.

We are confronted today with forms of violence that are genuinely limitless, but also without any pretence. Hyper-violence is no longer denied, but displayed. This is obviously the case



for terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State, which thus portrays the negation of the humanity of the victims; but this dehumanization of the adversary and of whole groups [20] is also found in the theme of the "ethical war" or holy war, the fight against evil praised by Bush after the attacks of September 11 [      which would never be reimbursed but would be paid out, interest only, perpetually.  These proposals, although moderate and perfectly achievable, had no chance at all of being accepted by the European authorities.

This is the case with many proposals aiming to ease Greece's and numerous other countries' debt (joint debt recognition, euro-denominated mutual bonds, etc.). Technically these proposals are all viable but, in the present political context and balance of power in the European Union, the will to put them into practice is lacking. A progressive government cannot hope to be heard, respected and, even less, assisted by the European Commission, the ECB, and the European Stability Mechanism.

The ECB can paralyze a eurozone country's banking system by cutting off its banks' access to liquidities. The ECB's arbitrary power and the banking union reinforce the coercive powers the European institutions can use to counter any experience of progressive policy in Europe.

The treaties have become extremely restrictive on matters of debt and deficit. The European authorities, in control of policies, could easily decide to derogate to these regulations by taking into consideration the state of crisis (actually they do this for "friendly" governments), but they clearly had no intention of doing so.

On the contrary, all the negotiating parties fiercely fought the Greek government even though it gave proof of great moderation (to say the least). The mainstream media and numerous European leaders treated Alexis Tsipras and Yanis Varoufakis as rebels, or even as radical anti-Europeans. Between January and July 2015, the troika launched a fight against the Greek government, in order show to the peoples of Europe

that there is no alternative to neoliberal capitalism.

The capitulation of the first Tsipras government was not enough to satisfy the IMF or the European leaders. Pressure continued to be laid on the second Tsipras government to apply ever more neoliberal policies, especially attacking public property, the welfare and retirement systems, and assisting big capital through the introduction of further judicial and legal frameworks favoring privatization and fundamental structural regression.  All these new measures lead to increased injustice and precariousness.

If the creditors agree to a new restructuring of the debt,  it will be under the condition that the same kind of policies be continued. In this case, a reduction of the debt will not at all be a victory or even a consolation. It will be no more than a measure to ensure continual reimbursements while seeking to dampen any arising social struggles.

This is the first lesson: unless they take strong sovereign and unilateral measures of self-defense, the people and the governments they bring to office to break with austerity programs cannot put an end to the human rights violations perpetrated by the creditors and the big corporations.

Some would argue that should a leftist government come to power in Madrid, it could use the weight of the Spanish economy (the fourth  in the eurozone in terms of GDP) to negotiate concessions that Tsipras was unable to obtain. But what would be those concessions? Relaunch production and employment through heavy public spending and deficits? The ECB and Berlin along with at least five or six other capitals would oppose such policies! Taking strong measures against the banks? The ECB, with the support of the European Commission, would reject such policies.

What is also certain is that if the radical left entered the government of a country like Cyprus, Ireland, Portugal, Slovenia, or one of the three Baltic states, they would not have the weight, facing an unyielding European

Commission or ECB board, to convince these institutions to let them renounce austerity, stop privatizations, develop public services, and drastically reduce the debt. These countries will have to resist and take unilateral measures in the interest of their populations. Could several progressive governments of eurozone countries form a common front for renegotiations? It would certainly be very welcome if this could happen, but the possibility is remote, if only for reasons of electoral agenda.

Should Jean-Luc M  lenchon win the upcoming presidential election in France, and his coalition win the following general election, could a French left-wing government achieve a reform of the euro? M  lenchon and the staff of his campaign believe so. It is reasonable to have doubts about this possibility. Let's suppose that M  lenchon does win and forms a government intending to introduce social policies and to reform the euro. What would be the options?

