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Tribute to hunger strikers in Palestine

31 May 2017, by Fourth International Bureau

Faced with this unprecedented movement, Israel decided to go for a showdown by explaining that there was nothing to negotiate with "terrorists." Some Israeli officials even referred to Thatcher's attitude during the 1981 hunger strike of Irish political prisoners, during which ten of them died. Palestinian strikers were subjected to sanctions, pressure, ill-treatment, and Israel threatened to force feed them if they continued their action.

After 40 days of hunger strike, the prisoners obtained satisfaction on most of their claims. This strike, carried out by members of all the political factions, was a demonstration of the determination of the prisoners but also of the power of the Palestinian mobilizations when they are carried out in a unitary way and without direct stake of institutional power. This mobilization contrasted strongly with the inability of the Gaza

and Ramallah leaderships, jealous of their meagre material and symbolic advantages and entangled in their rivalries, to propose a strategy of liberation to the whole population.

Faced with an extreme right-wing government backed by the imperialist powers, which reinforces and expands Israel's colonial hold on Palestine every day, the Palestinian people suffer from a lack of leadership, strategy, and programme for liberation. While a new generation has entered the struggle during the last two years with the rise in individual attacks against soldiers and settlers, the gap between the PLO and the Hamas on one side and the population on the other has never been so wide.

In this context, it is hardly surprising that the prisoners' movement was widely supported in the Palestinian territories, with days of general strike and regular demonstrations, violently

dispersed by the army of occupation. Without overestimating the medium- and long-term impact of the hunger strike, it has been noted that it has contributed to the re-mobilization of significant sectors of Palestinian society and to putting an anti-colonial perspective on the political scene.

We salute the victory of the prisoners, our solidarity with them is total, and that is why we have joined and will continue to join in international mobilizations in support of their struggle. Beyond that, we reaffirm our support for the demands of the Palestinian people: the end of the apartheid regime, the right to self-determination and the right of return for refugees. We will continue to maintain and develop ties with our regionally and internationally isolated Palestinian comrades and build the Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions (BDS) Campaign, which will weaken the colonial power.

Brazil rocked by the return of mass protest

31 May 2017, by Gibran Jordo , Todd Chretien

Gibran Jordão is a 38-year-old activist based in Rio de Janeiro, where he serves on the National

Coordinating Committee of [Movimento por uma Alternativa Independente e Socialista \(MAIS\)](#). He

is also a member of the executive committee of the National Federation of Federal University Employees and a

member of the National Executive Committee of CSP-Conlutas, a coalition of left-led trade unions. Jordão was interviewed by Todd Chretien, who translated it from Portuguese with help from Waldo Merlemstein of MAIS.

On April 28, Brazilian workers participated in a one-day mass strike against plans by the Temer government to enforce even stricter austerity measures. Can you describe the size and scope of the strike?

In 2016, after the parliamentary coup against Dilma Rousseff, Temer's government went on the offensive and began to implement an austerity package so severe that, in practice, it meant the dismantling of the constitution of 1988 [established after the fall of the military dictatorship] and the Consolidated Labor Code (CLT).

Dilma's government attempted to implement partial counter-reforms, but failed owing to the grave political crisis that wracked her popular front government.

The union movement found itself divided over the course of the past year, unable to develop a united calendar of struggles. A strike against a constitutional amendment that froze social investments for 20 years was restricted to the education sector, and the movement ended up in defeat.

But this year, things changed. A wave of opposition grew against Temer's austerity plans, finding expression in the feminist mobilizations on March 8, International Women's Day, and afterward, in protests on March 15 that brought hundreds of thousands out into the streets.

And on April 28, the one-day general strike exploded. All the trade union federations called for the general strike in a united front that shut down factories, refineries, banks, commerce, public transportation, school and universities. And now, a huge march to Brasília—the federal capital—on May 24 is also being organized as a united front against the so-called reform of pensions and the labor code, as well as outsourcing.

Now, on the eve of the Brasília march, new corruption charges are

hitting Temer's government, opening up the biggest political crisis since his inauguration, one that could lead to his downfall. This led trade union leaders who met on March 19 to agree that the order of the day is to bring down the government and its counter-reforms.

What are the most important unions and mass organizations behind the strike? What role did trade union federations like the CUT and CSP-Conlutas play in calling and organizing the strike?

The unity between all the union federations and popular movements brought together the entire Brazilian workers' movement against Temer's reforms into the planning of the general strike. This process was a qualitative jump in framework of resistance from what had been a defensive situation.

Without exaggerating it, we can say in a general way that the CUT [Unified Workers Center, Brazil's largest union federation] and the Workers Party (PT) are the main leaders of the process, and therefore, it has its limitations. Principally, these forces are always trying to subordinate the movement to the strategy of electing former PT president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in 2018's national elections, and thus rebooting a class collaborationist government.

But in any case, there was a powerful unity among all sectors of Brazil's social movement that made it possible to paralyze the country and bring out demonstrations that took place on that day. The movement has a broad reach and has developed a capillary system, allowing it to reach into large, medium and even small cities.

CSP-Conlutas is a union coalition that represents a minority of the workers, but it played a very important role in the work stoppages in the public sector, the schools, the universities and some sections of industry—such as the factories in São José dos Campos, construction workers in some cities, and road workers in Fortaleza, among others.

Did the strike spread beyond the best-organized sections of the

Brazilian working class? Did it draw in unorganized sectors? Favela dwellers? Farmers and agricultural workers? Students? Social movements?

GJ: Besides the main union federations, the MTST [Homeless Workers' Movement] and the MST [Landless Workers' Movement] both played a critical role in mobilizing workers, which, together with the union movement, contributed to spreading the strike to different categories of workers.

They were also decisive in organizing blockades and street demonstrations, adding a lot of visibility to the general strike. Just in the city of São Paulo, there were 50 highway blockades by the early morning hours of April 28.

How did the authorities, private bosses and the media react?

Initially, they tried to harass, delegitimize and ignore the movement in order to downplay it or claim it didn't have much support.

But these attempts by governors, bosses and the mainstream press were all in vain. The power of the general strike trampled anyone who tried to impede it, compelling the major media outlets to cover the shut downs and protests that took place all throughout the day of April 28. It was an historic day!

Turning to the broader political situation, I want to ask about the different political forces in Brazil now. Let's start with the right wing and the bourgeoisie under Temer, who, since taking office after Dilma's impeachment, has embarked on a series of drastic austerity measures and attacks on basic democratic rights. Some of his supporters even openly praise the old military dictatorship. What are Temer's main goals, and is the Brazilian ruling class united behind his administration?

Everything is happening very quickly in Brazil. The unity of the bourgeoisie behind the government, which was strong until some days ago, no longer exists.

Temer's government, whose aim was to deepen and accelerate the reforms, is now losing the confidence of a big part of the national and international bourgeoisie, mainly because of the charges filed by JBS [the largest meat processing company in the world, [whose heir recorded a conversation with Temer](#) that is at the center of the corruption scandal engulfing him] with Brazil's Supreme Court.

At this moment, because of the mobilizations and strikes, divisions are deepening among the bourgeoisie, Temer's government is suspended in midair, and there is a very good chance that the government could fall in the coming days. It remains to be seen if some agreement will be reached or if the process will be bloody.

What about the Workers Party? The PT was founded in 1980 as a political expression of Brazil's working-class movement and it succeeded in electing Lula, a former metalworker, president twice, and then Rousseff twice. It was lauded for reducing poverty, expanding education for the poor and improving nutrition for those living in extreme poverty. Yet by the time the right forced out Dilma, the PT had entered a profound crisis. Can you explain the state of the PT?

The PT played a progressive role during the 1980s. It was the product of strikes and a reorganization that occurred at the same time the mass movement went on the offensive to overturn the military dictatorship.

But to the degree that the PT won city halls, seats in parliament and eventually arrived in office at the federal level, it adapted itself to a modus operandi that the right of the party always used to facilitate a promiscuous relationship between the state and big business.

Moreover, the PT didn't dare make any structural reforms. On the contrary, so long as the economy grew [based on a boom in commodity prices for Brazil's chief exports], it employed compensatory social measures to maintain Lula's high popularity. But as soon as the economic crisis arrived in

Brazil, it precipitated a political crisis, and Dilma's government found itself paralyzed. It could neither meet workers' demands, nor did it succeed in pushing through plans in the interest of capital in a satisfactory manner.

The result was a loss of popular support and a crisis at the base among its social allies, which transformed the PT into a vulnerable and fragile government. All this created the conditions under which the pro-coup sectors of the opposition could act and triumph [by impeaching Dilma and making Temer president].

Do you think the April 28 strike will allow the PT to rebound?

The PT is exhausted and has suffered heavy defeats—not only Dilma's impeachment, but also losses in recent municipal elections. But it is a mistake to say that the PT is finished, just as we cannot really say that the experience of Lulaism has been overcome.

The PT never lost its position in the union and social movements. It remains the majority in those sectors. Likewise, given Temer's crisis and his intention to tear up historical social rights in a country with 14 million unemployed people, workers will remember the period of economic growth experienced during Lula's two terms in office.

In fact, today, Lula leads in all the polls for the upcoming presidential election, and the PT is undergoing a recovery process in so far as it leads the struggle against the Temer government.

A majority of the Brazilian revolutionary left participated in the founding and development of the PT, but over the years, different currents have protested the PT's leadership turning away from the party's original goals and left to begin new political projects. Plus, several important social movements have organized independently—or at least partially so—from the PT, including the MTST and the CSP-Conlutas. Can you explain the strength of some of the forces to the left of the PT?

Today, the socialist left that opposed the PT from the left faces a dramatic challenge. No current of the socialist left has mass influence, and the most important ones have undergone some degree of crisis and fragmentation.

This means that, politically, a polarization is gaining ground and beginning to consolidate between the old PT and the ultra right, represented by congressman Jair Bolsonaro—who notoriously paid homage on the floor of the National Assembly to the dictatorship's torture chief and [screamed at one PT congresswoman](#): "I wouldn't rape you because you're not worthy of it."

Sectarian and opportunist tendencies are obstacles to the development of a third camp in this moment. The PSTU [Unified Socialist Workers Party] opposes the construction of a Socialist and Left Front. It consciously fights against such a front, relying instead on its own self-proclamations. At the same time, there are tendencies within the left that insist on an electoralist path and on class conciliation.

The challenge facing the socialist left is to prove that it can overcome PT-ism and have the courage to present an alternative. At a minimum, PSOL [Socialist and Freedom Party], the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB), the PSTU, and other social movements and political organizations whose political projects are different than the PT should join together in a front.

Given the scale of Temer's attacks, there is a debate on the Brazilian left about whether the only possible way to defeat the right is to unite behind the PT in the 2018 presidential election. What is your view about supporting the PT? Even if it has been complicit with neoliberalism and bureaucratized, is it still a defense against the right? Or is it time to build a new political party?

We are not in favor of repeating the experience of a class-collaborationist government.

If Lula is not jailed or does not lose his right to run for office as a political candidate, the PT will have an

opportunity to recompose itself, but it will do so in a framework or a program that serves the interests of capital.

Brazil's left must conduct a thoroughgoing assessment of the experience of the PT in government and where this has left us. The parliamentary coup, the approval of policies that directly attacked social and democratic rights, and the difficult situation in which the left finds itself today were all byproducts of the PT's method of governing. Repeating that today in the midst of a global economic crisis could be even more catastrophic.

As I mentioned before, the challenge for the socialist left is to leave marginality behind, to unify different parties and currents and construct an anti-capitalist program that can win a mass audience. This is the political fight that those of us in MAIS want to push forward.

Within this perspective, PSOL has important responsibilities. The pressures on the movements to capitulate to Lulaism are very strong, but they can only be fought successfully by opposing any class-collaborationist projects and by presenting an alternative free from sectarianism, power grabs or self-referential declarations.

Despite Dilma's ouster, vicious austerity and the disorienting impact of the PT's crisis, the Brazilian working class appears to have a unique capacity for mobilization. Some on the left have argued that neoliberalism has so disorganized the working class that socialists must look elsewhere for anti-capitalist social power. How have Brazilian workers retained such a high degree of organization and militancy?

With the economic crisis in 2008, the European bourgeoisie's offensive against the social welfare state generated many struggles and powerful resistance in many countries, including general strikes, most notably in Greece.

When the crisis hit Brazil and when various governments—first Dilma's and then Temer's—increased their attacks on social and democratic rights, there was every reason to expect the Brazilian working class would stand up to fight, to resist.

We have a history marked by many struggles, but forming a united front between the union federations in unified action with the social and youth movements was decisive. The movement's unity focused all the indignation against the government and its reforms, and this gave us hope that we could defeat Temer and bring him down.

How do you see the relationship between short-term defensive struggles—for instance, the call for new strikes against austerity—and the construction of a mass, working-class political party to the left of the PT?

This question is difficult, and I will give my personal view on the subject. Today, it is hard to imagine the construction of a new political organization unifying all the legally registered organizations that are to the left of the PT. The PSOL fulfills this role to some extent, but it has limitations. Perhaps the experience in Rio de Janeiro—where Marcelo Freixo, PSOL's mayoral candidate, won roughly 40 percent of the vote—is the closest we have come nationally to achieving mass influence.

But the process is still under way, and there are many elements that we do not have much control over. In fact, one part of the bourgeoisie's offensive is to reform our political system, closing down space for the left by imitating elections in the U.S. We don't know if they will succeed, but a sector of the judiciary does seem willing to destroy the party system.

If we can at least immediately get the Socialist and Left Front into the streets all across the country, drawing inspiration from the Left and Workers Front's (FIT) experience in Argentina, that would be a very important first

step.

Finally, the Obama administration maintained a long and friendly relationship with Lula and Dilma, but readily backed Temer as well. Donald Trump's election in the U.S. has energized the populist right in various countries, but open support for Trump also brings with it a raft of liabilities. How has the Brazilian right reacted to Trump, and is there a danger of a return to a more authoritarian, even militaristic, state in Brazil?

The ultra right in Brazil looks at Trump's election with a lot of sympathy. Bolsonaro praised Trump's campaign posture of confronting everything and everybody, and he says he's willing to do the same in Brazil. But I don't think that the right wing in Brazil is unified in seeing Trump's election in a good light. For example, Rede Globo, Brazil's biggest media corporation, was clearly against Trump.

Nor do I see an authoritarian solution to the crisis, including a military intervention, as a priority for the Brazilian bourgeoisie, even if they do aim to close down some of the regime's doors and windows.

In fact, this is already being done. For instance, the new anti-terrorism law, prohibitions against civil servants going on strike, authoritarian actions taken by the judiciary branch, and the attempt to reform the political system in order to restrict organization's ability to express themselves politically are all examples of measures currently being put in place in Brazil.

Each and every working-class struggle today must also defend and expand democratic rights. All in all, we find ourselves living in a historical moment. The class struggles unfolding today will define the future of an entire generation for the coming period.

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31 May 2017, by **robm**

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A new feminist movement in Italy is on the move

30 May 2017, by **Nadia De Mond**

For more than three months now a new feminist movement, surprising in its breadth, composition and radical character, has burst onto the Italian scene. The first signs of the maturation of a new feminist generation, with its own codes of expression and its own political sensitivity, were already visible in the last two years in the initiatives in Italy, particularly in Rome, for the full exercise of the right to abortion - provided for by Law 194 but not guaranteed in practice in hospitals because of the growing presence of "conscientious objectors" - and in solidarity with the struggles of Spanish women against the anti-abortion bill of the minister Gallardon.

This time too, the inspiration came from international feminist mobilizations against macho violence in many Latin American countries, for equal pay in Iceland and for abortion in Poland, which encouraged the desire to react to a situation of structural violence against women that characterizes this country, where the murder of a woman by a fiancé, husband or ex is only the tip of the iceberg.

Thus, from the confluence of the practices of young feminist collectives and the experience of anti-violence centres, managed by women, there emerged a call for a national mobilization on the occasion of the

day of November 25th, conceived as the beginning of a process of reflection and action that attacks all forms of structural violence against women. The appeal, drawn up in Rome under the name Non Una di Meno ("Not one woman fewer"), was welcomed with enthusiasm and in several cities local assemblies sprang up to prepare for the demonstration. [1] Unlike in the past, these meetings, sometimes initiated by new collectives of young feminists or informal groups, often linked to occupied spaces, addressed everyone through the social media, and were very successful.

150,000 women in the streets of Rome

On Saturday, November 26, at least 150,000 women, LGBTIQ and a number of solidarity-minded (young) men took to the streets, forming a colourful, joyful and irrepressible tide that invaded central Rome. This demonstration, full of energy and the will to change the world, self-organized, without the support of the traditional structures of the left, took place in a unitary, inclusive spirit of the anti-racist, anti-patriarchal and LGBTIQ organizations.

It is a movement that is certainly hostile to the Democratic Party governments (Renzi first and subsequently Gentiloni) because of their attacks on public health, the living conditions of working women and those in precarious employment, the self-determination of women as regards reproductive health (see the promotion of "Fertility Day" by the Minister of Health, Beatrice Lorenzin). And also because of the suspension of funding for anti-violence centres and a migratory policy which, in practice, is punitive and forbids new arrivals from leading a dignified life on our territory. But at the same time, it does not identify itself with any other established political or trade union force.

This demonstration, whose success exceeded all expectations, was followed by a day of working out the content of the protest, with a national assembly, organized in eight round tables (each of about 200 people from all over the country), which examined the different aspects of (hetero) patriarchal violence: from the judicial-legal framework to economic violence, at work and in the sphere of social protection; from sexist education at school to the media; from feminist support to escape from violence to the plan for sexual and reproductive health; from the double or triple violence that immigrant women experience to sexism in social

movements. This process of reflection will lead to the writing of a feminist anti-violence plan, starting from below, in contrast to the one that is being prepared by the government and will be presented in June.

Refusing imposed gender behaviour

Meanwhile, "Non Una di Meno" endorsed the appeal of the Argentinian "Ni Una Menos" for an international women's strike on March 8th. A day in which we will proclaim: "if our lives are worth nothing, we stop." We do not produce, we do not provide care, we do not consume, we "strike" by refusing gender-imposed kinds of behaviour.