It is quite likely that a French government could afford to disobey the current treaties, but it could not achieve a far-reaching reform of the entire eurozone. To do this would take simultaneous progressive electoral victories in the major countries as well as in peripheral countries. That said, it is clear that a government of a defiant France, and its allies, taking measures in favor of the French population and the peoples of the world (for instance, by abolishing Greece's and developing countries' debts towards France) could have a positive effect throughout Europe.

Having said that, the way out of the crisis is not of a nationalist nature. As much as in the past it is necessary to adopt an internationalist strategy and aim for a European integration that brings together the peoples opposed to the present form of integration, totally dominated by the interests of big capital.

The weak links in the inter-European chain of domination are to be found in the peripheral countries. If Syriza had adopted a correct strategy in 2015 it could well have been a turning point. It didn't happen.

Other weak links where the radical left may gain power in the not-so-distant future are Portugal and Spain, and perhaps Cyprus, Ireland, and Slovenia. A progressive move ahead would depend on the capacity of the radical left to learn the lessons of 2015 and thus make anticapitalist and democratic proposals that will trigger popular support. Without doubt, the force of popular mobilization will be a decisive factor. If the pressure for real uncompromising change does not invade the streets, the neighborhoods, and the workplaces, the future will be very dark.

To avoid what we saw in Greece in 2015, here are ten proposals for social mobilization and actions to be taken immediately and simultaneously by any government that is truly operating in the interests of the people.

**1. A left-wing government must disobey the European Commission in a very transparent manner and in line with its prior commitments.**

The party or coalition of parties (the example of Spain comes to mind) that claim to govern should from the outset refuse to conform to austerity measures, and pledge to refuse measures aiming solely at balancing the budget. They should announce: "We will not yield to the European treaties' diktat of a balanced budget because we want to increase public expenditures to fight anti-social and austerity measures and embark on the ecological transition."

Therefore, the first step is to begin disobeying in a clear and determined way. The Greek capitulation has shown us why we must shed the illusion that the EC and other European governments respect the popular mandate. This illusion can only lead to disaster. We must disobey.

**2. Call for popular mobilization both at the national and the European level.**

In 2015, such an initiative proved unsuccessful in Greece and elsewhere in Europe. It is obvious that the European social movements did not achieve great success in calling for demonstrations, which did take place

but were not at the level required by the need for solidarity with the Greek people.

However, it is also true that Syriza's strategy did not include calls for popular mobilization in Europe, or even in Greece. And when the Tsipras government did call for mobilization by means of the referendum of July 5, 2015, the will of the 61.5 percent of Greeks who refused to accept the creditors' demands was not respected.

Let's remember that starting in late February 2015 and up until the end of June 2015, Yanis Varoufakis and Alexis Tsipras made statements aimed at convincing public opinion that an agreement was in sight and that the situation was improving.

Imagine that instead, after each important negotiation, they had explained what was at stake through press releases, statements to the media, and declarations in public places "in front of the headquarters of the European institutions in Brussels and elsewhere. Imagine that they had revealed what was really going on. It would have led to gatherings of thousands or tens of thousands of people, and the social networks would have relayed this alternative discourse to hundreds of thousands or millions of citizens.

**3. Launch a debt audit with citizens' participation.**

The situations in the twenty-eight EU countries, and of course within the eurozone, are diverse. In some European countries "as in Greece" it is a matter of utmost necessity and priority to suspend debt repayments, in order to make the satisfaction of social needs and basic human rights an absolute priority. It is also a key element of a self-defense strategy.

In Spain, in Portugal, in Cyprus, and in Ireland, such a move depends on the balance of power and the current economic picture. In other countries, it is possible to carry out the audit first and then decide on the suspension of repayments. The specific situation of each country must be weighed before implementing these measures.

**4. Establish control of capital flows.**

We must clarify what this means. It does not mean that people cannot transfer a few hundred euros abroad. Obviously international financial transactions would be allowed up to a certain amount. On the other hand, it is important to enforce strict control over capital flows beyond a certain threshold.

**5. Socialize the financial sector and the energy sector.**

Socializing the financial sector does not merely mean developing a public banking hub. It implies decreeing a public monopoly on the financial sector, i.e. the banks, building societies and insurance companies. That is, a socialization of the financial sector under citizen control; turning the financial sector into a public service. Of course, socializing the energy sector will also be a priority during the ecological transition. Ecological transition cannot take place without a public monopoly over the energy sector, both in terms of production and distribution.

**6. Create a complementary, non-convertible currency and defend the right to leave the eurozone.**

Whether it is a case of exiting the eurozone or remaining in it, it is necessary to create a non-convertible complementary currency. In other words, a currency that is used locally, for exchanges within the country "for example, for paying increased pensions, salary increases for civil servants, taxes, public services, etc. The use of a complementary currency enables partial relief from the dictatorship of the euro and the European Central Bank.

Of course, we cannot avoid the debate on the eurozone. In several countries, exiting the eurozone is an option that must be defended by political parties, trade unions, and other social movements. Several eurozone countries will not be able to truly break away from austerity and launch an ecosocialist transition without leaving the eurozone. A redistributive monetary reform, or the levying of a special progressive tax on incomes

above €200,000, should be implemented in the case of an exit. That proposal would apply only to cash assets, and not to personal property (principal residence, etc.).

By applying a progressive exchange rate when moving from the euro to the new currency, the amount of cash in the hands of the wealthiest 1 percent would be reduced and wealth redistributed to households.

## 7. Implement radical tax reform.

Remove VAT on basic consumer goods and services, such as food, electricity, and water (up to a certain level of consumption per individual), as well as other basic utilities. On the other hand, increase VAT on luxury goods and services, etc. We also need to increase the taxes on corporate profits and incomes above a certain level – in other words, a progressive tax on income, wealth, and luxury residences. The reform of taxation must produce immediate effects: a very significant decrease in indirect and direct taxes for the majority of the population and a very significant increase for the wealthiest 10 percent and for major corporations. Also, strict new measures will be taken against fraud and tax evasion.

## 8. Deprivatize – “buy back” – privatized companies for a symbolic euro.

Paying no more than a symbolic euro to those who have benefited from privatizations would be an appropriate gesture and would strengthen and extend public services under citizen control.

## 9. Implement a broad emergency plan for creating socially useful jobs and for economic justice.

Reduce working hours <<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/02/...>> with no reduction in wages. Repeal antisocial laws and adopt laws to remedy the situation of abusive mortgage debt; countries such as Spain, Ireland, Greece, etc. are the most concerned. This could well be fixed by adopting adequate legislation, to avoid court actions (since many households have to face legal action requested by banks).

For example, a parliament could pass a law to cancel mortgage debts below €150,000 and thus bring such cases to an end. A vast program of public expenditure would be implemented in order to stimulate employment and socially useful activity by encouraging circuits of local production and distribution.

## 10. Initiate a genuine constituent process.

This does not imply constitutional changes within the framework of the existing parliamentary institutions. It involves dissolving the parliament and electing a constituent assembly by direct vote.

These are ten basic proposals for discussion. But one thing is certain: the measures to be taken must go to the root of the problems, and must be applied simultaneously, since a coherent program is needed. Breaking away from austerity policies cannot be achieved if, from the very start, radical measures against big capital are not taken.

Those who want us to believe that it's possible to achieve this objective without going down that road just create confusion and block any real progress. The architecture of Europe and the magnitude of the capitalist crisis leave no room for neo-Keynesian or productivist politics. Ecosocialism must be put at the heart of the debate, not left aside. Immediate and concrete proposals must emerge. We must carry out the anti-austerity struggle and embark on the path of an ecosocialist transition. It is an absolute and urgent necessity.

Find the full list of signatories [here](#).

Signatures :

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# Statement of Condemnation on the Murder of Comrade Ruben

**5 March 2017, by Harold Fernandez**

On the abovementioned tragic afternoon, in masse and in full combat gears elements from the Bravo Company of the 15th Infantry Brigade of the 3rd Infantry Division lead by 1LT MARLOUIE S. DICEN, Platoon leader 2LT FERNANDO OLIVEROS JR, under the command of LTC AUDIE A. MONGAO the 15th IB 3rd ID battalion unit, and scores of Philippine National Police (PNP) led by PCINSP MALVIN CEBEDO LOQUINTE of the Kapatagan Municipal Police Office raided a certain house in Brgy. Tiacongan, Kapatagan, Lanao del Norte purportedly to serve the warrant of arrest for Comrade Ruben.