Galvanized by the gigantic demonstration in which thousands of young women - and men - took to the streets for the first time, the movement became even bigger by expressing itself in assemblies in many cities which were working either to deepen the themes of the national round tables or to prepare concretely the women's strike on March 8, each in its own area.

A second national assembly, which just concluded in Bologna last weekend, defined the platform - the result of in-depth discussions in the round tables - and the modalities of the strike: the choice of symbolic places to carry out flash mob actions; support for women workers in precarious employment or who are subjected to blackmail by the employer through "disturbance

actions" (which disturb the functioning of the service or of production); choosing a unique symbol - black and fuchsia colours and Russian dolls - to be displayed in windows or to be worn to signal support for the strike by those who are not able to leave their work; all this in addition to assemblies in workplace and also in schools, in order to block courses and discuss violence and the oppression of women.

Then, in late afternoon, we will meet up in the central squares of all the cities, where we will create national and international connections between the demonstrators, and conclude in some cities in the evening with demonstrations of the "Reclaim the Night" kind or those around the slogan: "safe streets are guaranteed by the women who walk through them" (and not by the "forces of order").

Self-management, mutual aid and education

While carefully maintaining the autonomy of the movement, Non Una di Meno launched an invitation and a challenge to all the unions, the big official confederations and the grassroots organizations, to join its action by calling for a 24-hour general strike, which is the only means by which workers can strike legally. So far, only a few grassroots unions have responded positively to this call, without committing fully to its success, while the CGIL [2] decided not to join the movement, merely

inviting its rank-and-file members to hold meetings on the subject in the workplaces.

This new feminist movement, which expresses a radical refusal of what exists, derives its strength from the combination of massive actions of protest and direct actions with experiences of self-management and mutual assistance, in anti-violence centres, in the collectives and in the occupied spaces, which have as their reference the construction of a society freed from machismo, racism, homo-lesbo-transphobia, a society that goes beyond the capitalist market.

It feels itself to be part of a tide - will this be the famous third wave? - of women fighting for themselves, a tide that sweeps across the world and challenges the misogynist and exclusionary policies of an establishment that has lost all credibility.

It is the first mass movement that has shaken the sense of helplessness and passivity that seems to have struck Italy since the centre-left of Renzi came to power, promising to modernize the country and restart the economy, while rejuvenating its political class and aligning its functioning with European standards of efficiency.

Let us hope that this movement, which is unique in the strength of its self-organization, led by a new generation of women - and to which we are fully committed - will be able to consolidate and give new impetus to the relaunching of social movements as a whole.

What should we make of the SACP's latest critical posture of the ANC rot: an audacity or a quagmire?

29 May 2017, by Gunnett Kaaf

This year, the SACP grew more critical of the ANC and JZ's leadership, particularly in the run up to the recent midnight cabinet reshuffle in which the Finance Minister and his Deputy were fired on account of a dodgy intelligence report. They initially threatened to resign en masse from the cabinet if Pravin Gordhan was fired. After the cabinet reshuffle, they openly called for the President to step down. They even participated in civil society marches demanding Zuma's resignation, which attracted tens of thousands of demonstrators, on 7th April.

So what should we make of the SACP's latest posture? Are they becoming courageous, such that they will soon breakout of the alliance impasse? Will they independently forge ahead with an audacious programme guided by the social demands of workers and the poor? Or are they getting trapped in a quagmire of noises that will not bear any meaningful result?

They have since capitulated on their threat to resign en masse from the cabinet after the reshuffle. A mass resignation would have had a political impact by shaming and condemning JZ. It would make it clear that the SACP was now drawing the line that they can no longer tolerate any of the corruption antics by JZ. It is clear that the reshuffle was more about capturing the National Treasury as part of the Guptaisation of our state institutions by JZ. A mass resignation would earn them some of the respect they lost when they were active participants in the Zuma inner circle, since Polokwane, until recently when they fell out of favour.

The SACP has done some of the most despicable things as part of the Zuma group. They defended the unpardonable Marikana massacre, and called the striking workers "vigilantes". They defended Nkandla saying that it is a "rural development" project and that the criticism is mainly "a propaganda by white people". They led the charge for the expulsion of NUMSA from COSATU. Ironically this was for being critical of the JZ rot, pretty much the same as they themselves are doing now.

The current noises by the SACP, though correct, are not sufficient. The SACP is squandering an opportunity to break away into a new independent political mode and chart a way forward that would help the country not to slide into a tragic impasse as a result of the ANC crisis. Of all the ANC groupings (101 Veterans, MK Council, COSATU etc) that are openly critical of the ANC rot, the SACP is the most objectively placed to make a meaningful and impactful contribution. What makes the SACP uniquely privileged is that they are an independent political party. They are not an ANC structure (or a trade union like COSATU). They are therefore not constrained by the ANC internal discipline that has been polluted by the increasing power of dominant factions within the organisation, ahead of the December elective conference. That's why courage is indispensable for the SACP. Sadly, lack of courage is their biggest weakness.

They keep on criticizing, without ever embarking on an action to really shake things up within the alliance or break out of the alliance, in an audacious way, and chart an independent socialist path. Only calling for Zuma's resignation and bemoaning the ANC rot will not shake up things for the better within the ANC. This is a make or break moment for the SACP because the ANC can no longer be renewed from within. The rot is way too deep. Ordinary ANC members have been effectively sidelined. They don't have a say in the affairs of the organisation. The dominant factions have appropriated all the power to themselves.

In fact, these dominant ANC factions have constituted themselves into a bourgeoisie that is based on accumulating wealth, using the state in corrupt ways. That's why the moral condemnations of the ANC corruption, which is what the SACP's criticism amounts to, can no longer have any impact. The ANC corruption is effectively linked with the class power relations within the state as well as the post-94 social power relations. The black bourgeoisie is a subaltern ally of the established white bourgeoisie that owns and controls monopolies across all the sectors of the economy.

The ANC is imploding in a chaotic way, like an "Empire of Chaos", to borrow a phrase from Samir Amin. This implosion is going to continue until the ANC loses power. It manifests through endless corruption scandals, policy incoherence, loss of a sense of strategic management, and the ANC decline in prestige and electoral support.

That's why only audacity will save the SACP's relevance in our politics. For instance, since the SACP has already called for JZ to resign, they should easily mandate all of their members who are MPs to vote for the motion of no confidence in the president when it comes up in parliament. But they will not do so, because they lack the courage of their own convictions.

The question is why does the SACP lack courage? The answer to this question should go beyond the trappings of patronage networks, wherein they rely on ANC deployment to prop-up their political careers.

The main reason the SACP lacks courage is because it has no political independence from the ANC. It has no independent socialist programme worth the name. For most of post-1994, they continued the sterile mode, inherited from the exile years, of operating within the ANC, without a real independent socialist programme. They continued to pursue their struggle for socialism within the ANC political framework of the National Democratic Revolution.

The alliance has failed because it is based on the ANC political strategy, the NDR, which is not radical, despite the radical sounding rhetoric. The ANC is not radical, in that it is not anti-capitalist, and does not support socialism or any other form of egalitarian society. The ANC is trapped within the capitalist framework. Historically, particularly during the struggle against apartheid, the ANC was revolutionary in that it fully opposed apartheid. The ANC understood that apartheid could not be merely reformed, it had to be destroyed. So there was a potential to be radical if the ANC had elaborated a post-apartheid South African society from an anti-capitalist stance, with a meaningful social transformation

perspective beyond political conquest. The ANC did not do so, and thus after 94 it made a full bourgeois capitulation and embraced neoliberalism.

The other potential for the ANC to be radical stemmed from its popular social base of black workers, township and rural communities. The alliance (COSATU and SACP), the Youth League, ANC branches, students, civics and other mass formations could have insisted on a radical social transformation programme that has a strong economic redistribution element for workers and other poor

strata from the black community. Sadly that did not happen.

Now the ANC has become fully bourgeois and, on top of the neoliberal policy embrace, increasingly corrupt. It is rotten to the core, and that's no longer reversible.

If the SACP had an independent political programme for advancing socialism, it would have used it to meaningfully to bargain within the alliance. It would have insisted on radical policy measures for the whole alliance. Instead, the SACP mainly sought accommodation within the alliance. Even their criticism of GEAR

policy and neoliberalism did not come from a firm standpoint of a sound socialist programme. That's why they were easily co-opted after Polokwane into the conservative Zuma inner circle. And they then defended the neoliberalism and the rot.

The SACP are trapped in a quagmire. Only courage and audacious measures will save them. Otherwise they are going to perish from the political scene, as the ANC continue to implode like an Empire of Chaos!

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Femicide in Mexico and Guatemala

28 May 2017, by Mabel Encinas

The word 'feminicide' was popularised over twenty years ago to denounce the killing of women due to their gender. The crime is called 'feminicidio' in Mexico and 'femicidio' in Guatemala. Although there have been some attempts to differentiate the two concepts, both terms emerge as a form of resistance: to assert that women's lives matter, and such crimes should not go unpunished. Impunity contributes to the normalisation of the femicide machine. This 'machine' is supported by gender inequality as the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights have suggested.

Femicide is part of a wider issue within cultures of gender inequality; men's violence against women and girls - violence which attacks their dignity, their integrity and their lives and is part of gender orders which accord little value to the lives of women. In Mexico and Central America murder is often preceded by beating, mutilations, burns, other forms of torture and by sexual violence. Femicide is an intentional crime, but too often impunity rules,

especially when it is women living in poverty, and in the case of Mexico and Guatemala, indigenous women.

In both countries, feminists challenge the indifference and negligence of justice systems, connecting this to institutionalised gender inequality, victim blame, and terror inducing sensationalism. It is this complicity which leads activists to argue that femicide should be considered a state crime.

Mexico

In 1993, a pattern of woman killing became evident in the border city of Ciudad Juárez, in Chihuahua, Mexico. The first woman in the list of victims was actually a girl, Alma Chavira Farel. That year, the first coalition of organisations, mothers, feminists and academics denounced the systematic violence against women in Ciudad Juárez. A number of civil society organisations have emerged since (Casa Amiga, Nuestras Hijas de Regreso, Justicia para nuestras hijas, Red Mesa de Mujeres de Ciudad Juárez, and Ni una más). Most of the dead women of Juárez have been adolescents and young adults, many of

them workers in maquila factories.

Maquila companies process raw materials from other countries, mainly the US, with products exported back to be branded and commercialised. Multinational companies benefit from the use of cheap labour, usually employing women from small towns and rural areas, who are presumed to be more docile than men. The turnover is extremely high: women workers are squeezed to the last drop and then replaced by others. Their welfare is of little concern and their human rights are violated as a matter of course. Apart from the working conditions, factories are situated in deserted areas. It is this harsh reality, combined with a location on the border with the presence of organised crime, drug trafficking and the presence of the army, that creates a conducive context for the increase of femicide.

In the wake of the Dead Women of Juárez, feminist groups highlighted the fact that feminicides happened in many other regions. The first data came from the most populated state (county), the state of Mexico, which surrounds Mexico City, where 840 women were killed between 2011 and

2013. It is unclear how these crimes are classified, and only 145 were investigated as feminicides. Additionally, 1,500 women have disappeared between 2005 and 2013, mainly adolescents between 15 and 17 years old. The pattern both in Ciudad Juarez and the state of Mexico is similar where organised crime, economic power and corruption coincide.

Between 2011 and 2014, the rate of feminicides increased five times, and between 2013 and 2015 6488 women were killed. In 2016, 3,000 women were been killed between January and mid-October, of which 1,185 have been identified as feminicides. In Mexico, a country of 120 million inhabitants, 77% of feminicides are not prosecuted, with a large proportion of bodies never identified.

Community organisations and victim's families have challenged state impunity and raised awareness, which has resulted in law reform. In 2007, the General Law of Women's Access to a Life Free from Violence was passed, and the crime of feminicide was specified in the Federal Penal Code in 2011. Currently 49 human rights and women organisations form a coalition - the National Citizen Observatory of Feminicide (Observatorio Ciudadano Nacional del Femicidio). This organisation monitors feminicides, the application of the law, and demands accountability from the institutions responsible for preventing and prosecuting violence against women.

Guatemala

Femicide is even more prevalent in Guatemala, possibly the most dangerous place to be a woman. In a country of 15 million people, an estimated 6500 women were murdered between 2000 and 2012 and that number continues to rise. In 2014, 766 women were murdered. An average of 2 women are killed every day and only 2% of femicides are prosecuted. Among the most vulnerable are women living in poverty or women in prostitution, who often have been victims of trafficking and live under the control of organised crime.

The fact that Guatemala has been a pioneer in the recognition of feminicide is the result of the activism of groups of women fighting for their rights, such as Grupo Guatemalteco de Mujeres, Women for Justice, Education and Awareness (Mujeres por la Justicia, Educación y el Reconocimiento) and CAIMUS (Centros de Apoyo Integral para Mujeres Sobrevivientes de Violencia). Despite having achieved the Law against Femicide and other forms of Violence Against Women, the legacy of the civil war of the 60s has been pervasive. The country has a weak democracy and a corrupt government, which has produced a culture where there is limited accountability of state authorities, which results in impunity for those who kill women.

This combination of impunity and the

devaluation of women in a society with ingrained machismo and misogyny is evident in the brutality against the bodies of the victims, which show evidence of rape, torture and mutilation. Almost all (90%) of the indigenous population live below the poverty line. Their marginalisation is evident in the fact that despite indigenous people being half the population, the media still tends to portray European characters.

Legal reforms in Mexico and Guatemala have recognised femicide but this has, so far, made little if any difference. Both countries still need to ensure that the perpetrators are detected and prosecuted. To support this, a manual has been produced to improve evidence gathering and how such cases are approached. It is unclear whether this is having an impact yet. Changes in law enforcement need to be connected to wider engagements on women's equality, including the development of sustainable livelihoods and lifelong learning.

Activism by women, families and communities continues, fighting for women's rights - and literally for the right to life. Supportive links with international organisations are vital: the 'international community' needs to show that it is watching what is happening in Mexico and Guatemala, to bring pressure to bear on those responsible for law enforcement and join the struggle to end impunity.

[Open Democracy](#)

Emergency Crisis in Marawi City, Mindanao (Philippines): Urgent Call for Humanitarian Aid

27 May 2017



#DuyogMarawi: An Appeal for Emergency Response to Marawi Siege Affected Communities

Around 2 o'clock in the afternoon of 23 May 2017, gunfight between armed men (suspected Maute Group and allegedly ISIS sympathizers) and the

elements of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) erupted in public places in Marawi City putting civilian population hostage in the situation. As the violence heaps up, civilian population are exposed to higher risk of being killed or injured. In fact, reports have noted that the gunfight has already claimed 44 lives, wounded hundreds other individuals, abducted church leaders, held civilians hostages, occupied hospital and burned and destroyed properties as of midnight of May 23.

Tight inspections in every checkpoint and curfews were implemented following the declaration of Martial Law in Mindanao by President Rodrigo Duterte on the 23rd of May. As the military operation intensified, more and more civilians were forced to flee the area. An estimated 25,000 individuals have fled Marawi City since May 23. [3] There were also civilians including children reported trapped inside buildings who have not eaten several meals waiting for rescue that has not yet come. More than 1,300 individuals are still trapped in Marawi City as of May 26. [4]

The Ranaw Disaster Response and Rehabilitation Assistance Center (RDDRAC), the secretariat for Multi-sectoral Initiatives for Humanitarian Action against Disaster (MiHANDs-NorthWestern Mindanao) has documented at least 343 families who evacuated from Marawi City and are now staying in evacuation centers and their relatives in Iligan City.

While RDDRAC is still determining the total number of affected individuals and families who evacuated in Iligan City and Lanao del Norte, it is now appealing to your support in this humanitarian action.

Among the expressed immediate needs of the IDPs, as of this moment, are:

- Halal Food and Drinking Water
- Sleeping materials (malong/blanket, sleeping mat, pillow, insect repellent)
- Hygiene Kits
- Medicines

- Kitchen utensils and cooking wares

- Clothing

- Transportation support for stranded and trapped individuals in Marawi City (communities and universities) and Saguilaran, Lanao del Sur

We are hoping for your positive response.

Any donation can be channeled to our network command center:

Ranaw Disaster Response and Rehabilitation Assistance Center (RDDRAC), Inc. at Door 2 Maca-agir Apartment, 6th East Rosario Heights, Tubod, Iligan City, Philippines.

Contact details:

Contact Person: RICHEL BORRES

Email: rddrac_inc@yahoo.com

You may deposit cash donations to:

Account Name: Ranaw Disaster Response and Rehabilitation Assistance Center

Account Number: 186-123321-9

Bank: China Banking Corporation

Branch: Quezon Avenue, Iligan City

Swift Code: CHBKPHMM

Donations from different places in Mindanao and Manila can also be channeled to the network and partners of MiHANDs in different strategic areas:

1.) Lanao del Norte (c/o Demokratikong Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas-Lanao)

Contact Person: MARIO PONGASE

2.) Cotabato City and Maguindanao area (c/o Tri-people Organization against Disaster Foundation)

Contact Person: YENNAH TORRES

3.) Pagadian City and Zamboanga del Sur (c/o Convergence of NGOs/POs in Zamboanga del Sur for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development)

Contact Person: VILMA WAHID

4.) Butuan City

Contact Person: Daisy Jane Apit

5.) Agusan del Sur (c/o Filipino Katoliko Church at Purok 13, Sibagat)

Contact Person: Rev. Pedro Fenis Junior

6.) Quezon City and Metro Manila (c/o Lilak-Purple Action for Indigenous Women's Rights)

Contact Person: Judy Pasimio

Donations through ESSF

Donations for humanitarian aid coming from outside the Philippines can also be channeled through our bank account, for facility and if preferred.

To send donations

Cheques

cheques to ESSF in euros only, payable in France, to be sent to:

ESSF
2, rue Richard-Lenoir
93100 Montreuil
France

Bank Account:

Crédit lyonnais
Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux
(00525)
10 boulevard Chanzy
93100 Montreuil
France
ESSF, account number 445757C

International bank account details :

IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12
BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP
Account holder : ESSF

Through PayPal

You can send money through Paypal: see the PayPal button on the upper right side of [ESSF English home page](#).