The latter had noticed the approaching armed elements of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and made a quick decision to evade the state forces being unarmed himself. His attempt to escape had been impossible considering the number of the enemies with high caliber arms. He was alone and only armed with a cellular phone because he was in the place to visit a family friend and the masses. Given the number of the armed operatives at the scene, the intention was really to eliminate Comrade Ruben. It was a murder as can be seen by the number of bullets inflicted at him. It was crystal clear and very revealing that the said operation was mainly a

military operation rather than a police one. That is if warrant of his arrest was supposed to be served at him.

Comrade Ruben was never been in any gun-for-hire and other un-revolutionary activities. He was an active political and military cadre of the RPA since it split way from the CPP-NPA-NDFP in the early 90's. He was known to be tough on criminals and even government forces and personalities known to be abusive and oppressive. In fact, he was one of those vocal to support the current Duterte government's campaign on illegal drugs but not the "Tokhang" method. He strongly believed that the widespread drug problem in the country is a symptom of the intensive poverty and social inequity affecting the vast majority of our people.

Comrade Ruben had been very active in defending the peasant communities and the rural poor in his areas of operations as a member of the Partisan unit of the RPA. He selflessly performed his political and military tasks until the sad incident under the hands of the murderers. Until his last hours, he wanted to be with the masses.

The RPA as an armed wing of the Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa - Mindanao (RPM-M) has

been present (among other areas) in the Northwestern Mindanao that includes Lanao del Norte province since the early 80's. Since the RPMM signed the ceasefire Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Manggagawa - Mindanao Revolutionary Peoples' Army (RPA) agreement with the Philippine government under the Arroyo administration, RPA comrades hold on to this agreement and tried to stay the course of peaceful settlement of the armed conflicts as a result of the extreme poverty of the people. The murder of Comrade Ruben is a violation to this agreement. This raised more questions to the nature of peace that the present government under Duterte is waging. But it has become much clearer that the peace the AFP would want to achieve is a peace of the graveyard.

We deeply mourn for the loss of Comrade Ruben but will never put the death of our comrade in vain.

We shall overcome!

Harold Fernandez

National Operational Command (NOC)

RPA/RPMM

[www.rpm-m.org](http://www.rpm-m.org)

## Chilean copper miners on indefinite strike



# against BHP

5 March 2017, by **Franck Gaudichaud**

Owned by two Anglo-Australian mining giants, BHP Billiton and Rio Tinto, Escondida is the largest producer of “red gold” in the world. The mine extracts about 900,000 tonnes a year. This represents 20% of copper production in Chile, the country with the largest copper reserves in the world.

After the announcement of an “indefinite” strike by Escondida’s work force, the business consortium paralysed activities at the mine, a move that set off alarm bells in London’s Stock Exchange.

Despite threats from the mine’s president, Marcelo Castillo, and pressure from the government of President Michelle Bachelet, the mine’s workers have stood firm. They have set up a permanent picket line and campsite just outside the mine (at an altitude of 3100 metres in the desert of Atacama), supported by donations to a solidarity fund.

Economics minister Rodrigo Valdes wasted no time in denouncing the workers’ struggle and lending legitimacy to the transnationals, declaring: “This strike could affect Gross Domestic Product more than the forest fires” the worst in Chile’s history “that ravaged the country at the end of January.”

Yet it was only after collective negotiations broke down, and in the face of the company’s stubbornness, that the main trade union at Escondida launched the strike. Its central demand is revaluating salaries

at a time when the price of copper has risen by 27% last year. Copper prices are expected to continue rising at a similar rate until 2020, mainly to the benefit of foreign shareholders.

“The minimum we ask for,” said trade union leader Jaime Thenoux, “is to maintain the benefits we have in the existing collective agreement” “particularly for young miners who have recently joined the payroll at Escondida.