For a Labour victory on June 8

27 May 2017, by **Socialist Resistance**

The manifesto which calls for the renationalisation of rail, the Royal Mail and water, is the most radical since 1983. And those pledges took place before the defeat of the miners at one of the high points of struggle, industrial and political, of the 20th century.

For the first time after many years of crypto-Tory policies, there is a real alternative on offer in this election to the politics of austerity, welfare cuts, low wages, job insecurity, zero-hour contracts, and food banks. It is a unique opportunity for the left. It is a manifesto that can cut through the shadow of Brexit that May is using in an attempt to win a Tory majority.

It does not contain everything we wanted, but it is a radical departure from the politics served up by Labour leaderships since Kinnock and then Blair in their embracing of ‘new realism’ i.e. neo-liberalism.

There are only a few short weeks to change the dynamic and elect a Labour led government on June 8 on the basis of this manifesto. Polls are starting to show an increase in support for Labour, as well as widespread enthusiasm for the policies they are promoting. We are calling on our supporters to pull out the stops, get fully involved, and strain every nerve to bring about Labour victory.

It is not an easy task. Ukip has collapsed into a Ukipised Tory Party and May is appealing to 17 million Brexit voters to vote for her if they want the referendum decision fully carried through. But with a social crisis created by 7 years of Tory austerity there is everything to play for.

A Tory victory would be a disaster. It would mean full speed ahead with Tory austerity policies for the next five years and a hard-line anti-working

class Brexit with all that means for political and social conditions in Britain for a very long time. As Corbyn says, it is the politics of fear rather than those of hope.

The message is clear: if you want your wages to remain frozen, if you want the NHS to be destroyed, and if you want to continue to have zero rights at work, if you want a hard Brexit vote Tory.

The Labour right haven't given up trying to sabotage Corbyn. Blair, Mandelson, and Hattersley have been doing their best but have been roundly slapped down by John Prescott, in the Sunday Mirror, who called for unity behind Corbyn and told them to ‘put up or shut up’. He argued that a united campaign will put Labour in the lead as the popularity of their policies take hold. Since then MPs such as Ben Bradshaw are refusing to recognise the Labour manifesto.

A huge battle is taking place in the Labour Party to defend the Corbyn leadership against the right-wing saboteurs. It is a battle that is likely to continue with even greater intensity whichever way the election goes – either with Labour in office or facing defeat – and we urge every activist who possibly can to get involved in it.

Radical proposals

As well as re-nationalising rail, Royal Mail, water, and parts of the energy industry, the manifesto proposes a major reversal of Tory welfare cuts including scraping the bedroom tax and the Work Capability Test, an increase in the carers' allowance of 17% and following the social model of disability.

On the economy: reversing the Tory's £72 billion tax cuts, higher taxes on the rich including an income tax rise to 45p for those earning over

£80,000 a year and a new and a new 50p rate for those earning over £123,000. A Robin Hood tax on financial transactions for the NHS. A one third increase in corporation tax and a ‘fat cat’ tax on companies paying fat cat wages. Taking advantage of low interest rates Labour would invest £250 billion over ten years to ensure a transport, energy and digital infrastructure fit for the 21st Century.

On workers' rights: a £10 minimum wage, repeal the Trade Union Act, end zero-hour contracts, end the public sector pay freeze, full employment rights from day one, the right to trade union representation, end sacking of pregnant women, force companies to publish gender pay differentials, the abolition of fees for industrial tribunals, pay for interns, guarantee trade union access to workplaces and maximum pay ratios of 20:1 in the public sector and those bidding for government contracts.

On the NHS: Repeal the Health and Social Care Act, over £6 billion extra in annual funding through increased income tax on the highest 5% of earners, increased tax on private medical insurance, boost capital spending and ending privatisation, halt all current A&E closure proposals, reintroduce NHS bursaries

On social care: an additional £8 billion during the next Parliament, including £1 billion in the first year, end 15-minute care visits and ensure care workers are paid travel time.

On education: reverse Tory education cuts, reduce class sizes, no more free schools or new grammar schools, free school meals, abolish tuition fees and reintroduce maintenance grants. 30 hours free childcare for 2-4 year olds.

On housing: build a million houses over 5 years, half social housing,

action against rogue landlords to ensure rented accommodation is fit for human habitation, limit rent increases, reverse housing benefit cut for 18-21 year olds.

On the environment: full support for the Paris agreement, an end to fracking, a new clean air act, and Blue Belts in the sea around Britain, and a ban on neonicotinoids. Labour will insulate 4 million homes, start to decentralise energy supply by taking the national grid into public ownership. There will be at least one publicly owned energy company in every region; that is a locally run, democratically accountable, working to tackle fuel poverty and return profits to customers via reduced tariffs.

On Brexit: a unilateral declaration that EU nationals living here will be allowed to stay; opposition to a hard Brexit; a meaningful vote in the Commons at the end of the process; seeking to stay in the customs unions; tariff-free access to the single market, by way of a trade deal, freedom of movement for those with a job offer, ditch the Great Repeal Bill and replace it with a positive bill ensuring that Brexit doesn't result in a loss of rights.

The response of the Tories and the media has been to vilify Corbyn again, saying that whatever policies Labour has its leadership is incapable of implementing them or knowing how to pay for them.

There are certainly things that are

regrettable in the manifesto; the Fiscal Credibility rule and support for nuclear energy, the promotion of the unworkable carbon capture technology, airport expansion, the continuation of HS2 and an extension to it. There is also the retention of Trident – a battle the left hadn't managed to win since Corbyn became leader – meaning that the wording here is as good as was possible.

It is a big mistake not to include PR for Westminster in the proposals for a constitutional convention and an elected House of Lords. Such a commitment would not only attract a lot of votes to Labour from many desperate to see a grossly undemocratic system changed, but given the changes that are taking place in the political structure of the country, first-past-the-post is getting more and more undemocratic.

The overall package, however, is a serious challenge to the austerity agenda and a good basis on which to start to rebuild left-wing politics in this country – particularly when it comes at a time when the overall political situation is moving to the right under the impact of Brexit.

An anti-austerity alliance

Given that Labour is continuing to defend a unionist position in Scotland, and is opposing a Yes vote in a second independence referendum, its electoral position is not going to

change – in fact it might well get worse. This means that a Labour overall majority in the Commons is extremely difficult so a Labour 'win' effectively means Labour being the biggest single party governing with the support of other anti-austerity parties: i.e. the SNP, Plaid, and the Greens. Corbyn's current hostility to this makes no sense and needs to change. If Labour does become the biggest party after the election, the only other choice would be to invite the Tories to form a Government – which does not make sense

But whether it is cooperation before the election or afterwards with Labour as the biggest party, we are talking about an anti-austerity alliance and not the ambiguous concept of a 'progressive alliance' as defined by and campaigned for by Compass for example. Unfortunately that's also what the Green Party are pushing too – an alliance which includes the Lib Dems – the same Lib Dems who propped up the Tories for 5 years enabling them to force through their austerity programme the hard end of which is currently being implemented.

That's not the message that will galvanise the hundreds of thousands that have stayed at home in recent elections, feeling that there is no difference between politicians of any hue – who can be most effectively mobilised around a clear anti-austerity message.

[Socialist Resistance](#)

Why solidarity with Mindanao requires opposing martial law

26 May 2017, by **Herbert Docena**

As with their "war on drugs", Duterte and his army of enablers are trying to rally support for martial law and their own version of the "war on terror" by claiming that, just as there is no other

way to help and support victims of drug-related crimes but to curtail people's rights and exterminate drug peddlers/dependents, there is now no other way to help and support the

victims of "terrorism" in Mindanao but to curtail people's rights and liquidate the "terrorists." Those who support martial law are the only ones who "care" about the people of Marawi;

those who are against it are on the side of, if not in cahoots with, the "terrorists."

This is of course not only dishonest but ridiculous. We oppose martial law precisely because we stand in solidarity with the people of Mindanao, and because we know that martial law will not help but only harm, and indeed, terrorize them – just as so many people from Mindanao themselves have said (See statement from over 20 Mindanao-based groups below, for example).

Duterte's "war on terror" will only allow and embolden state forces to perpetrate even more human rights violations against all those they suspect as the "enemies" and we know that, despite all the legal restrictions imposed on them on paper, they will tag and treat as enemies even ordinary civilians. It is bound to create or reinforce a climate of impunity that is likely to result in so many illegal arrests, arbitrary detentions, disappearances, torture, and other atrocities that, instead of resolving the conflict, will only drive even more people – the sons, daughters, brothers, sisters or friends of those they terrorize or slaughter – to join rather than reject the likes of the Maute Group, thus further perpetuating rather than ending the conflict.

We – and many people in Mindanao, especially – know this from experience (and common sense): Marcos also imposed official martial law in Mindanao in 1972 (and successive regimes imposed 'unofficial' martial law after) but, instead of ending the violence, their own wars of terror only led to more blood and tears. Instead of eliminating the "enemies," official and de facto military rule only drove many Moros and lumad to join, and fight with, the various resistance groups in the region.

The root of all the violence and suffering in Mindanao is all too clear (despite so many governments' attempts at Filipino-nationalist historical revisionism): The emergence and persistence of groups such as the Abu Sayyaf or the Maute group – their continuing ability to draw recruits and keep fighting – has been the consequence not just of the spread of

irrational ideologies such as "Islamic fundamentalism" nor of conspiracies hatched by the United States. It has been the result of the abject failure of all previous negotiations agreements between the government and various Moro/Muslim and other groups in Mindanao (the MNLF, MILF, etc.) to improve the conditions of life in Mindanao and to guarantee real as opposed to bogus autonomy to the Moros and lumad.

Those agreements failed, in turn, because politicians, landowners, capitalists, military generals, and other elites from the northern Philippines (and from other countries) have refused to give up even just a small portion of the vast lands and resources they took from the Moros/Muslims/lumad from the 19th to the 20th century through state-sanctioned land grabs and resettlement programs (itself an attempt to pacify all those whose lands they grabbed in the Visayas and Luzon).

"Conflict" has continued because instead of simply acquiescing as they were effectively subjected to colonial rule by Filipinos, the Moros/Muslims/and lumad organized themselves and formed various groups (the MNLF, MILF, etc), to fight for their rights – groups that, because their oppressors used arms and violence to subdue them, also felt compelled to use arms and violence to fight back. The history of Abu Sayyaf and Maute groups are nebulous, but available information suggest they were formed largely by rebels who felt betrayed after the government failed to deliver on its promise to grant them real autonomy, and who feel that they could only finally achieve their goals by fighting for an independent (and 'Islamic') state.

Oppression breeds resistance

It's easy to think of them as just dupes or stooges of ISIS (or of the CIA), but what more likely happened is that, isolated and desperate to attract support, they only adopted the language and ideology of ISIS (and perhaps accepted resources from

them and other groups) in order to pursue their own homegrown goals. We may disagree with (and we should condemn) their methods, but it would be inaccurate to dismiss them all as mere "bandits" or "terrorists."

Oppression always breeds political resistance, and political resistance comes in many – sometimes ugly and detestable – forms.

This is why the "war on terror" now being waged by Duterte – and being justified by his army of enablers – will not actually help but only further harm, and terrorize, those they claim to "care" about. Unable to once and for all pacify Mindanao, Duterte is once again unleashing the swords of war in yet another attempt to once and for all open up Mindanao to local and foreign investors and foster capital accumulation – something he could not quite do for as long as armed groups continue to fight the state.

But even if Duterte captures, tortures, or slaughters all the members of the ASG/Maute and other groups – just as Marcos and his henchmen tried to capture, torture, or slaughter members of the MNLF/MILF/etc in the 1970s, many of their sons and daughters will simply replace them, and much of Mindanao will only continue to be a valley of blood and tears, for as long as the injustices committed against the Moros/Muslims/lumad (and landless Christian settlers) in the region are not corrected.

The kind of military "solution" that Duterte is now pursuing – the same solution that Marcos (and Erap, GMA, etc) before him pursued, will therefore not work to end the violence; what's needed instead are political solutions – the same ones that Cory, FVR and others tried to pursue but ultimately failed to deliver.

What's needed is for the government to conduct earnest and honest peace negotiations with the various armed groups in the regions and be willing to finally respect rather than suppress the right to self-determination of the Moros/Muslims/lumad in Mindanao. And the enemies or the "spoilers" here, let us be very clear, are not the

oppressed but the landlords, investors, generals and other elites who, seeking to hold on to their stolen property, would rather that Mindanao continues to be ruled as a de facto colony.

There is another way to help, or be in solidarity with, the people of Marawi

and the rest of region – just as there is another way to help, or be in solidarity with, drug dependents and the victims of drug-related crimes.

We need to block rather than support Duterte's martial law in Mindanao in

order to pave the way for a different kind of peace that will not just benefit Mindanaoans but all Filipinos: the peace of the free and living, not the peace of the muffled, nor the peace of the graveyard. –

Rappler.com

Trump not welcome, and neither is NATO

25 May 2017, by **Thomas Weyts**

As expected and hoped it was a very diverse, lively and militant demonstration. More than 70 organizations took to the streets against war and imperialist adventures, an open asylum policy and equal rights, a different climate, against women's oppression, sexism and homophobia, against the degradation of social and democratic rights and an increasingly authoritarian world. Not only was Trump put in the dock, but the link was made with the Belgian government's policies.

Feminist groups, organizations of

undocumented migrants and refugees, the environmental and climate movement, all of the radical left organizations, Ecolo and Groen (the Belgian Green Parties), leftist youth movements and others had a massive presence. A great success!

Unfortunately the unions, with the pleasant exception of CNE Brussels, ACOD ALR Brussels and no doubt many individual trade unionists were hardly present. Yet another missed opportunity ...

The event not only brought many young people (including many young women) onto the street, but also had a

beautiful internationalist character.

Turkish and Kurdish activists were protesting not only against Trump and NATO, but also the dictatorial policies of Erdogan, who is also participating in the NATO summit. There were also people from the US and Latin America and big delegations from France, Germany, Netherlands, ...

Even today, further action is being taken at the NATO summit itself. The peace movement is organizing a counter summit.

25 May 2017

A murderous attack on women and girls in Manchester

24 May 2017, by **Socialist Resistance**

Don't need permission

Made my decision to test my limits

â€˜Cause it's my business, God as my witness

Start what I finished

Don't need no hold up

Taking control of this kind of moment

I'm locked and loaded

Completely focused, my mind is open

Ariana Grande : *Dangerous woman*

Socialist Resistance extends its sympathy to the families of the people who were killed and injured in the attack on Ariana Grande's Manchester concert. The pain of the parents whose children were murdered or hurt

must be immeasurable.

Those responsible will have known that the people they set out to kill, maim and psychologically scar would have overwhelmingly been young women and girls. Theirs is a death cult whose real gods are slaughter, rape and patriarchy. Misogyny and homophobia are a everywhere a hallmark of fundamentalism.

Lyrics like those of *Dangerous Woman* quoted above sum up everything that the killer and his accomplices hate about women and girls. That is why they targeted the Manchester Arena on May 22nd. Male violence against woman was taken to a horrific new extreme in that concert venue.

The murderers may try to justify this action and so many others by citing the West's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and British or American support for the colonial oppression of the Palestinians. As socialists we are internationalists and enemies of imperialism. But we reject the murder of children and innocent people as a form of political statement. This is a reactionary, barbarous expression of a reactionary programme. It will bring no comfort to the Yemeni family who has lost a loved one killed with British weapons or the Palestinian parent whose child was killed with explosives paid for by the US government.

This horrible crime will be measured

against the anti-personnel devices being used by Saudi Arabia, supported and armed by the UK and US in Yemen. And endless such horrors in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere. But we must not be relative about this. Measuring it against wars elsewhere won't help the grieving parents, siblings, friends, bystanders and emergency services in Manchester or anywhere else on the planet.

Such an act will affect all mass events up and down the country. Every event organiser will now have a new fear. Bag searches and scans had already become routine, and are bound to become more widespread at venues like the Tate as well as museums and theatres and sport grounds everywhere. And now we have the announcement that the military will be on the streets - which won't make many of us feel safer at all

And some have been rightly quoting Trotsky on another impact of this

barbaric act: "*The more effective the terrorist acts, the greater their impact, the more they reduce the interest of the masses in self-organisation and self-education*" - Leon Trotsky

On the night of the attack hundreds of working class Mancunians on the streets, in hotels, taxi firms and hospitals showed how to respond to obscurantist butchers by helping strangers. The night after the slaughter thousands from every community took to the streets of Manchester to show their love and solidarity with the victims and their families. Collective action is how we change the world, end imperialist wars and put an end to male violence against women.

Socialist Resistance.

The grassroots protest movement in the Rif region

24 May 2017, by **Al Mounadil-a**

Seven months have passed since the start of the grassroots protest movement in the Rif region of northern Morocco. This movement takes root in the popular mobilization that took place in the region during the uprisings of February 20, 2011. It was revitalized by the crushing of the fisherman Mohsen Fikri in a dumpster truck in October 2016.

Rif's people claim the judgment of responsible for the death of Mohsen and five other Rifans killed in a banking agency during the events of 20 February 2011. They also call for the lifting of the militarization in the province of Al Hoceima which should

be considered a disaster area, the halting of prosecutions and harassment of small farmers, and other social demands concerning health services, education and infrastructure according to the development model that Rif's inhabitants really want. This is a clear sign of the failure of the economic and social policies promoted by the State in this region, which translates in the destruction of the production structures, the pillage of maritime and forest resources, the weakness of major public services such as clinics, Universities, schools and the lack of jobs for the youth.

All this is the result of main choices of the State based on the need to pay back a huge public debt by reinforcing the austerity on social budgets, opening up the profitable sectors of our country to foreign capital, more tax relief in favor of the rich, the generalization of corruption, land-grabbing and the seizing of wealth by a minority.

These policies dictated by foreign decision-making centers are legitimized by "representative" institutions that have nothing democratic under a despotic regime, a façade government and a factitious parliamentary "majority". All

mobilized to silence the voice of the Rif's population who clearly expressed their demands in the local committees of the protest movement.

They also mobilized the various governmental, security and media organs to defeat this intense mobilization, repression and arrest of activists, intimidation and defamation and trying to create imaginary and marginal conflicts between inhabitants of the region according to the principle of tyrants: divide and conquer. They seek to criminalize the protest movement, undermine its credibility and target its activists so that it does not serve as an example for other cities and regions of Morocco who live under the same conditions of marginalization, impoverishment And the flouting of dignity.

Last days events indicate that there has been a strengthening of the repressive arsenal in the Rif region, where a multitude of forces (police, gendarmerie and auxiliary forces) have been deployed. Hundreds of tents have been erected in the public squares and in the public institutions which serve as encampments. This suggests a violent repression in such manner of those already perpetrated by the regime against the struggles of Moroccan people, in particular against

the historical resistance in the Rif.

We, Al Mounadil-a, a socialist revolutionary political current, consider the grassroots protest movement of the Rif as a real example of a struggle that must be followed by all the regions of Morocco in terms of : First, claims centered on social justice, dignity and the distribution of natural resources and wealth produced locally and nationally. Second, the creativity of combative forms of struggle that ensures continuity and collective participation in mobilization. And thirdly, the bottom-up democracy represented by the local coordination of the movement, which is spreading in the various zones of the Rif.

We support the struggle of the Rifans and we salute their firmness and determination against all those who fight their struggle and aspirations. We condemn the policy of intimidation and misinformation of the state and all those who help justify its lies. We hold the state responsible for any repressive intervention against the inhabitants of the rif in struggle. We call for the expansion of support and solidarity and the strengthening of the coordination committees to prevent the isolation of the movement by the State and we affirm that the satisfaction of the demands of the

lower classes in Morocco for dignity, freedom And social justice is incompatible with tyranny and the system of corruption.

We, Al Mounadil-a, consider that the main task right now for the radical left and for all the organizations of struggle, in particular the unions, the organizations of unemployed youth and the associations which fight liberal policies, Is to support the grassroots protest movement in the Rif and work to extend it to the whole country. It is the regrouping of struggle forces and their solidarity and the expansion of international solidarity that will oblige the rulers to satisfy the demands of the populations by allocating the necessary budgets. It is an historic opportunity given by the resistance of the Rifans, inspired by the historical leader Abdelkrim al-Khattabi, to Moroccan lower classes to obtain fundamental improvements to their social conditions and to march on the path of their emancipation from Political despotism and capitalist exploitation.

Victory for Rif's people struggle

Long live for people and struggle for freedom, dignity and social justice

Current Al Mounadil-a,

18 May 2017

Resurrections and frauds of Pedro Sanchez

24 May 2017, by Josep María Antentas

1. Disoriented and without a project, cut off from its traditional social base and disconnected from youth, European social democracy (in its senile phase) is not having a pleasant sunset, but an ongoing crisis full of upheavals in which the apparatuses most identified with austerity policies clash with their own activists who launch, here and there, smaller or larger internal rebellions in reaction to the decline of their parties, but with political crystallizations of diverse nature. Corbyn, Hamon or the

resurrection of Pedro Sanchez express, in different contexts, similar situations from the point of view of the causes and nature of the crisis of their respective parties but represent very different political projects: a genuine and honest reformism in the case of Corbyn, and a very limited regeneration in the case of Hamon and, even more so, in that of Sánchez.

2. The visible head of a generation of leaders which was born old, the defeated Susana Diaz represented the

worst possibility for the PSOE. A PSOE very little accustomed to losing and still not understanding the historical significance of 15M. A PSOE damaged by history and by the devastation created by an economic model that it had adopted with enthusiasm and that was one of its systemic guarantors. With the failure of Diaz, which is undoubtedly excellent news, we see the end of the ridiculous history one of the most sinister characters, as insignificant as he is symbolic, in the crisis of the

PSOE: Antonio Hernando. Sanchez's key man up until the internal coup last October, who at the last minute betrayed him, and betrayed himself (in the unlikely event that there is something inside him worthy of being betrayed), to save his post and become a regrettable parliamentary-puppet and the visible face of the most botched episode in the parliamentary party's history, the investiture of Rajoy. The "AntonioHernandization" of European social democracy is doubly a cause and a consequence of the crisis. A current in decay produces characters like this, and these in turn will only deepen the crisis of which they are the fruit. A symbol of mediocrity and betrayal, AntonioHernandization is a mere subsidiary version for middle leaders and followers, the process of "FelipeGonzalezization" of the PSOE and European social democracy, that is, its most complete overlap with global economic and financial power and its absolute moral and spiritual corruption.

3. A caricatural marketing version of Corbyn, Sanchez is an impostor who knew how to transform itself in order not to perish. In his long political career he never championed any type of project which, however timidly, deviated from social-liberal orthodoxy. But to survive politically in his first stage as secretary general he had to reject any logic of "grand coalition" with the PP and realized that he was playing for his future in the dispute with Podemos for the leadership of the left. And after his resignation he was forced to adopt a regenerating, leftist and democratic rhetoric to mark his differences with Susana Diaz and give a political meaning and a coherent narrative to his attempt to regain the general secretariat, channelling the discomfort of the party rank and file towards a regeneration project of a political force whose boastful mediocrity shamed its own activists. But once the path was chosen he was a prisoner of it and of the hopes and

expectations generated, which makes him an annoying element of destabilization of the systemic governance scheme of the current phase, which requires a PSOE which is disciplined and not adventurous, and a threat to Podemos, which can be cornered by Sanchez if he is capable of combining an image of solvency and renewal, of synthesis between the best of the PSOE and a credible change in the spirit of Podemos, but without the adventures and risks this carries for a part of the electorate. In any case, his victory is a setback, real and symbolic, for the media and financial block which last year ordered his dismissal and will now have the dilemma of whether to make his life impossible, pushing him towards a relative "Podemosization" of his discourse, or on the contrary, trying to reach an understanding with him to deactivate the destabilizing effect of his project. Political life is full of paradoxes and the orchestrated removal of Sanchez in the name of reasons of state has now led to a return of the former secretary general under a narrative that for the moment cannot be integrated into its scheme of state governance.

4. Sanchez has sold the project of a "new PSOE" that is perceived by its activist rank and file as an attempt to return the PSOE to what it was in its heyday. There is some truth in this because it is clear that the degeneration of the party had reached unusual heights. But in reality a "new PSOE" that was really capable of sustaining a project opposed to policies of austerity and the real implosion of the representative democratic systems under the yoke of the financial dictatorship would be *a PSOE which was no longer the PSOE*, i.e. it would cease to be a party embedded in the structures of the state and the financial-economic power as it has been since the transition. A contradiction in terms. Something impossible and completely foreign to the intentions of Sanchez.

Putting an end to austerity policies requires much more than what Sanchez and the "new PSOE" can offer, however positive their victory against Diaz. This is the Achilles heel of his proposal and the main asset that Podemos should exploit.

5. The illusions of a progressive government of PSOE and Unidos Podemos, with Sánchez at the head, may be real in a significant part of society and, faced with the apparent impossibility that Unidos Podemos could form a government on its own or be the hegemonic force within one, an alliance with the Socialist Party could appear as the only credible concrete perspective to exit from the current impasse. Unidos Podemos, En Común Podem and En Marea face the complex situation of neither appearing sectarian (as Sanchez will certainly try to make them appear), or feeding illusions of "change" that do not correspond to the reality of a possible government led by Sanchez. Before a new contender in the rhetoric of "change", Podemos and its allies would commit a big mistake if they choose to compete with Sanchez on his own ground, blurring the differences with him uncritically in a bloc led by the PSOE. On the contrary, at this stage the (often improvised) shock effect politics characteristic of Podemos, whether successful as in the current motion of censure or sloppy as in the offer of a coalition government in January 2016, will more than ever need to give way to a *more substantive politics* in which *programmatic proposals* and *extra-institutional politics* will be decisive. It is in the programmatic debate on the realization of "change" where the limits of Sanchez may become more clear (or where his tensions with the establishment will increase if he is forced to maintain specific radical positions), and in the ability to show that there is life beyond the institutions where the new PSOE could show its continuity with the old one.

Socially Destructive Amendments to the Hungarian Labour Code Need to be Opposed

23 May 2017, by **Tibor Meszmann**

Calculating with oscillating production cycles, the three year reference period would annul most overtime bonuses too, and thus cut worker earnings. After unions emphatically opposed the amendments to further increase employee vulnerability, by April 25 the Committee withdrew the proposal. How are we to understand this incident in the context of labor relations in contemporary Hungary?

Already without the latest proposed amendments the existing labour legislation is far from employee-friendly. Taking a long duree perspective, postsocialist regulation of labour relations has generally been driven by employer demands for higher flexibility as a precondition for maintaining employment (strategically placing workers between a rock and a hard place, in an assault usually backed by narratives of increasing competitiveness, modernization, superior rationality, etc). Resembling the spirit of the clauses regulating labour relations in the late 19th century, and also the original “slave-labor law” (rabszolgatörvény) of 1898 that regulated agricultural labour, the Labour Code introduced in 2012 in many respects is hypocritical and liberal. Namely, it stresses the premise of equality of parties and stresses individual bargains between employer and employee, while silencing the importance of collective bargaining. The legislation presupposes equality of the contracting parties, whereas in reality, those who are hired to work, that is, have to work in order to survive, are in an unequal, dependent position to employers. Strike legislation in 2011 also makes it quite difficult to launch collective action. Conditions of collective bargaining are easy to establish, but only if it serves employer needs. All in all, the position of most (potential) employees in

production is vulnerable.

The current Hungarian government combines a hostile attitude against relatively autonomous social groups, it strategically engages in power struggles in certain, more regulation and service driven economic sectors. More recently, it also started domestically a rather aggressive discourse against the EU. Simultaneously to these, it fully pleases requests of large employers in the export driven sector, especially in the automotive industry. Of course, proposals to regulate labor relations come only after new practices have already been introduced.

As we know, industrial production is the big lord in Hungary, which the lackeying legislators typically try to please ex post. Last year, in many Hungarian manufacturing plants it was common that the 250 annual overtime limit was broken already before the end of the year. Unable to hire new workers, manufacturing plants would typically continue production, and management would rather pay (symbolic) fines for breaking regulations. Some employer organizations therefore publicly (!) complained that the problem is that “people” cannot work enough. The practical conclusion they drew from this? The legislation of 250 extra-working hours is not enough, and employers needed to solve this “problem” with tricks!

But let’s consider what consequences might a tense, or from the employer perspective, an increasingly flexible work regime have on a worker and on the society.

Reproduction of

the asocial employee

Let’s start with a central assumption of the dominant local liberal narrative, the assumption of individualized employees, or in literal translation from Hungarian the “labor undertakers” (munkavállaló). “Individual” employees are asocial beings, who just happen to be there, whose daily regeneration presupposes only fulfilment of physiological needs. His or her regeneration needs water, certain input of calories, certain hours of rest, sometimes medical (or rather: pharmaceutical?) treatment, and perhaps, body exercise. Since production workers in Hungary typically do not earn much more than a minimum wage – which is below the living wage! – they typically depend on various bonuses, overtime or achievement based elements of pay, in order to make ends meet. But even our asocial, immobile employee does not last: his or her body and functions of the nervous system wear out. S(h)e needs to be not only maintained but eventually also replaced... Thus an employee, who is an atomic member of a society of individuals, needs thus also to reproduce, or find a younger replacement from somewhere. He or she has to have offspring, a family, which is, somewhat more difficult to consider “atomic” or asocial – since many needs suddenly emerge, and our head starts to hurt from brining in all sorts of needs and calculations...

Our asocial worker has to choose: if (s)he does not comply with the flexible work regime – (s)he does not have enough to eat. If (s)he complies, (s)he would have serious doubts whether (s)he can have enough rest, can regenerate in the medium or longer run, reproduce her/his labour for the

next days, and reproduce her/his labour also through future generations. Such a worker, especially if (s)he has a family, thus cannot fulfil her/his basic needs for reproduction.

Workers are, however, social, and their labour is social too. Workers do have other social needs, and also, frustrations.

Social reproduction: maintenance or explosion?

Social reproduction is not a popular expression. But nowadays we hear little even about the broader issue of workers wellbeing in Hungary, an issue that was still popular under state socialism. In our everyday life we see though that certain stresses and frustrations are being reproduced daily. My point here is that there is a social group of relatively isolated, socially barely visible production workers, whose mobility is mostly limited to commuting between home and workplace. Their acquaintances, friendships and marriage possibilities are increasingly narrowing down in the space of the "bread-giving" enterprise. Their life space, vertical mobility opportunities to come out from a narrowing, increasingly limiting space are limited. The space seems to work as a vertigo: those who cannot fight for their rights (e.g. via a responsive trade union) or have an exit option are predestined to sink. They are sinking, but this sinking is also a social phenomenon, as it affects society. Institutionalized injustice that happens to a part of society will eventually affect the whole society. But let's keep in mind that a society that willingly allows a social group to undergo such processes is an unhealthy society. I still believe that Hungarian society has some strength

to rediscover its real values.

One must also mention that social awareness and critical knowledge on the hardships and social life of workers is quite low in the milieus of the relatively privileged, in university towns, or in the capital of Budapest, e.g. in the urban middle class, on what is going on in the countryside. We know very little about children who see their parents mostly or only for the weekend. Children who will grow up as semi-orphans and will have limited social capacities as a result. Thus, it's important to record, inform and communicate, and reflect on what is going on, and what and how these developments determine the future of our society.

Role of trade unions

Many forget, even some trade unions themselves, that labor unions are not only interest representative, member-self-help, or self-servicing organizations. First and foremost, the first function of trade unions is social. That is, trade unions have a tremendous social role and responsibility to gather information, communicate to the public, and act in any situations which are related to work and employment and which have alarming social consequences. Trade unions have to safeguard issues not only related to the immediate life and safety of workers (safe working environment, impact on health etc.) but also those that have broader social consequences. Already now an employee who depends only on his or her wage can have very little opportunities for achieving what they would consider a decent life due to increasingly tense working time arrangements.

Therefore, Hungarian trade unions, and most of them already did, reacted

sharply against the newly proposed regulations. They reacted most likely also because they are interest representative organizations: plant level unions - which try to protect their members as well as employees of the whole company - will lose significant bargaining power against the management if the new legislation comes into force. They cannot fight easily against unilateral working time regulations. But as social actors they should strive towards greater presence in Hungarian public spaces and engage in more detailed sharing of information and communication with other social actors and groups, outlining and warning against the social consequences of exploitation.

Some Hungarian plant level and regional trade unions have overcome isolation, successfully coming out from behind their factory gates. Especially the successes of the publicly covered strike at Mercedes in November last year received a significant social echo. However, strikes usually do not engage at this level. If a well-informed and sufficiently organized plant level trade union reaches the stage of launching a warning strike, they reach a point where they showed their strength to the employers, and typically their immediate demands are immediately met. Nevertheless, a great pity remains that the fruits of such collective action remain mostly in silence, the revealing knowledge about the importance of communication and self-organization does not reach wider segments of the society. Trade unions, those smart and autonomous enough to do so, might continue winning small battles in the periods when tides change to their advantage. However, in preparing for the not so good times, and also in exerting a greater influence, trade unions need to be more present, more active in society, and become more social.

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VERY URGENT CALL FOR SIGNATURES -

Release Baba Jan! An International Appeal to the Pakistani and Gilgit-Baltistan Governments

21 May 2017, by **Farooq Tariq**

Baba Jan is a political activist in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) facing a life sentence along 12 more at Gahkooch jail. He is a federal committee member of the Awami Workers Party and president of the Progressive Youth Front. He was sentenced on charges of rioting and organising illegal rallies in 2010. His real "crime" was to help the victims of Atta Abad Lake to receive a fair compensation. The lake was established after the land sliding that blocked the path of the river.

In 2010, when the people of Ali Abad, the main city of Hunza Valley, protested for fair compensation for all the genuine victims of the Atta Abad Lake, the police opened fire, killing two protesters, the father and his son. There was immediately very strong protests and people rebelled. Baba Jan was not there at the time. He later joined the protests and tried to cool down the temperature of the mood of the people by organising rallies and demonstrations. It was promised that a police case would be registered against the police officer responsible for firing on the peaceful demonstrators.

Instead, various police cases were registered, under the anti-terrorist laws, against Baba Jan, along over 100 activists from various political parties. Anti-terrorist laws are very often used against political activists in Pakistan and Gilgit-Baltistan on political grounds.

Baba Jan and his 12 colleagues were sentenced to life in 2014 by the anti-terrorist court – it has never been heard earlier that demonstrators would receive such a sentence for protesting! Later, the High Court of GB acquitted Baba Jan upon his appeal against the verdict.

Baba Jan contested the general elections in 2015 and came second in his home constituency. However, when a bye election was to be held again in the same constituency, after the winner was made governor of Gilgit-Baltistan, and it emerged that no one could match the popularity of Baba Jan, the government went to the Supreme Court and asked that their appeal for Baba Jan acquittal must be heard before the election and the election was postponed.

Later, the Supreme Court restored the life sentence of Baba Jan. Many believed the decision was taken on a political basis, to keep Baba Jan out of the contest.

The Supreme Court will hear a final review petition of Baba Jan on 25th May 2017.

This is to demand that the government of Gilgit-Baltistan withdraw its appeal at the Supreme Court and plead at the Supreme Court for the release of Baba Jan and all others, and to release all of them.

This is also to demand the publication of the judicial commission report on the original incident and the implementation of the recommendations. This judicial commission was established by the GB government itself to investigate the whole incident. Its report was never published.

Fourth update of 25 May 2017.