Over the past few years, mining companies have consistently sought to increase labour casualisation, at the same time as eliminating thousands of jobs, with many replaced by subcontractors. For its part, the main union at Escondida is demanding a wage rise of 7% and a special bonus of about US\$38,000 a person.

The miners are often referred to as a “labour aristocracy” because of their relatively high salaries when compared to most Chileans, but these workers have to labour in dangerous work conditions. Above all, it is the strategic position they occupy in the country’s “primary-exporter” neoliberal economy that lends important weight to their resistance and demands.

In the context of a fragmented trade union and workers’ movement, inherited from the years of military dictatorship followed by 25 years of post-dictatorship neoliberalism, this strike could pave the way for future class conflicts. This is especially the case given the Unified Workers

Central (CUT, Chile’s main national trade union centre) remains in the hands of a bureaucracy with little legitimacy that has been largely coopted by the parties of government, including the Chilean Communist Party.

Over the past few days, the ghost of the great strike of Escondida of 2006 has reappeared “much to the disgust of the conservative media and the bosses. That bitter conflict, which lasted 25 days, shook the world mining sector and contributed to the revitalisation of the trade union movement across the country.

In his time, socialist president Salvador Allende (overthrown in a 1973 military coup) noted just how much copper represented “Chile’s wage”. Today, these resources are once again largely in the hands of transnational capital. In these conditions, the call to renationalise mining resources under the democratic control of the people and workers resonates with force.

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## What the Women’s Strike Means

## 4 March 2017, by **Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya**

The strike will take place in at least forty countries – the first internationally coordinated day of protest on such a large scale in years: in terms of size and diversity of organizations and countries involved, it will be comparable to the international demonstrations against the imperialist attack on Iraq in 2003 and to the international protests coordinated under the banner of the World Social Forum and the global justice movement in the early 2000s.

While Occupy, the indignados, and Black Lives Matter did manage to have international echo and to trigger demonstrations, occupations, and protests in a number of country, there was little conscious international coordination among the various organizations and groups involved. The Arab revolutions were an extraordinary and historic event, but social and political organizations in other countries failed to give birth to a powerful internationally coordinated mobilization in their support.

If it succeeds, the International Women's Strike will mark a qualitative and quantitative leap in the long process of reconstructing an international social mobilization against neoliberalism and imperialism, to which the various movements of recent years, from Occupy to Gezi Park, from the indignados to Standing Rock and Black Lives Matter have given form. It will also signal the concrete possibility for a new, powerful, anticapitalist, and internationalist feminist movement.

### **Why Are We Calling It a Strike?**

Many discussions about the strike, particularly in the United States, have centered on whether it is correct to call March 8 a "strike" at all, rather than a demonstration. This criticism misses the point. Women's strikes have always been more encompassing in their targets and aims than traditional walkouts over wages and

working conditions.

In 1975, 90 percent of Iceland's women staged a strike in the workplace and refused to perform unpaid socially reproductive work for a day, in order to make Icelandic women's work and contribution to the society visible. They demanded equal wages with men and an end to sexual discrimination in the workplace.

In the fall of 2016, Polish activists adopted the strategy and message of the 1975 Iceland women's strike and organized a massive women's strike to stop a bill in parliament that would have banned abortion. Argentinian activists did the same last October to protest male violence against women.

These events – which spurred the idea for a larger strike on Women's Day – demonstrate how a women's strike is different from a general strike. A women's strike springs from political and theoretical reflection on the concrete forms of women's labor in capitalist societies.

In capitalism women's work in the formal labor market is only a part of the work they perform; women are also the primary suppliers of reproductive labor – unpaid labor that is equally important to reproducing society and capitalist social relations. A women's strike is designed to make this unpaid work visible and to emphasize that social reproduction is also a site of struggle.

Moreover, because of the sexual division of labor in the formal labor market, a vast number of women hold precarious jobs, don't have labor rights, are unemployed, or are undocumented workers.

Women working in the formal and informal labor market and in the unpaid social reproductive sphere are all workers. This consideration must be central to any discussion about the reconstruction of a working-class movement not only in the United States, but also globally.