Signatories

Txema Abaigar, editor *Infogaia*, internationalist and anticapitalist blog, Spanish State

Sébastien Abbet, student, MPS, Suisse

Serge Aberdam, historian, France

Eva Abuin Bideburu, councilor, Baleike Arrasate, Spain

Gilbert Achcar, Professor, School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, UK

Louis Adam, Ensemble, France

Abraham Agulhas, South Africa

Yoko Akimoto, Japan

Al Mounadil-a Current, Morocco

Badrul Alam, President, Bangladesh Krishok Federation, Bangladesh

Professor Peter Alexander, South Africa

Karamat Ali, executive director Pakistan Institute of Labour Research and Education (PILER), Pakistan

Sher Ali Khan, *Herald magazine*, Pakistan

Sardar Shaukat Ali Kashmiri, Chairman, United Kashmir People's National Party, Kashmir

Marina Albiol, Member of the European Parliament, Spain

Guillermo Almeyra, historian and periodista, México

MarĀa Ā lvarez Moctezuma, Human Rights Defender, México

Ronaldo Ambangan, Erumanon IPS, Philippines

Samir Amin, economist, Egypt

Javed Anand, Convener, Indian Muslims for Secular Democracy (IMSD), India

Mercia Andrews, South Africa	Ella Sheryl Benito, Teduray and Lambangian Youth and Students Association (TLYSA), Philippines	Borderless Movement, Hong Kong
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Gina Belos, Kilos Ka, Philippines		Matt Carthy, Member of the European

Parliament, Ireland	Venezuela (14 members signed)	Wilfred Dcosta, Indian Social Action Forum (INSAF), New Delhi, India
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Kamil Ahmed Engineer & Pol Activist (PSF.) Lahore, Pakistan	Vice-President and President Elect, American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division	Janette Habel, politologue, France
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Patrick Farbiaz, Sortir du Colonialisme, France	Rena Marie Gahum, Chairperson, Alliance of Youth for Peace in Mindanao (AKMK)	Salima Hashmi, Artist educator, Pakistan
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Dianne Feeley, editor, <i>Against the Current</i> magazine, United States	Oscar Garc�a Miguelez. Concejal en Berango (Bizkaia), Spanish State	Marieme Helie Lucas, Secularism Is A
Yaneis Felekis, long-time militant, prisoner during the military dictatorship 1967-1974, Greece	Camila Andrea Galindo, Movimiento Ecosocialista, Colombia	
Bong Fenis, MPPM, Philippines	Boy Gatchalian, CLUTCH, Inc., Philippines	
Elisabeth Ferreira, lawyer, Geneva,	Franck Gaudichaud, Researcher, Grenoble-Alpes University, France	
	Daniel Geffner, diputado de las Cortes Valencianas de Podemos, Spanish State	
	Luciana Genro, Dirigente Nacional do PSOL, Brazil	

Women's Issue	Sadet Karabulut, SP, Member of the Parliament, The Netherlands	Tamas Krausz, Professor of History, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary
Odile Hélier, France	Safder Karim Hunzai, accountant, Australia	Marko Krzan, Initiative for democratic socialism, Slovenia
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Shamim Hhan, quality controller resident in Oman, member Jammu Kashmir National Awami Party, Oman	Claudio Katz, Economista, UBA, Argentina	Masis Kurkcugil, historian-researcher, Turkey
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The times they are a changing: Rebuilding collective action in Albania

20 May 2017, by **Griselda Qosja**

From Aristotle to Hegel, the distinction between state and market has been the basis of understanding the role of civil society. In Albania, however, since the 1990s, unfortunately the role of civic activism has been often marginalized in public opinion, and perceived as an agent linked to the Open Society Foundation (OSF) [5] or backed by foreign embassies. Probably, an atavism of the communist regime, where the fight against foreign agitators was ever-

present. Furthermore, for historical and geographical reasons, be it in our foreign policy or daily discourse, Albanians (as most of our neighbors) tend to adopt a mild paranoia of resistance against forms of external social and cultural domination.

Lulzim Basha, the leader of the Democratic Party (PD) has claimed more than once that the prime minister is the primary investment of George Soros in the Balkans [6] and that George Soros himself is an agent

provocateur in the region. Unlike Hungary or Macedonia, these accusations have failed to produce a dramatic effect. The right in Albania has often associated civic activism and the current government with OSF [7]. As a result it has downplayed the significance of those protests which are not initiated or supported by the PD itself.

During the last two decades, the major problem with the opposition in Albania has been that it has typically come

from the political parties. Mjaft (Enough), a movement-turned-NGO, was one of the first groups to protest without being formally party-affiliated (unfortunately, it also transitioned as its crucial members joined into political parties before the movement itself completely disappeared). Even in those cases when protests are spontaneous, often one of the two major parties blames the other for initiating them.

During the last two months, thousands of people have protested in the Albanian capital, Tirana. The protestors can be broken up into three main groups lead by (a) the PD (b) Nisma Thurje (Thurje Initiative) (a brand new movement, at the intersection of green and leftist politics) (c) OP (Organizata Politike or Political Organization, - the radical left). The government, led by the Socialist Party (PS), claims that the protests of Thurje are supported by PD. PD itself claims Thurje is supported by PS, in order to overshadow their protest. And Thurje itself avoids being associated with the OP, even when both groups protest on the same issues.

Despite the lack of solidarity within the opposition, the recent protests in Albania are showing a greater awareness of the necessity to rebuild collective action as the only way to hold back policies that reflect the personal interest of those in power. On a discursive level, this mobilization has already proven effective in redefining the role of the masses in the political realm. In 2004 the government wanted to build an incinerator near the capital city of Tirana. For this to happen a law that allowed the import of waste from Italy had to be passed. Mass protests, however, stopped this law from passing, first, when it was introduced by the DP-SMI coalition government in 2011 and, again, in September 2016 by Rama's government. In both cases civil society groups mobilized against the law, which is still pending.

Over the past decade every government has tried to serve the interest of certain private groups that oppose the interest of its citizens. As a result, it's of no surprise that civil society groups, through

demonstrations and protest, have tried to keep the powers of government within legal bounds.

In order to better understand the current protests, I talked to leading members Organizata Politike (OP) and Besjan Pesha, the founder of Thurje, who recently organized a small group of people from Zharrez, a small village situated on the biggest onshore oil field in Europe, to protest against a foreign company that is altering the landscape and destroying the inhabitants' houses in order to extract oil.

Organizata Politike - "We have always maintained the belief that parties representing social bases against the establishment should be the coagulative result of popular movements."

GQ:First, can I ask you about your political background and where you stand ideologically?

OP: Organizata Politike is an organization of the radical left that sprang up from the events of 21 January 2011, when four protestors were shot dead by the National Guard during a demonstration against a corruption scandal involving leading politicians. Since then we have supported various protests by chromite and oil miners, have organized protests against the increase in the price of public transportation, the occupation of public space and the neoliberal reform in higher education.

GQ:Thoreau saw the government as an agent of corruption and injustice and because of this, honest men must rebel and revolutionise. Does OP consider the actual government corrupt? Are the recent protests in Zharrez an example of this?

Corruption has reached an unprecedented level in Albanian politics and institutions, and this is easily perceived by the vast majority of the people. That notwithstanding, over the years since the fall of the regime there have been very few signs of protests springing independently

from any political party affiliations. This is commonly attributed to dysfunctional trade unions and a complacent 'civil society'.

What is happening in Zharrez is a peculiar case of intertwined vested interests. Bankers Petroleum, a multinational corporation, has been ruthlessly exploiting the oil reserves in the Patos-Marinze area (where Zharrez is located) for years now, based on contracts signed and renewed by both political parties of the left-right centre. The corporation has been using fracking techniques that are followed by earth tremors causing severe damage to the houses of the inhabitants. An investigation launched by the Prosecutor's Office on the case was promptly dropped on request of the American Ambassador in Tirana, Donald Lu. This fact was made public later by the General Prosecutor, Adriatik Llalla, after a dispute between Lu and Llalla regarding reforms in the justice system.

GQ:Why did the OP join the struggle of Zharrez's residents? What was the politics of this decision?

We have been in contact with the residents of Zharrez since their first initiatives in reaction to the situation, initially by blocking the main highway, later by entering a hunger-strike and finally deciding to march all the way to Tirana to ask for an immediate halt to the fracking procedures. The residents asked for our support and proclaimed their non-party affiliation in their struggle. Our political statement has always been to support the various social groups that find themselves vulnerable under the wave of privatization and hence, exploited and marginalized for the benefit of private interests.

GQ:How erratic and factional is the left in Albania? Are there other leftist groups? And if yes does the OP stands on comradely terms with them?

It has always struck our comrades from abroad our claim that in Albania there are no other organized leftist groups, including variations of communists, anarchists or even

greens. Here we are excluding the various Hoxha-ist parties that exist only nominally. Operating in an ideological desert where we were immediately branded with the mark of Albania's Stalinist past has been quite challenging. This has prompted us, however, to become more inclusive and welcoming for young people of various political beliefs that identify the current political establishment as totally defunct and unreformable.

GQ: Is the OP trying to play the role of an agitating agent to accelerate the social revolt and bring students and the working and rural masses out of their passivity?

OP was conceived as an initiative to react to the general lethargy that characterizes Albanian social groups. The Albanian public has been fed the tale that our politicians are held in check by the pressure exerted by European and American representatives in our country. We, on the other hand, believe that unless there is pressure by organized and mobilized social groups from within Albanian society, no substantial change will ever occur. This is why we have strongly supported any initiative by workers, the unemployed and any other marginalized groups fighting for their rights in the public sphere. This is why, as part of the student movement, Per Universitetin, we tried to mobilize student resistance against the privatization of the public university that the neoliberal reform, introduced by the PS, sought to achieve. We are following political developments and we are trying to articulate a position which goes beyond the usual political show portrayed in the mainstream media.

GQ: With the intensification of the protest waves in the region and the advent of the leftist alternatives coming back in countries like Greece, Spain and lately the Netherlands, do you think that OP will present in the future an electoral alternative? Or is it advocating a more radical strategy?

For the moment, we feel that our role is to try to organize resistance through mobilization of the social

masses. Albania is a country too small for big ideas. There was hope among us, as throughout Europe, that Syriza in Greece would mark a change in the course of European politics. Had this been achieved to a certain extent, it would have significant effects on the mentality of people in Albania. Syriza's capitulation to the third memorandum, however, changed that perspective. Another window appears to be opening now, first with the impact of Sanders in the US elections and now Corbyn in the UK, but it remains to be seen. Unless a palpable example comes from abroad, it seems unlikely that politics in Albania will take a significant turn. We as OP have always maintained the belief that, just like Podemos in Spain, parties representing social bases against the establishment should be the coagulative result of popular movements. For the moment, we seem to be far from this vision in Albania. Therefore, plenty of work remains ahead of us.

Thurje - "We don't believe that Albania will be made by some holy "prophet" coming among us with all the solutions. We don't believe in politicians as individuals. We do believe in communities, when they join forces and work together."

GQ: What is Thurje? Where does it stand ideologically?

Thurje is a grassroots movement funded by a group of young professionals. We believe that there is only one way to make Albania move forward and that is by organizing the society. A more proactive, reactive and organized society that is concerned about and participative in the decision making processes or other aspects of social life, would mean a better place to live as a result of better policies, better politicians, stronger rule of law, stronger communities. We don't believe that Albania will be made by some holy "prophet" coming among us with all the solutions. We don't believe in politicians as individuals. We do believe in communities, when they join forces and work together. Imagine if we do this every day, in every aspect. Who could dare to cheat us? Who

could dare to steal from us? Who could dare to lie to us?

This is our dream, our mission and our vision for Albania. And we intend to make it happen, as long as it might take. Personally, this is a lifetime mission. I would be doing the same even after 50 years, if I would be among the living.

GQ: On the 17th of March for two hours you were interrogated at the Police Station 1 in Tirana for organizing "unlawful protests that seek to destabilize Albania". What were you protesting against?

One of the monopolies that is pick-pocketing Albanians every day, is the fuel monopoly. Owned and controlled by a few oligarchs the price never goes down and the quality gets worse every year. As you might know, Albania owns the biggest onshore oilfield in Europe. One thinks, in this country at least fuel should be cheap and the quality good. Well here is the paradox, while we export most of the oil outside, we use the remaining to mix with the imported fuel. So we end up having a very expensive mixture of crude oil and fuel in our cars, which pollutes the air significantly. [8]

So, on 16 March we decided to do something about it and went into the streets to protest. The crowd stood in front of the Prime Minister's office in silence for one hour and peacefully went home. Before that week we delivered a proposal for the solution of the problem to the Parliament and Prime Minister. A change of law. So the protest was to support our proposal, despite the fact that the police won't allow us to protest as they say it might bring destabilization to the country. We actually know that the only persons 'destabilized' by the protests are the few controlling the fuel business. These are who police call "the country".

Not many days ago we won a very important battle against the oil industry. We "destabilized" them by organizing a small group of people from Zharrez, a small village next to Patos Marinza (the biggest onshore oil field in Europe) and led them to a victory against the company that is extracting oil and the government that

was backing them. We held a march of 130 km for 4 days and another 4 day resistance in front of the Ministry of Energy. The mainstream media silenced us, government ignored us, but we went viral on social media. So in the end the village got full compensation for the damages caused by fracking, full compensation for environmental damages and fracking was stopped by law.

GQ: On your social accounts you called the arrest grotesque. Was it an excess of bureaucracy that announces the beginning of an oppressive system?

It was a pure abuse of power. They called me into the police station and first they threatened to arrest me.

When I showed my hands and willingness to get arrested, they changed their mind. Then they said they would prosecute me. I again showed enthusiasm. They asked some questions and I answered them, but when I asked for a copy they refused to give me one. So I am afraid I won't have my prosecution either. It was all a set up to threaten me not to go on the street again, not to talk about certain issues. Now I don't want to think that this is the beginning of an oppressive system, as if it is it would be a very ridiculous one. Rather, I believe that fragments of the government in Albania are more controlled by business oligarchs, mafia people than by the people that we voted in at the last election. This is

worse than oppression I guess.

GQ: In Mjaft, the movement you co-funded, several members slowly transitioned into the very political parties they once opposed. Does Thurje risk the same scenario?

I can speak for myself. I don't have an interest in political parties any longer. But Thurje is growing and more people join. Maybe some of them in the future will join political parties, maybe not. It's up to every individual to make decisions of what to do in their life. Thurje will not join, will not be used, will not be transformed into a political party. I do believe that Albania needs a new party, but also an organized society. Until then, we have a lot to do.

Seven keys for understanding the current crisis

19 May 2017, by **Emiliano Teran Mantovani**

Venezuela's treatment by the international media is certainly special. Undoubtedly there are too many distortions, too much Manichaeism, too many slogans, too many manipulations and omissions.

Beyond the stupefying versions of media newspeak that interprets everything that happens in the country in the key of "humanitarian crisis", "dictatorship" or "political prisoners", or the heroic narrative of the Venezuela of "socialism" and "revolution" that interprets everything that happens in the country in terms of "economic war" or "imperialist attack", there are many topics, subjects and processes that are invisible and that essentially constitute the national political scene. It is not possible to understand the current crisis in Venezuela without analysing the factors that develop "from within".

The criterion of action and interpretation based on the logic of

"friend-enemy" responds more to a dispute between the elites of the political parties and economic groups than the fundamental interests of the working classes and the defence of common goods. It is necessary to provide a comprehensive overview of the process of crisis and national conflict, which helps us plot the coordinates to transcend or deal with the current situation.

We present seven keys to your understanding, analysing not only the dispute between government and opposition, but also the processes that are developing in the political institutions, the social fabric, and the economic networks, while highlighting the complexities of neoliberalism and the forms of government and governance in the country.

1/ It is not possible

to understand what is happening in Venezuela without taking foreign intervention into account

The rich and vast array of the country's so-called "natural resources"; its geo-strategic position; its initial challenge to the policies of the Washington Consensus; its regional influence for integration; as well as its alliances with China, Russia and Iran, all give a considerable geopolitical significance to Venezuela. However, there are intellectual and media sectors that continually seek to avoid the very fluid international dynamics that impact on and determine the political future of the

country, which highlights the persistent interventionist actions of the government and the power of the United States.

In this sense, these sectors are responsible for ridiculing the critique of imperialism, and present the national government as the sole actor of power at play in Venezuela, and therefore the sole object of political interrogation.

However, since the inauguration of the Bolivarian Revolution there has been much US interventionism in Venezuela, which has intensified and become more aggressive since the death of president Chavez (2013) and the context of the exhaustion of the progressive cycle and conservative restoration in Latin America. It is worth remembering the executive order signed by President Barack Obama in March 2015 which stated that Venezuela was "an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States". We already know what has happened to countries that are categorized in this way by the power to the north.

Now, we have the threatening statement of the head of the Southern Command, Admiral Kurt W. Tidd (April 6, 2017), arguing that "The growing humanitarian crisis in Venezuela could eventually compel a regional response". This is combined with the evidence of the aggressive nature of the foreign policy of Donald Trump with the recent bombing of Syria, while the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Luis Almagro, together with other countries in the region, intends to apply the Democratic Charter to open a process of "restoration of democracy" in the country.

The ideologues and the media operators of the conservative restoration in the region are very concerned about the state of human rights in Venezuela, but fail to explain in their analysis why, strangely, there is no supranational effort of the same type in the face of the appalling crisis of human rights in countries such as Mexico and Colombia.

In this sense it seems that the moral

indignation is relative and they remain silent. It is because, for reasons of political intent or analytical naivety these sectors depoliticize the role of the supranational bodies and are unaware of the geopolitical relations of power that constitute them, that are part of their own nature. While a paranoid reading of all the operations driven by these global bodies is one thing, another very different approach is a purely procedural interpretation of their actions, ignoring the international mechanisms of domination and control of markets and natural resources that have been channelled through these institutions of global and regional governance.

But there is something important to add. If we talk of intervention, we cannot just talk about the US. In Venezuela there are growing forms of Chinese interventionism in the political and economic measures that have been taken, which points to a loss of sovereignty, an increase in dependency on the Asian power and processes of greater economic flexibility.

A part of the left has preferred to remain silent on these dynamics, since it seems that the only intervention that deserves to be mentioned is that of the USA. But both streams of foreign interference are being developed to promote transnational capitalist accumulation, the appropriation of "natural resources" and have nothing to do with popular demands.

2/ The concept of "dictatorship" does not explain the Venezuelan case

From almost the beginning of the Bolivarian Revolution Venezuela has been branded a "dictatorship". This concept remains the subject of extensive discussions in political theory because it has been challenged by the transformations and complexity of contemporary regimes and exercises of power, especially in the

current globalized era, which raises serious gaps and imprecisions in its definition.

"Dictatorship" is usually associated with political regimes or types of government in which all power is concentrated, without limitation, into a single person or group; there is a lack of separation of powers; the absence of individual freedoms, freedom of political parties, freedom of expression; and sometimes the concept has even been vaguely defined as "the opposite of democracy".

The term "dictatorship" has been used in relation to Venezuela in media jargon of a fairly superficial, visceral and moralizing kind, practically to raise it as a kind of specificity in Venezuela, distinct from the other countries of the region, where in theory there would be "democratic" regimes.

The thing is that in Venezuela at the present time it is difficult to say that all power is concentrated in one person or group, due to the fact that in this country we are faced with a map of actors, which, although hierarchical, is fragmented and volatile, especially after the death of President Chávez, with the existence of various power blocs that can link up or be at odds among themselves and that goes beyond the dichotomy between government and opposition.

Although there is a government with a significant military component, with increasing expressions of authoritarianism and with some capacity for centralization, the scenario is highly unstable. There is no total domination from top to bottom, and there is some parity between the disputing power groups. On the other hand, the conflict could spill over, making the situation even more chaotic.

The fact that the Venezuelan opposition controls the National Assembly, winning convincingly by the electoral path, also indicates that rather than a pure absence of separation of powers, there is a dispute between them, until now favourable to the executive-judicial combination. Rather than a

homogeneous political regime, we are faced with a wide and conflicting network of forces. The metastasis of corruption means the exercise of power is decentralized even more, making its centralization by the constituted power difficult.

What is relevant to the old Roman concept of dictatorship, is that, in this context, the national government is governing through decrees and special measures in the framework of a declared “state of emergency”, which has officially existed since the beginning of 2016. In the name of the struggle against the economic war, the advance of criminality and paramilitarism, and the subversive advances of the opposition, many institutional mediations and democratic procedures are being omitted.

Security policies stand out for their severity, exemplified by the Operación de Liberación del Pueblo (OLP - People’s Liberation Organization); there are direct interventions by the state security bodies in different parts of the country (rural, urban, suburbs), to “fight the underworld”, which tend to lead to a controversial number of deaths; there is the paralysis of the referendum; gubernatorial elections were suspended in 2016 and it is not yet clear when they will be held; there is increasing repression and police brutality in response to the social unrest resulting of the situation in the country; and there is an increase in processes of militarization, especially in the border areas and those declared to contain “strategic natural resources”.

This is the political map, which, together with the various forms of foreign intervention, sets the stage for a low-intensity war that runs through virtually all the spheres of everyday life for Venezuelans. This is the framework within which individual freedoms, party opposition and pluralism, the convening and realization of marches, expressions of dissent and criticism in the media, among other forms of so-called democracy in Venezuela, are developing.

3/ In Venezuela the social contract, institutions and frameworks of the formal economy are being overwhelmed

If there is something that could be defined as a specificity of the Venezuelan case, it is that the current socio-political scenario is torn, deeply corrupted and highly chaotic. We have argued that in this country we are facing one of the most severe institutional crises in all of Latin America, with reference to the set of legal, social, economic and political institutions, among others, that make up the Venezuelan Republic.

The historic crisis of oil rentier model of accumulation, the metastasis of corruption in the country, severe violations to the social fabric from the “neoliberal period” and in particular since 2013, and the intensity of the attacks and political disputes, have overflowed the frameworks of the formal institutions of all areas of society, channelling a good part of the social dynamics by means of informal mechanisms, often underground and illegal.

In the economic sphere, corruption has become a transversal mechanism for distribution of oil revenues, diverting enormous amounts of foreign exchange at the discretion of a few, and undermining the foundations of the formal rentier economy. This occurs in a decisive manner with PDVSA, the main industry of the country, as well as with key funds like the Sino-Venezuelan Fund or a number of nationalized companies.

The collapse of the formal economy has made informality practically one of the “drivers” of the national economy as a whole. The sources of social opportunities, whether for social ascent or the possibility of higher profits, are often in the so-

called *bachaqueo* in foodstuffs (illegal trade, at extremely high prices, on the black market) or other forms of trade in the various parallel markets, exchange, medicines, gasoline, and so on.

In the political-legal order, the rule of law lacks respect and recognition on the part of the main political actors, who not only mutually repudiate each other but are willing to do anything to overcome each other.

The national government faces what it considers the “enemy forces” with emergency measures, while the most reactionary opposition groups deploy violent operations of vandalism, confrontation and attacks on infrastructure. In this scenario the rule of law has been greatly eroded, making the Venezuelan people very vulnerable.

Impunity is ever greater, and has spread to all sectors of the population. This leads to corruption becoming even more rooted and impossible to prevent, and means the people expect nothing from the legal system, increasingly taking the law into their own hands.

The collapse of the social contract generates trends of “everybody for themselves” among the people. The fragmentation of power has also helped to generate, grow and strengthen various territorial powers, like the so-called “miners’ unions” that control gold mines in Bolívar state by force of arms, or the criminal gangs that dominate sectors of Caracas like El Cementerio or La Cota 905.

The framework presented implies nothing more and nothing less than the future and political definitions of the current situation in the country being developed to a great extent by force.

4/ The long-term crisis of Venezuelan rentier capitalism

(1983-2017)

The collapse of the international price of crude oil has been instrumental in the development of the Venezuelan crisis, but it is not the only factor that explains this process. Since the 1980s there are growing signs of exhaustion of the model of accumulation based on the extraction of oil and the distribution of income that it generates. The current phase of increasing chaos in the national economy (2013-present) is also a product of the trends of the last 30 years in the country's economy. Why?

For several reasons. About 60% of Venezuelan crude is heavy or extra-heavy. This crude is economically more costly and requires greater use of energy and the use of further processing for marketing. The profitability of the business that feeds the country is declining with respect to earlier times, when conventional crude prevailed. This is happening as the model requires ever more rentier profits and increased social investment to deal with the needs of a population that is still growing.

The hyper-concentration of the population in the cities (over 90%) promotes the use of profits directed primarily towards consumption (imported goods) rather than production. The boom years promoted the strengthening of the extractive (primary) sector - the effects of the so-called "Dutch Disease" - while significantly weakening the already weak productive sectors. After the end of the boom (as happened at the end of the 70s and now from 2014), the economy was more dependent and even weaker in the face of a new crisis.

The socio-political corruption in the system also makes it possible for leakages and fraudulent diversion of profits, which prevents the development of coherent distribution policies to alleviate the crisis.

The increasing volatility of international prices of crude oil, as well as changes in the global power balances in oil (such as the progressive loss of influence of OPEC) also has significant impacts on the

national economy.

While all these economic shocks are affecting the country, ecological resources will continue to be undermined and depleted, which threatens the livelihood of millions of Venezuelans for the present and future.

The government's current solution has been to greatly increase external indebtedness, distribute income more regressively, expand extractivism and favour transnational capital.

To sum up, any of the elites who rule in the coming years will have to face the historic limits that have been reached with the old oil-based model. It is not enough just await a stroke of luck and a rise in oil prices. Momentous changes are taking place and it is necessary to be prepared to deal with them.

5/ Socialism? Venezuela is carrying out a process of progressive economic flexibility and adjustment

Venezuela is developing a process of progressive and sectoralized adjustment of the economy, with more flexibility in comparison with prior regulations and restrictions on capital, and the gradual dismantling of social advances achieved in earlier times in the Bolivarian Revolution. These changes are masked by the name of socialism and revolution, although they represent policies increasingly rejected by the population.

This includes policies such as the creation of Special Economic Zones, which represents a comprehensive liberalisation of parts of the national territory, with sovereignty being delivered to foreign capital which administers practically without limitations in these regions. This is

one of the most neoliberal measures of Agenda Venezuela, implemented by the government of Rafael Caldera in the 1990s, under the recommendations of the International Monetary Fund.

Also we should highlight the gradual relaxation of the agreements with foreign corporations in the Orinoco; liberalization of prices of some commodities; growing issuance of sovereign bonds; devaluation of the currency, creating a floating exchange rate (Simadi); acceptance of some trade procedures directly in dollars, for example, in the tourism sector; or the faithful fulfilment of payment of the external debt and its servicing, which implies a reduction in imports and consequent problems of shortages of basic consumer goods.

A renewed and more flexible extractivism is being adopted, aimed mainly at the new frontiers of extraction, such as the mega-project of the Mining Arc of the Orinoco, which proposes to install mega-mining on an unprecedented scale in a territory of an area of 111,800 km², threatening key resources of life for Venezuelans, especially for indigenous people. These projects add to long-term relations of dependency that are produced by extractivism.

It should be noted that these reforms are combined with the maintenance of some social assistance policies, continuous increase in nominal wages, some concessions to the demands of the popular organizations and the use of a revolutionary and anti-imperialist narrative. This obviously has as one of its main objectives the maintenance of the electoral support that remains.

We are witnessing what we have called a "mutant neo-liberalism", to the extent that forms of commodification, financialisation and deregulation are combined with mechanisms of state intervention and social assistance.

Parts of the left have been very focused on preventing conservative governments coming to power so as to avoid the "return of neo-liberalism". But they forget to mention how progressive governments have also made progress in a number of

measures reflecting a mutant and hybrid neo-liberalism profile, which ultimately have an impact on the people and on nature.

6/ What alternative? The project of the parties of the “Mesa de la Unidad Democrática” (MUD) is neo-liberal

The right-wing Mesa de la Unidad Democrática’ (MUD - Table of Democratic Unity’) is the predominant bloc of party-based opposition to the national government, although a left opposition has been growing slowly and is very likely to continue growing. This critical left, at least in its more defined elements, is not identified with the MUD so does not link with it politically.

The MUD is not a homogeneous block, and there are sectors ranging from influential radical groups of the extreme right - which we could call “Uribistas” - as well as some sectors of moderate conservatism, and elitist liberalism with a certain distributionist tendency. These various groups have a mutually conflictual relationship characterized by possible confrontation and mutual insults.

Despite their differences, the various groups of the MUD agree on at least three key factors: its ideological matrix, the bases of its economic program and its reactionary agenda in relation to the national government and the possibility of a profound transformation of popular emancipation.

We will refer to the first two. Their ideological matrix is deeply determined by neoclassical theory and conservative liberalism, honouring obsessively private property, the end of the “ideology” on the part of the state and corporate and individual freedoms.

These ideological pillars are clearer in the program of this bloc than in its media discourse, where the rhetoric is simplistic, superficial and full of slogans. The synthesis of its economic model is in the “Guidelines for the Program of Government of National Unity (2013-2019)’. It is a more orthodox neo-liberal version of oil extractivism, in relation to the project of the current Venezuelan government.

In spite of the slogans of “change” and “productive Venezuela”, what stands out is its proposal to extract up to six million barrels of oil per day, placing an emphasis on increasing the quotas of the Orinoco Oil Belt. Although they dispute publicly, the oil proposals of Henrique Capriles Radonski (Petróleo para tu Progreso) and Leopoldo López (Petróleo en la Mejor Venezuela) are twins, and accord with the government’s “Plan de la Patria” of 2013-2019. The change demanded is no more than another ratcheting up of extractivism, more profit and development oriented, with the economic and socio-environmental consequences and cultural features associated with this model.

7/The fragmentation of the “people” and the progressive undermining of the social fabric

In all these processes of low-intensity warfare and systemic chaos, working people are the most affected. The

powerful socio-political cohesion set up in the early years of the Bolivarian Revolution has suffered not only from erosion but a gradual disintegration. But these effects have reached the very core of the tissues of the community in the country. The difficulty in covering the basic requirements of daily life; incentives for the individual and competitive resolution of the socio-economic problems of the people; the metastasis of corruption; the channelling of social conflicts and disputes by force; the loss of ethical-political references and polarization due to the discredit of the political parties; the direct aggression against strong or important community experiences and community leaders from various political and territorial actors; they are part of this process of erosion of the social fabric that aims to undermine the true pillars of a potential process of popular-emancipatory transformation or of the capacities of resistance of the people to the advancement of regressive forces in the country.

Meanwhile, various grassroots organizations and social movements across the country are building an alternative. Time will tell what their capacity for resistance, adaptation and above all their collective ability to articulate among themselves and to exert greater strength on the course of the national political project will be.

If there is an irreplaceable solidarity that should be promoted from the left in Latin America and the world, it must be with this struggling people, which has historically borne the burden of exploitation and the costs of the crisis. Which has frequently risen up and taken to the streets so that its demands are listened to and met. Which is currently facing the complex dilemmas posed by the current times of reflux and regression. This seems to be the true point of honour of the left. The cost of turning away from these popular counter-hegemonies in the name of a strategy of power conservation could be very high.

The hunger strikers need us to speak out

18 May 2017

Around one in four Palestinians confined in Israeli prisons are participating in the hunger strike that was launched on April 17 to raise [a host of demands around the conditions and treatment they endure](#), ranging from contact with their families to medical care and an end to solitary confinement. Israeli officials have responded with a crackdown—some hunger strikers have been thrown in solitary, while others have been dispersed throughout Israel's system of jails. More prisoners are suffering serious health consequences, including muscle atrophy and loss of balance, [according to the strike's media committee](#).

One of the best-known hunger strikers is Marwan Barghouti, a leader of the First and Second Intifadas who has been behind bars for the last 15 years. His son, Aarab Marwan Barghouti, talked to Brian Bean in Chicago after a demonstration in solidarity with the hunger strikers about the state of the struggle now and the importance of solidarity.

What are the causes of the hunger strike, and what goals do the strikers hope to achieve?

The hunger strike started on April 17 with more than 1,500 Palestinian political prisoners. They are united to raise their voices against the inhumane conditions of the prison.

A lot of the hunger strikers are in bad health, so they want to improve medical care. Some have been imprisoned for years without trial. And, of course, all of them have not been unable to visit their families on a regular basis. They want to be able to touch their families. They want visitation time to be one and a half hours instead of 45 minutes, and they want better conditions for family members when they go visit.

Personally, I used to visit my father a

lot before I was 16. Then after I turned 16, I could only visit him once every two years. That's illegal under international law, but it happens to a lot of families. Yesterday, I met with the father of a prisoner named Mohammad, and he told me that he only was able to visit his son six times in the last 16 years.

The demands are for humane conditions and human rights. This strike is called the "dignity and freedom hunger strike"—dignity because it is time to say enough to inhumane conditions in prisons, and freedom because they are all freedom fighters.

Everyone should understand that these individuals are not in prison for being a criminal. These are freedom fighters, and they are guilty only of raising their voice against the occupation.

This is, of course, not the first hunger strike by Palestinian prisoners. From Khader Adnan and Samer Issawi to Mohammed Allan and others, there is a long history of Palestinian resistance engaging in hunger strikes to protest the apartheid system of Israeli courts and prisons. How is this hunger strike situated in that history of struggle?

The hunger strike is the most peaceful way you can stand up against the prison authorities. This hunger strike is different than the ones carried by individuals like Khader Adnan. Those would strike for 70 or 90 days because they used to take vitamins and other things to keep them alive. This one is more like [the hunger strike that happened in 1992](#). They only take salt and water. [according to news reports, some hunger strikers had started taking vitamins].

They are not asking for a lot, and now is their time to say "Enough." They

have the strongest mentality you can imagine.

We are not only talking about my father, who has long experience at fighting against the occupation, and who has been in prison for more than 21 years of his life, who was kicked out of Palestine for seven years. We are talking also about Karim Younis, who has been imprisoned for 35 years, the longest political prisoner of this struggle. We are talking about some people who are really sick and want treatment, and they can't get it.

They are heroes—that's why they are in prison in the first place. They are people who have given literally everything for Palestine, all these years. I don't think they are going to give up, no matter what.

The Israeli government displays such arrogance. Anyone who reads the demands of the hunger strikers can see they are easy to meet. It is probably surprising to most people that these demands have not been met already. But they haven't. So the hunger strikers are going to take it as far as they need to in order to get their demands met.

Another difference that accounts for the size of the hunger strike is that it involves freedom fighters from many different Palestinian parties and factions.

All the Palestinian parties are included in this. Every day, more groups of prisoners are joining the strike. They are all united in asking for dignity and freedom. Political leaders are taking part in the strike—my father, Marwan Barghouti; Karim Younis' Ayman al-Sharbaty; [Ahmad Sa'adat](#).

These prisoners are united, with the same plan. The Israeli prison authorities tried to negotiate with them individually, and they all answered that the Israelis needed to

negotiate with our leaders.

How was this unity achieved between different wings of the Palestinian resistance?

I would say that the main reason is the political leaders in prison. These are prominent, high-profile people—they are respected, and everybody listens to them.

My father's main message since the Intifada is to be united. Unity is the only strength we have. He has been working to build this, and it has been achieved in prison. You don't have people saying "this guy is Hamas," "this guy is Fatah," "this guy is al-Jabhaah [Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine]." They are all together and have been working on this for many years.

My father has been there for 15 years, and he has been building this base along with Ahmad Sa'adat and the others. They have finally achieved unity and we can see it in this hunger strike.

Yesterday, you and I were part of a demonstration in Chicago showing support for the hunger strike. What has solidarity looked like in Palestine and internationally?

Solidarity is so important because it puts pressure on the Israeli government. The Israeli government has taught us through its history that it will not move or negotiate without being pressured to do so.

Internationally, we have gotten a lot of support—from Argentina, from Europe, from the UK. I should mention that a few students—one of whom is a friend of mine—went on a hunger strike for days in the streets in Manchester. They inspired some groups in Europe, who started a hunger strike several days ago. I received a video from group in South Africa that is starting a hunger strike. From the Italian Parliament, to Nobel Prize winners, to celebrities, people have sent us their support.

In Palestine, of course, there have been huge protests. Even in the U.S., a lot of people are supporting us. We also saw have seen the success of the [#SaltWaterChallenge](#), with people

sending in videos from everywhere to pledge their solidarity.

If we feel like we are alone in this, we aren't going to be able to keep going, which is why it is so important to receive the support, even if it is as small an act as a status update or a video or sharing an article on Facebook. I really encourage everyone to raise their voice for humanity—to raise their voice for the right side.