Emphasizing the unity between the workplace and the home is key, and a central organizing principle for the March 8 strike. A politics that takes women's work seriously must include not only strikes in the workplace but also strikes from unpaid social reproductive work, part-time strikes, calls for reduced work time, and other forms of protest that recognize the gendered nature of social relations.

"Strike" has become the umbrella term under which these various forms of action are included because it is the term that best emphasizes the centrality of women's labor and their self-identification as workers, whatever form their work takes.

### **Reclaiming the Right to Strike**

The United States has perhaps the worst labor laws among liberal democracies. General strikes and political strikes are forbidden, strikes are tied to narrow economic demands addressed to employers, and contracts often have explicit no-strike clauses, the violation of which can cause the worker to lose their job and/or the union organizing the strike to receive hefty fines. Additionally, several states, such as New York, have laws that explicitly forbid public employees from striking.

The discussion about how to reverse this situation and empower workers has been the main strategic concern of the US left over the past few decades. Yet one of the dangers in this discussion is that of reducing class struggle to economic struggle alone, and of conflating capitalist social relations with the formal economy in a narrow sense.

A transformation of labor relations in the United States requires not simply an activation of the working class on the basis of economic demands in the workplace, but its politicization and radicalization – the capacity to wage a political struggle addressing the

totality of relations of power, institutions, and forms of exploitation in place.

This cannot be achieved by improving and expanding rank-and-file organizing in the workplace alone; one of the central problems radical labor organizing faces is its political and social isolation and invisibility. Laying the groundwork for the revitalization of working-class power will require operating on different levels — creating large social coalitions acting inside and outside workplaces and establishing bonds of solidarity and trust among labor, antiracist, feminist, student, and anti-imperialist organizers and activists. It also means

harnessing social imagination through creative, intellectual and theoretical interventions and experimentation with new practices and languages.

Instead of a narrow focus on workplace struggles, we need to connect movements based on gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality together with labor organizing and environmental activism. Only by creating this collective totality will we be able to address the complexity of issues and demands put forward by these various forms of mobilization.

This is the path that the International Women's Strike is pursuing, with its expansive platform and inclusiveness.

March 8 will not be a general strike. But it will be an important step toward the re-legitimation of the right to strike against the degradations of capitalism felt in all spheres of life by all people.

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## Russia and the Left

3 March 2017, by **Stephen R Shalom**

Why do some cheer on Russian bombing in Syria, dismissing out of hand the evidence from Physicians for Human Rights, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch [31] that they are criminally targeting hospitals? Why do some try to justify Russia's takeover of Crimea or its blatant intervention in Ukraine?

Apologetics for Moscow, of course, has a long and ignoble history on the left. There is no excuse for this betrayal of left values, but we can at least understand some of the reasons that people held these wrongheaded views.

In the past, many Americans who were committed to progressive causes — especially civil rights and labor rights — joined the Communist Party because it was an organization actively and powerfully engaged in these struggles. They were aware that CP membership required following the Soviet line on foreign policy questions, but many joined despite this, not because of it. Now in fact even their contribution to the civil rights and labor movements was compromised to some degree by their allegiance to a hierarchical party that was subservient to Moscow's

foreign policy. (How many honest radicals became alienated from the left because of the CP defense of the Moscow Trials or the Hitler-Stalin Pact? How much harm was done to the left by the CP supporting the trial and conviction of Trotskyists under the Smith Act in World War II?) Still, we can understand why many CPers believed that their participation was furthering the cause of social justice at home, and, hence, why they gave the Soviet Union a pass.