Can you talk more about the #SaltWaterChallenge? This was something you initiated, right? To challenge people—like the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge—to take a video of themselves drinking salt water, the only thing the hunger strikers are consuming, and share it on social media.

The [#SaltWaterChallenge](#) was launched in April by some friends and I in the Bay Area. I gathered them in my house and told them: My father has been starving for eight days, and I need to do something - something that is not traditional. I want it to go viral so everyone knows about the hunger strike.

We brainstormed and came up with the idea in less than an hour. The success started when I challenged Mohammad Assaf, the winner of *Arab Idol* - and Ali Jaber, a judge on the show *Arabs Got Talent*. Mohammad Assaf did it a few hours after I challenged him, and Ali Jaber did it live on the *Arabs Got Talent* show.

Many celebrities followed. Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, the Nobel Peace Prize winner from Argentina, did it. I really can't tell you how much it touches us.

The U.S., like Israel, has a system of incarceration that is marked by racism and injustice. It is well known that the Israeli and U.S. states collaborate and collude over their tools of repression. Can this contribute to the potential for solidarity?

A few days ago, I spoke at a rally in San Francisco, and one of the main issues was taking up how African American people are targeted and facing inhumane conditions in prison.

When I was asked to speak, I started doing my research and thinking about what we have in common. I realized that we honestly have everything in common. We are both on the oppressed side.

I was raised to value people like Dr. Martin Luther King, who said that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. I was raised on Nelson Mandela, who said that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinian. I was raised on Angela Davis and Jimmy Carter, who all, except Dr. King, supported the campaign for the release of Marwan Barghouthi and Palestinian political prisoners.

We all have the same cause. We are all seekers for justice.

In your speech at the protest yesterday, you mentioned how much your father opened your eyes and inspired you to fight for justice. Can you talk about that?

Being the son of Marwan Barghouthi means I have to raise my voice no matter what. My father is everything to me, and I will do whatever I have to do for him because he gave me everything. He is my role model, and he sacrificed his life for me and my generation. The least I can do is to raise my voice and reach as many people as I can, especially in the U.S.

My living in the U.S. is so important because I want to talk to people in America. I know that the American people are not the problem. The media are the problem—the media are feeding them with Israeli propaganda. My role is to spread the truth.

It's time for us to expose Israeli propaganda and lies. They trying their best to carry out a character assassination of Marwan Barghouthi, which means a character assassination of the Palestinian people. But I will keep going until everyone knows that there are more than 1,500 political prisoners in Israeli jails protesting for their demands such as visiting their families and being able to touch them.

I haven't communicated with my father personally in two years, and we

know nothing about how he is doing to be honest. The lawyers are not allowed to see him—which is, of course, illegal, but Israel doesn't care. None of the other prisoners know how he doing either.

We saw Karim Younis on day 15, and he told us they have not seen my father for eight days. No one has heard anything about him since either.

This leaves me speechless. What kind of world are we living in? How can they not even tell us if he is okay? This behavior by the Israeli authorities represents their policies and their ideology. It is frustrating and I just want to know if he is okay.

What can people do to support the hunger strike?

People can raise their voices and reach out to as many people as they can. We have a lot of supporters for the Palestinian cause.

My father and his fellow prisoners have made it easy to show support because when I tell people that they are on a hunger strike for these demands, people are shocked that they didn't even have those rights in the first place. I want people to talk about this and raise awareness.

My father says that our chains will be broken before we are—he has that

kind of determination. He wrote [an article published in the New York Times on April 17](#) that explains why the hunger strike was starting, which I encourage everyone to read. It was attacked by Israeli officials, and they punished him by sending him to solitary confinement just for raising his voice.

Can you see how irrational this is? For raising his voice and writing an article in a newspaper, the Israelis were angered and sent him to solitary confinement.

May 8, 2017

[Socialistworker.org](#)

"A threat to democracy"

17 May 2017, by David Finkel

If it's true, what then does it amount to? Certainly, anyone on the left — and any student of history — knows that it's hardly worse than what the United States has routinely done in other countries' elections. Only the electronic technology is new. The list is too long to even survey here, but to take just one example from Italy's election way back in 1948:

The CIA, by its own admission, gave \$1 million to Italian "center parties" and was accused of publishing forged letters in order to discredit the leaders of the Italian Communist Party. The National Security Act of 1947, that made foreign covert operations possible, had been signed into law about six months earlier by the American President Harry S. Truman.

'We had bags of money that we delivered to selected politicians, to defray their political expenses, their campaign expenses, for posters, for pamphlets,' according to CIA operative F. Mark Wyatt. In order to influence the election, the US agencies undertook a campaign of writing ten million letters, made numerous short-wave radio broadcasts and funded the publishing of books

and articles, all of which warned the Italians of what was believed to be the consequences of a communist victory. Time Magazine backed the campaign and featured the Christian Democrat leader and Prime Minister Alcide De Gasperi on its cover and in its lead story on 19 April 1948.

The pattern continued throughout the Cold War and beyond — and that's not even counting murderous CIA-sponsored coups and assassinations in Guatemala, Iran, Congo, Indonesia, Chile and more. But if none of this is exactly late-breaking news, what is there to say about today's "threat to our democracy" at home?

The media know, of course, and some are even saying up front, that Donald Trump's shambolic firing of FBI Director James Comey is a blatant move to block the investigation into Russia's interference in the 2016 election, and the possible collusion of Trump campaign operatives. More importantly, what they're not saying is that as "a threat to our democracy" Russian hacking ranks no higher than third on the list. The much bigger "threats to our democracy" are the uncontrollable dark money from the

Crack (Koch) Brothers and others in politics, combined with blatant gerrymandering and voter suppression by Republican-controlled state legislatures.

In fact, on the very day that the administration's initial account of the Comey firing was blowing apart, the Trump regime had just created a "voter fraud investigation commission" to put in place voter suppression on a nationwide scale. The Orwellian-titled "Presidential Commission on Election Integrity" is to be chaired by vice-president Pence with vice-chair Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach. Its purpose is to confirm Trump's fantasy that "millions" of ineligible and dead people voted for Hillary Clinton. It can be safely assumed that it will not investigate the removal of 200,000 people from Wisconsin's voter rolls — disproportionately Black and Democratic voters — nine times the amount of Trump's critically important 2016 victory there.

The Voting Rights Act is rapidly becoming a dead letter in big parts of the United States, and not only the deep South.

Swirling Scandals

The real issue in the swirling scandals around the White House isn't James Comey, one way or the other. It's the future of a presidency that gives cesspools a bad name.

NBC news anchor Lester Holt missed the point in his highly acclaimed May 11 interview when he let Trump get away with saying he has "no businesses or property in Russia." The question is not about business "in Russia" but Trump's business and financial relations with Russian organized crime and politically connected figures in his businesses around the world including in the USA.

These entanglements are detailed by reporter Steven Rosenfeld in an

Alternet article worth reading in detail. "Meanwhile, domestically," Rosenfeld suggests, "Trump seems to be copying what unfolded in Russia after the Soviet Union broke up and several dozen oligarchs and mobsters emerged with control of the country's mineral wealth...including the possibility that some of Trump's private investors from Russia could end up with stakes in newly freed-up U.S. mineral assets [on federal land]."

Let's be clear: The Republican leadership knows, as well as the rest of us, who and what Donald Trump is. The question will be whether and when he is no longer useful to pushing through their kleptocratic and socially medieval agenda. For now they still need him, and he's an asset to their voting base who believe the myth that Trump will solve the disastrous social crisis and disintegration of small-town and rural America.

For the moment, only a few Republican senators are breaking ranks. My guess is that when that dam breaks it will happen basically all at once - maybe if it becomes clear that Trump is dragging them down in the 2018 midterm - or sooner, or later, depending on all kinds of unpredictable events (e.g. a big financial downturn).

If it becomes necessary to dump Trump, there are many ways to do it - impeachment isn't necessary. It's not a news flash that this man is a crook, a swindler and the head of a corrupt family enterprise. That subjects him to blackmail, not only by Russia but by the U.S. system itself, if and when that option becomes important for the ruling class.

[Against the Current](#)

Brazil after the April 28 general strike

16 May 2017, by Roberto Vêras de Oliveira

The general strike of April 28, 2017 in Brazil took place 11 years after the last one and 100 years after the first. Throughout this period, trade unionism has actively taken part in the history of the country. After the two decades of a dictatorship (1964-1985) during which it was persecuted, the trade union movement played a prominent role in the re-democratization process and in successfully managing to include social improvements in the Constitution of 1988. Between 1983 and 1996, the Brazilian unions carried out six general strikes. Right from the start, two different approaches crystallized: one represented by the Unified Workers' Central (CUT), created in 1983, heir to the so-called "new unionism" and allied with the Workers' Party (PT); the other represented by the National Conference of the Working Class (CONCLAT), created that same year with the support of sectors linked to

official federations and confederations, and renamed in 1986 as General Confederation of Workers (CGT). A few years later, in 1991, a dissident sector of the CGT created Union Force (FS), which defends a pragmatic vision related to neoliberal thought.

In the 1990s, the governments of Fernando Collor de Mello and Fernando Henrique Cardoso promoted a neoliberal agenda through macroeconomic policies dissociated from job creation: privatizations, divestment in public services, laxer labor laws, anti-union standpoints, and so on. Faced with the ensuing scenario of increasing unemployment, labour market informality and cuts in wages and benefits, unions were forced to the defensive. To a large extent, they managed to stay at the forefront of the workers' demands, but they failed to show the political leadership which had characterized them in the past.

Under the presidencies of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff, the country resumed a path of economic growth and improvements in the distribution of income. Better formal conditions in the workplace, and a more favourable political climate, benefitted union performance in collective bargaining and in different political action scenarios. But this did not result in recovery of the political role unions had enjoyed in the 1980s. The prevailing position within the CUT was to support delegating the initiative on the social and labour agenda to the government, and this led to internal dissidence. It was then that the Trade Union and Popular Centre Conlutas (CSP-Conlutas) emerged, influenced by two parties to the left of the PT: the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL) and the Socialist Party of Unified Workers (PSTU); the Workers' Central of Brazil (CTB), linked to the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB); and the Inter-union.

Rousseff's second term began in 2015, in the context of an incipient economic crisis and the advance of the conservative forces, helped by the mainstream media and backed by successful right-wing coordinated action in both Chambers, as well as by the judiciary's shift to the right and the mobilization of middle class sectors under the banner of the "fight against corruption". The siege on the center-left government kept on closing, and this led to the dismissal of the President through non-constitutional means. The parliamentary, judicial and media coup was carried out between April and August 2016. With Rousseff out of the way, Vice-President Michel Temer stepped in and took office as head of a coalition led by his party, the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB), and Cardoso's party, the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB), which had been defeated by the PT in the previous four elections. Since then, as the economic crisis deepens and unemployment reaches 13.7% (after having reached its minimum, 4.8%, in 2014), a regressive social and political agenda is being implemented by the current government. Despite its very low approval ratings and the allegations of corruption involving its main cadres - including the President himself -, it can still count on ample support in Congress and in the media, which allows it to carry on with its political and social program.

The government has three main priorities. First, fiscal adjustment, aimed primarily at reducing public spending (a constitutional amendment putting caps on the budget for the next 20 years has been passed, with the sole exception of budget allocations for debt interest payments). Second, the reduction of social and labour rights (a law has already been passed that broadly extends outsourcing, even within the public administration, and several bills on labour market and pension reform are currently under consideration in Congress). Third, intensifying privatizations and the transfer of public enterprises to the private sector (the emblem here is Petrobras' assets and mineral extraction areas).

What is being targeted is not only the social policies of the Lula and Dilma

governments, but also the rights recognized by the 1988 Constitution and even the guarantees included in the Consolidation of Labour Laws (CLT) of the 1940s. To date, protests against this drift have been violently repressed and criminalized with the support of the mainstream media. The new scenario thus places an enormous responsibility on the shoulders of trade unions and popular movements to reverse this regressive agenda.

This was the context in which the trade unions - CUT, CTB, Inter-unions, CSP-Conlutas, UGT, Union Force, New Central, CSB and CGTB - and the popular movements - the Movement of Landless Rural Workers (MST), the Movement of Homeless Workers (MTST) and the Popular Movements Central (CMP), among others -, organized and structured in blocks - such as the Fearless People Front or the Brazil Popular Front -, called a general strike on April 28. It was an atypical moment of unity of the different unions and popular forces. It is to be noted, for example, that Union Force, despite its involvement in Lula's government, nevertheless supported Rousseff's impeachment.

The general strike took place at a decisive moment. The previous Wednesday, congressmen had approved the draft labour reform bill submitted by the government, which must now go through the Senate proceedings. The reform of the pension system is also currently being considered and is up for congressional approval soon. Backed by intense social media activity, the protest had the initial support of some key unions such as the banking, metallurgical, oil and petrochemical sectors' workers, public and private school teachers, public transport and motorcycle workers, and the mail, civil construction, trade, healthcare and urban services unions. The government kept to its roadmap and ignored the movement that was consolidating. The mainstream media were careful to avoid any information spreading the call for strike, which was basically carried out through social media. The support of Catholic priests and bishops throughout the country was interpreted as a very positive development for the strike - a

change of attitude reinforced by Pope Francis's refusal to accept Temer's invitation to the festivities for the 300 anniversary of Our Lady Aparecida, patroness of Brazil. In addition to refusing to attend, the Pope added some critical comments on government measures which aggravate the situation of the poorest sectors of the population.

The strike on April 28 saw a stoppage of activities throughout the country, followed by marches, rallies, road blocks and demonstrations. Provincial governments allied with Temer gave a green light to repression, and Rio de Janeiro's was a case in point: police prevented demonstrators from rallying in the Cinelandia quarter of the town using tear gas and beating up demonstrators. In Goiás, a young student who was battered by a policeman is currently in a coma. In São Paulo, three MTST leaders were arrested and are now in prison, charged with criminal arson and incitement to violence. In their statements, government officials disqualified and criminalized the protest: for the Minister of Agriculture, the strike was "inconsequential"; for Temer, it was only "small groups blocking streets and terminals", driven by their rejection of the "modernization of national laws". As for the media, they tried at first to ignore what was happening, but eventually found it impossible to cover up the facts and took the option of reporting confrontation and material destruction in the streets.

The organizers say that some 35 million workers supported the strike, which makes it one of the biggest general strikes in the country's history. Their action continued with the demonstrations on May 1st, putting pressure on deputies and senators who are to vote for or against the labour and pension reform bills, and with the preparation of a great unified march in Brasilia - on a date yet to be defined. For the forces opposing the conservative onslaught, April 28 is already beginning to be considered a historic day in which the course of the country turned in favour of the resistance.

[Open Democracy](#)

Trump In Power: The First 100 Days

14 May 2017, by **Dan La Botz**

As Trump took office, the majority of Americans were anxious, worried.

Trump's inaugural address did nothing to put their minds at ease. Many were shocked and frightened by his short, strident speech with its allusion to "American carnage" and its dystopian visions of an American populated by "mothers and children trapped in poverty in our inner cities; rusted out factories scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our nation; an education system flush with cash, but which leaves our young and beautiful students deprived of all knowledge; and the crime and the gangs and the drugs that have stolen too many lives and robbed our country of so much unrealized potential." [9] His call to put "America First," using the slogan of the rightwing movement of the early 1940s of which the anti-Semitic aviator Charles Lindbergh had been a spokesman, alarmed many. As former President George W. Bush commented, "That was some weird shit." [10]

Trump was popular only among his base. He took office with the worst public approval rating of any president in the history of polling. Only 44 percent of Americans approved Trump during his first month in office compared to 51 percent approval of President Ronald Reagan and for George W.H. Bush, 57 percent for George W. Bush, 58 percent for Bill Clinton, 59 percent for Richard Nixon, 66 percent for Jimmy Carter, 68 percent for Dwight D. Eisenhower, 72 percent for John F. Kennedy, and an astounding 76 percent for Barack Obama. [11]

Trump's abysmal approval rating was not so surprising when one considers that Trump had won only 19.5 percent of votes from all possible voters, with Hillary Clinton winning 19.8 percent, other candidates 2.2 percent, some 29.9 percent not voting, and 28.6 percent ineligible to vote (since they

either had not registered or were felons who had lost their voting rights). [12] Trump was so unpopular that in his first 12 days in office that some 12,000 Twitter messages were recorded that contained the words "assassinate Trump," presumably either as a speculation, suggestion, or hope. [13] Nevertheless, no matter how unpopular he might be "53 percent disapproved" Trump swore the oath and moved into the White House. Many Americans were apprehensive.

The great fear in the minds of many liberals and people on the left was that Trump would install an authoritarian, reactionary government, or that his administration might provide a springboard to actual fascism. Equally, or perhaps even more worrisome, was the fact that many of the Americans who had voted for Trump did not seem to share these concerns. Among many Americans of all political persuasions was the question of what could be expected from the president who had been such a demagogue, so vitriolic, so prone to encourage violence, so impetuous, and so unpredictable.

Psychologists speculated on his possible mental problems. The most common diagnosis was narcissism, but there were various others as well. Psychologist Dan P. McAdams wrote *The Atlantic* magazine that,

Donald Trump's basic personality traits suggest a presidency that could be highly combustible. One possible yield is an energetic, activist president who has a less than cordial relationship with the truth. He could be a daring and ruthlessly aggressive decision maker who desperately desires to create the strongest, tallest, shiniest, and most awesome result—and who never thinks twice about the collateral damage he will leave behind. Tough. Bellicose. Threatening. Explosive. [14]

A frightening analysis. John Gartner, another psychologist with twenty years experience at Johns Hopkins University, went further circulating a petition signed by 25,000 that read:

We, the undersigned mental health professionals believe in our professional judgment that Donald Trump manifests a serious mental illness that renders him psychologically incapable of competently discharging the duties of President of the United States. And we respectfully request he be removed from office, according to article 3 of the 25th amendment to the Constitution, which states that the president will be replaced if he is "unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office." [15]

Others suggested that Trump had had a brain tumor, a stroke, or was in the early stages of dementia or of Alzheimer's, a heredity disease from which his father had suffered. Whatever the merits of these various analyses and speculations, they demonstrate the great public misgivings with regard to the new president.