Another reason for leftists to be soft on the Soviet Union was that internationally it was generally on the side of the great anti-colonial struggles of the day. Its economic and military aid and its diplomatic support helped many Third World nations break from Western colonial or neocolonial rule. Now this was never as consistent or as selfless as Moscow's acolytes suggested. Soviet opposition to the Eritrean liberation struggle, for example, was horrendous, and as early as 1921 the new Soviet state sold out communist militants in Turkey in order to maintain its relationship with Mustafa Kemal. Moreover, national liberation

that was supported with Stasi agents setting up a security apparatus was hardly very liberating. Likewise, Soviet support to the Republic during the Spanish Civil War was such that even if Franco had been defeated, Spanish democracy was unlikely to survive. In addition, it should be noted that great powers often tried to weaken their rivals' colonial empire without at all being progressive — think of the German Kaiser's aid to Irish rebels. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the Soviet Union played an important role in hastening the end of colonialism, and so we can understand why many leftists were enamored of it. Soviet prestige was also enhanced by its role in the defeat of Nazi Germany (though this followed its pact with Nazi Germany).

A third reason that some leftists wrongly but understandably championed the Soviet Union is that the country was committed, rhetorically at least, to socialism. Principled socialists differ in their assessment of when the Soviet Union became a repressive state — I would date it from the crushing of the Workers' Opposition and Kronstadt —

but there is no doubt that by the mid-1920s there was no democracy in the Soviet Union and, because there can be no socialism without democracy, nor was there socialism. Beyond their rhetorical socialism, members of the Soviet bloc proclaimed their allegiance to social justice, and to some extent this was not all just words. Because social justice, like socialism, has to include democratic rights, the Soviet Union and other members of its camp were crucially deficient in social justice. But they did tend to have greater social and economic egalitarianism and more developed social welfare policies than many Western states. These accomplishments had the unfortunate effect of erroneously suggesting that we face a trade-off: we can have either economic justice or democracy, but not both. It is true that a resident of Brazil's favelas might choose Cuba's health care over her own country's formal democracy. But Costa Rica, no paragon of socialist enlightenment, offers both democracy and a life expectancy equal to that of Cuba's. Still, to many leftists the fact that the "communist" countries, led by the Soviet Union, declared themselves to be pursuing socialism made it easier to overlook their misdeeds.

The question is, why do many leftists today close their eyes to Russian crimes given that each one of these lame but understandable reasons for Soviet apologetics no longer applies?.

Where the Soviet Union generally backed parties around the world and in the United States that were on the left, at the moment Moscow seems to be much more supportive of far right parties than of left ones. [32] In the United States, Putin's backing of Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton was clear, whether or not it is confirmed that Russia hacked emails with the intention of helping the Republican candidate. So left apologists for Putin are not turning a blind eye to the crimes of a regime that at least is promoting the U.S. civil rights movement. No, their blind eye is to the crimes of a regime that favors the candidate who will preside over one of the most rightwing governments in U.S. history.

Where the Soviet Union generally

stood against colonialism, in this post-colonial age Putin's Russia is now one of the leading powers seeking to acquire or hold on to territory by force: Chechnya, South Ossetia, Eastern Ukraine, Crimea (the latter annexation condemned by a vote of 100-11 in the General Assembly, with 58 abstentions).

Some leftists like to claim that Russia, Syria, Iran, and Hezbollah constitute an "axis of resistance" that has heroically been challenging U.S. and Israeli imperialism. This account ignores the fact that in the 1970s Hafez al-Assad intervened in Lebanon against Palestinians and the Lebanese left, and more recently Bashar al-Assad partnered with Washington in torturing prisoners. [33] Today, hundreds of Palestinians languish in Bashar's torture chambers. [34]. If this is an axis of resistance, we might consider adding the European far right parties that have been supporting Assad. [35] Indeed, given that Moscow has been a substantial purchaser of Israeli military drones [36] and a leading supplier of its oil and has coordinated its bombing in Syria with Israel, [37] perhaps Israel too should be considered a member of the axis of resistance? After all, Israel did absent itself from the UN resolution condemning the annexation of Crimea. [38]

And where the Soviet Union could boast some progressive social policies, these are things of the past. Putin has explicitly adopted a rightwing ideology, drawing on émigré and even fascist philosophers. [39] Putin's party, United Russia, with three-quarters of the seats in the Duma, has officially adopted "Russian Conservatism" as its position. As RT, the Russian-government sponsored news outlet, reported:

Having called themselves "conservatives," the members of United Russia "have simply determined their place" as a rightwing party, political scientist Dmitry Travin said. That means that they are "politicians who defend values of the market economy based on national traditions," Rosbalt news agency quoted him as saying.

At the same time, they "are not

staunch defenders of freedom as liberals," and they are not "followers of egalitarianism as social democrats," he said. [40]

In terms of Islamophobia and anti-LGBT repression, Russia makes the United States look like Paradise. Male life expectancy in Russia is six years less than in Brazil and a decade less than in Mexico; its spending on education as a share of GDP is 80 percent that of Mexico and less than three quarters that of Brazil. [41] In terms of the size of the public sector, Russian government spending as a percent of GDP is smaller than that of Japan, Greece, the UK, and Spain (and its military spending is a far greater share of its overall government spending than any of these countries). [42] Neither in practice nor in inspiration nor even in rhetoric does current-day Russia reflect left values.

So why then the left enthusiasm for Russia?

For some, no doubt, it's simply nostalgia. The U.S. Peace Council, a slavish Moscow tool during the Cold War, fondly recalls the Soviet alliance with the Baathist regime in Syria under Hafez al-Assad, and so perhaps it's a simple move to glorify Russian support today for the successor to the Assad dynasty. (And thus the Peace Council's awful propaganda trip to Damascus and subsequent participation in Syrian-government sponsored propaganda events. [43])

But wistful longing for the glory days of the Soviet Union doesn't explain most left attachment to Russia. Instead it's the pernicious doctrine of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" that unfortunately has permeated large sectors of the left.

A civilian airliner is shot down over the Russian-backed break-away zone of Ukraine, the United States (among others) accuses the Russians of being responsible, and the automatic, reflexive response from some is that this was either a Western false flag operation (an intelligence concoction) or at a minimum a tragedy for which the United States and its allies bear primary responsibility. That Russian propaganda on the matter was so



easily refuted merely confirmed for some how devilish the false flag operation really was. [44]

An aid convoy is bombed in Syria. Washington accuses Russia or Syria of being responsible. Given that Assad had a clear policy of forcing Aleppo to “surrender or starve,” [45] Washington’s accusation was certainly plausible, but further evidence left little doubt as to Russian/Syrian responsibility. [46] But to some on the left, the fact that the U.S. government said it made it false.

Now it is true that any time two imperial states contest for power each is going to try to push a one-sided, jingoistic narrative of the differences between them. Skepticism about the claims of one’s own government is certainly warranted. During the Soviet period, in the United States the official line tried to portray Moscow as wholly responsible for the onset of the Cold War, and as being in the wrong, the

aggressor, in every single international dispute. It was and remains important to contest this dominant view. That doesn’t mean, though, that we should have dismissed the tendentious U.S. narrative only to adopt the equally tendentious Soviet counter-narrative — dismissing as Western propaganda such things as the gulag or the secret clauses in the Hitler-Stalin pact or the Katyn massacre or Soviet aggression in Hungary in 1956 or in Afghanistan in 1979-88. It was entirely possible — and right — to reject both the U.S. and the Soviet propaganda lines. The forerunner of the current [Campaign for Peace and Democracy](#)— the Campaign for Peace and Democracy East and West — famously got Western Central America activists to sign on to a statement condemning Soviet policy in Eastern Europe and got East European dissidents to sign on to a statement condemning U.S. policy in Nicaragua and El Salvador. It’s this sort of rejection of both sides

and their lies that ought to be key to any left politics.

If Russian hacking interfered in the U.S. election, it is not enough to point out Washington’s sordid record of interfering in foreign elections. The left condemns U.S. interference in foreign elections and we ought to condemn Russian interference as well (and not just in the United States). While some of the attacks on Russian hacking by the Hillary Clinton camp (“Ronald Reagan would be rolling over in his grave” [47]) do indeed smack of McCarthyism, there’s nothing wrong with the left denouncing Russian crimes. And all the U.S. crimes in the world don’t justify Russian crimes. Nor should U.S. crimes lead us to withhold our criticisms of the crimes of Moscow, any more than Russian crimes would lead us to withhold our criticisms of the crimes of Washington in Iraq, Honduras, and elsewhere.

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