There was also a proliferation of articles comparing Trump and his followers to Adolf Hitler and the rise of the Nazis. Intellectuals, the only Americans besides immigrants and military people who know much about other countries, compared Trump to Viktor Orban and the Jobbik Movement for a Better Hungary or to Marie Le Pen and the National Front in France. But most Americans, more familiar with Hitler, wondered if Trump might not prove to be a similar authoritarian figure. Readers ransacked libraries and bookstores for histories of Hitler and the Nazis and Facebook pages were filled with discussions of Trump and fascism. Others turned to reading dark, futuristic novels like George Orwell's 1984 and Aldous Huxley's Brave New

World, or to American novels about the rise of fascism in the United States, such as Sinclair Lewis' *It Can't Happen Here* or Philip Roth's *Plot Against America*, all of which surged in sales in bookstores and on Amazon.

Trump might be crazy and reactionary, but he was also shrewd. On his fourth day in office, Trump met with building trades union leaders who gushed over the new president's plans for vast infrastructure projects: highways, bridges, and, of course, the border wall. Sean McGarvey, president of the North America's Building Trades Unions, sounded like Trump himself as he called it "an incredible meeting," the "best he had ever had in Washington." "We have a common bond with the president," said Garvey. "We come from the same industry. He understands the value of driving development, moving people to the middle class." [16] Trump would also woo the president of the historically liberal United Auto Workers, though the public employee and service workers unions consistently opposed him. Trump was appealing to the Democrats' historic labor base, and finding some allies there.

The Resistance Begins

But many moved into active opposition. The shock of Donald Trump's election to the presidency in November 2016 detonated the eruption of a new social and political movement that named itself "The Resistance." Trump's Islamophobic, racist, and misogynistic campaign and the rightwing, authoritarian populist politics that characterized his first days in office set in motion millions of Americans who raised the cry "Not my president!" Concerned about Trump's cabinet of billionaires and generals, angered by his plans to end the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), disconcerted by his admiration for the dictator Vladimir Putin, shocked by his offhand insults directed at foreign leaders and governments, and appalled by the Muslim ban, everywhere in America by the tens of thousands people began marching and demonstrating as they have not for

two generations.

On January 21, the day after his inauguration, more than 500,000 rallied for the Women's March in Washington, D.C. to repudiate Trump's presidency, his vulgar and misogynistic language and behavior, and his anti-woman policies. While Washington, D.C. was the main march, there were some 700 sister marches—some of hundreds of thousands and many of tens of thousands—in cities and towns across the United States. Altogether, an estimated four million marched in what was the largest national protest demonstration in the nation's history. [17] The women's protest reawakened a dormant women's movement.

When at end of his first week in office, late in the afternoon of January 27 Donald Trump issued an executive order on immigrants and refugees, popularly known by his own term as the "Muslim ban." Thousands from New York City to Seattle went on January 28 to the nation's major airports to protest the executive order. The demonstrations, initiated by immigrant rights groups through social media, took place not only at major airports, such as John F. Kennedy Airport in New York—where it grew to several thousand—and Los Angeles, but also in smaller cities like Portland OR. Tens of thousands joined the anti-Muslim ban protests on January 28 and 29. A resistance surged up in the streets across the country.

Trump's first several weeks in office did little to allay the public's fears. He continued to send out late-night tweets attacking his political opponents, sometimes antagonizing foreign leaders, and frequently making wild, unsubstantiated claims. At the same time he began his political career with bold strokes.

A Cabinet of Billionaires and Generals

Donald Trump had run for president on a nativist, nationalist economic

platform, promising to "Make America Great Again" by both encouraging job production and defending those jobs against both foreign capital and foreign workers. Trump promised to rebuild the national infrastructure and to pressure companies to keep jobs in or to return industrial jobs to the United States. He pledged to protect those jobs from Mexicans and other "illegal immigrants" as well as to protect the United States from economic competition from China and from Islamic terrorism. While vowing to protect Social Security and Medicare, he promised to repeal and replace the vilified "Obamacare" with a "bigger, better" healthcare plan. Finally, Trump swore to end America's foreign wars and the U.S. policy of regime change in foreign countries, concentrating on putting "America First." It was this nationalist economic platform that in a few key states had won Trump just enough voters to carry the Electoral College vote and win the election.

In order to carry out his program, Trump had promised to "drain the swamp in Washington," that is, to eliminate the corruption that resulted from corporate lobbyists and legislators who colluded to put their private interests ahead of those of the American people. During his campaign, Trump railed against Wall Street bankers, often singling out Goldman Sachs, a financial firm close to the Clintons. He vowed to limit congressional terms in office, to forbid former legislators from becoming lobbyists for five years, and to ban foreign lobbyists. [18] With the swamp drained, Trump claimed, his nationalist program would make America great again. As Trump took office in January of 2017, the people wondered: Who would he chose for his leadership team? How would he govern? Would he fulfill his promises? The first clue was the cabinet.

Because he was a maverick and not a politician—the very "outsider" identity that propelled him into office—he had none of the usual political infrastructure of most incoming presidents: no savvy political advisors, no circles of party loyalists, no legislative allies, no strong ties to the military leadership, no trusted friends in the media. This lack of

political connections forced him to depend on family and friends like his daughter Ivanka, her husband Jared Kushner, and his recently acquired buddy the radical alt-right journalist Steve Bannon. With no reliable consigliere and no political entourage, he had to turn to the Republican Party and the Establishment for assistance in choosing his cabinet. They were more than happy to do so.

As Grover Norquist, a conservative leader of Americans for Tax Reform, a group that opposed virtually all taxes, had commented back in 2012:

All we have to do is replace Obama. ... We are not auditioning for fearless leader. We don't need a president to tell us in what direction to go. We know what direction to go. We want the Ryan budget. ... We just need a president to sign this stuff. We don't need someone to think it up or design it. The leadership now for the modern conservative movement for the next 20 years will be coming out of the House and the Senate. [19]

Now in 2017 the Republicans had found that man, whose fingers, however short, were long enough to hold a pen. The populist Trump was being rapidly coopted by the Establishment he had promised to overthrow, but to whom he had upon his election given the keys to the kingdom.

Trump had vowed to end the corruption in Washington, but from his first days as president making his initial cabinet appointments, nearly all easily approved by the Republican majority in Congress, it became clear that, on the contrary, he was repopulating the Washington sloughs with new swamp monsters. Many of Trump's cabinet members were Wall Street bankers and several were billionaires—the cabinet's total worth was estimated at \$14 billion—and several appointees were generals, leading his critics to comment that his government looked more like a military junta than a civilian government.

As in all countries, the four key cabinet positions in the United States are Treasury, State, Defense, and Attorney General, and for three of

those four posts, Trump chose individuals from the Establishment who represented continuity with past policy, while for one he chose a rightwing racist who represented a throwback to the country's bigoted past who could be counted on to restrict the voting rights of the black and the poor. For lesser positions, he chose wealthy conservatives, big contributors to the Republican Party and to his own campaign, who were enemies of the welfare state and advocates of the free market.

Though he had as a candidate lashed out against Wall Street and in particular against Goldman Sachs, as president he appointed a slew of Goldman Sachs associates to positions high and low in his cabinet and among his advisors. As Matt Taibbi had written about Goldman Sachs, "...it's everywhere. The world's most powerful investment bank is a great vampire squid wrapped around the face of humanity, relentlessly jamming its blood funnel into anything that smells like money." [20] Trump placed the great vampire squid at the very pinnacle of his administration, allowing its tentacles to grab hold of the country.

Sachs men were legion. Trump chose Steven Mnuchin, a 17-year veteran of Goldman Sachs, to be his Treasury Secretary, one of the top positions. Stephen Bannon, also a former Goldman Sachs banker, was picked by Trump to be his Chief Strategist, a new title. The sitting President of Goldman Sachs, Gary Cohn, was chosen by Trump to be Director of the National Economic Council, the body that provides the president guidance on economic issues. And Trump selected a Goldman Sachs outside lawyer, Jay Clayton of Sullivan & Cromwell, to be the Chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, the government agency that polices Wall Street. Clayton's wife is also a Vice President at Goldman Sachs. And there were several other Goldman Sachs bankers working in high government positions as well. [21] Placing Goldman Sachs at the center of the administration, just as former president Bill Clinton and Barack Obama had done, showed that on the most fundamental level—the relationship of the financiers of the

capitalist class to the government—things remained unchanged. [22] The choice of Mattis suggested continuity with the foreign policy of the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations. The first three key cabinet positions—Treasury, State, and Defense—all represented choices from the Establishment. For the fourth key position, Attorney General, Trump did break with the policies of the fifty years since the civil rights movement by choosing the ultra-conservative, atavistic nativist and racist Jeff Sessions, who is also an opponent of abortion, of LGBT rights and hate crimes laws. [23]

To be Secretary of Commerce, a particularly important top-level position given his campaign promises on foreign trade, Trump appointed Wilbur Ross, a banker and "vulture" investor worth \$2.5 billion who was known as the "king of bankruptcies." Ross specialized in downsizing industrial firms, often reducing the number of employees by half and letting others worry about workers' pensions, while making a profit for himself and other investors. Ross, who had conducted business in dozens of countries over the years, had at times been an advocate of free trade, though now he would have to make good on Trump's promises to put America first and create jobs at home. [24]

National security positions—external and internal—are also, of course, extremely important and throughout American history often headed by civilians. But, unlike his predecessors, Trump filled them all with military men. As his National Security Advisor, Trump first picked retired Lieutenant General Michael T. Flynn, an erratic, belligerent, Islamophobe, but when it became clear that Flynn had lied to Vice-President Mike Pence about contacts with Russian government officials, he was forced to resign after only weeks in office. To replace Flynn, Trump then chose another general Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, a military strategist best known for his role in the First Gulf War. To head Homeland Security, Trump selected yet another military veteran, John F. Kelley, a retired four-star Marine general who had commanded the Multinational Force-West in Iraq. To head the CIA, Trump picked a civilian, a Republican

politician, but one with military credentials, Mike Pompeo, a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1986 who had served in the First Gulf War. Taken together, Trump's appointment of so much brass suggested a significant militarization of civilian government.

Trump's chief strategist Steve Bannon suggested that several other cabinet members had been chosen for their positions in order to carry out the "deconstruction of the administrative state," that is, to destroy the very regulatory or social service agencies they were picked to lead. [25] Rich Perry, a former Republican governor of Texas, America's largest oil producers, was chosen to head the Department of Energy, an agency that he had, in a previous presidential campaign, promised to eliminate altogether. Perry had no academic credentials and little experience that would prepare him for managing 17 national laboratories, overseeing the country's nuclear stockpile, detoxifying Cold War era weapons sites, and furthering nuclear non-proliferation. To head the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Trump chose Scott Pruitt, a Republican politician from Oklahoma, also a big oil state, a man who had repeatedly sued the EPA in an attempt to limit and weaken the agency. The appointments of Perry and Pruitt would certainly be good for the oil and coal companies and bad for any attempt at dealing with the environmental crisis.

Trump's cabinet appointments to social welfare agencies were equally horrendous. As Secretary of Urban Development, Trump appointed the archconservative African American Dr. Ben Carson, a man with no experience in urban and housing issues and an opponent of the agency's anti-discrimination laws. Perhaps Trump's most outrageous appointment among these regulatory and social service agencies was his choice to head the Department of Education, the billionaire Betsy DeVos, a former member of the Republican National Committee, and a well known enemy of public education and the teachers unions. [26] For Secretary of Labor, Trump initially chose Andrew Pudzer, the CEO of CKE Restaurants, the

parent company of Hardee's and Carl's Jr., an opponent of labor laws and the minimum wage who disparaged the workers at his own company. Pudzer was forced to withdraw his nomination after it was revealed that for several years he had employed an undocumented worker, as well as revelations that his ex-wife had accused him of abusing her. To replace him Trump chose a Latino, Alexander Acosta, a conservative Republican who had served on the National Labor Relations Board and who had worked for the George W. Bush administration as a Justice Department U.S. Attorney.

To head the Office of Management and Budget, Trump picked Mick Mulvaney, a man who had failed to pay over \$15,500 in taxes on his family nanny. He would prove to be a particularly reactionary and mean spirited individual. Defending Trump's proposed budget cuts in after school food programs "a significant part of the diet of many millions of poor children" he said there was no evidence that children who received the food actually performed better in school.

Nepotism in Trump's leadership team imparts a quasi-monarchical character to his administration. Trump appointed his 36-year old son-in-law, Jared Kushner, a real estate mogul with no previous experience in politics or government, to be a senior White House advisor and charged him with a variety of tasks: to manage the Office of American Innovation, to act as a special envoy to negotiate peace in the Middle East, and to serve as the primary contact for diplomats of more than two dozen countries. [27] Trump's daughter and Kushner's wife Ivanka Trump also became a full-time, unpaid White House advisor to her father. [28] Raising his children to those positions also laid the basis for a future Trump political dynasty.

Trump's cabinet of billionaires and generals, the filthy rich and the far right, family and friends is without doubt one of the most reactionary in modern American history. One could foresee corruption scandals that would rival those of the President U.S. Grant's administration or the Warren Harding presidency. But the

appointment that most disturbed and frightened many Americans was Trump's choice of his former campaign manager Steve Bannon to be his Chief Strategist. Bannon, an ex-U.S. Navy officer and former Goldman Sachs banker, was a founder of Breitbart News, a radical alt-right publication identified with European far right organizations and American white power groups. Breitbart not only took white nationalist and nativist positions, it also promoted white supremacists such as Richard Spencer. On a daily basis it fabricated hysterically anti-Muslim, anti-LGBT, and misogynist news reports. [29] Some described Breitbart as crypto fascist. [30]

For a few weeks, Bannon was member of the National Security Council, a terrifying thought to many. The presence of Bannon in the White House and at the right hand of the president created enormous anxiety not only among leftists and liberals, but even among conservatives and in the Establishment. Yet as the Establishment took Trump in hand, things returned to a quite reactionary normal. Bannon was removed from the National Security Council and Congress thwarted Trump's populist program. [31] Trump's late night tweets and his several post-election campaign style rallies continued to offer up to his base his populist program, even as he accommodated to the Republican Establishment. Conservative and alt-right radio hosts and writers too began to suggest that Trump was selling out.

The Russian Imbrolio

During his campaign, Trump had shocked many Americans with his fulsome admiration and praise of the Russian dictator Vladimir Putin, well known for imprisoning or murdering his political opponents, for defying international law by seizing Crimea from Ukraine and militarily intervening in eastern Ukraine. Trump even suggested that the United States and Russia might overcome their differences and perhaps become allies.

Then too there was the suspicion, later

confirmed by U.S. security agencies, that the Russian government had intervened in the American elections. Many of Trump's associates, such as his former campaign chairman Paul Manafort, had a long history of relations with Russia and meetings with top-level Russian officials. [32] Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, had also a meeting with banker Sergey N. Gorkov, a close associate of Putin. Roger J. Stone Jr., a veteran Republican operative had contact with Guccifer 2.0, an online figure believed to be involved with Russian intelligence. And Carter Page, who had been a foreign policy adviser to the Trump campaign, had been involved in wide-ranging business deals in Russia. [33] Trump's National Security Advisor Michael T. Flynn had conversations with Russian officials and then lied about them, leading to an investigation into his sharing of classified information and acceptance of payment from the Russians. [34] Naturally the question arose, had Trump's associates worked with Russia to intervene in the U.S. election? The U.S. Justice Department authorized an FBI investigation into contacts between the Trump team and Russia before the election. The Senate and the House also created committees to investigate the Trump-Russia connections.

Some Democrats were motivated by a desire to prove that Trump and the Republicans, working with the Russians, had stolen the election from Hillary Clinton, but members of both parties, and many ordinary Americans were concerned about what might be interpreted as treasonous behavior that jeopardized American sovereignty. In any case, the Russian imbroglio was not going away.

Trump's Strategy and Agenda

Since Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt's first term in 1933, a new president's "first hundred days" have become an important measure of a new administration. And it was perhaps even more important for a political novice who had campaigned on a populist agenda. Taking office on January 20, Trump's first hundred

days would be completed on April 29, and he moved quickly to take action, pursuing a strategy aimed at fulfilling campaign promises to his overwhelmingly white voter base that he would keep out the Mexicans who threatened their jobs and stop the Muslims who threatened their lives. So, just five days after his inauguration, Trump issued an order to begin immediately the construction of a wall on the Mexican border and to more aggressively find and deport undocumented immigrants, by expanding the definition of criminal immigrants. [35] Just two days later, Trump issued an order that "in the midst of the mass migration of Syrian war refugees" temporarily banned immigration from seven Muslim countries and suspended the immigration of refugees for 120 days. His order also imposed a religious test, allowing Christian refugees from Muslim countries to enter the United States.

Trump's "Muslim ban," as he had originally called it and as it became popularly known, led to the massive protests at airports across the country. The U.S. Federal Appeals Court overturned the ban. As *The New York Times* reported, "The three-judge panel, suggesting that the ban did not advance national security, said the administration had shown "no evidence" that anyone from the seven nations "Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen" had committed terrorist acts in the United States." [36] Trump's first major initiative, poorly planned and executed failed completely. Trump went on to issue a second executive order, but the courts overturned it too.

Trump's second major initiative was an attempt to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, popularly known as Obamacare, a government coordinated and subsidized private insurance and health care program. Paul D. Ryan, the Republican speaker of the House began the push to repeal even before Trump's inauguration and attempted to pass the repeal in March, but he could not get a majority in the House because of desertions of conservatives on the right, who wanted a more thorough-going destruction of Obamacare, and defections of moderates who had

come under pressure from their constituents who were concerned about losing their health insurance. Town hall protests had mobilized large numbers and put a lot of pressure on moderate Republican legislators, several of whom refused to vote for repeal. [37] The failure to repeal Obamacare was an even greater defeat for Trump and the Republican Party. Trump made a second attempt at a health care bill, hoping to pass it during his first 100 days, but it too ran into opposition, so at the present it remains stalled in Congress. [38]

The one victory that Trump enjoyed in his first few months in office came with the Senate's confirmation of his nominee to the Supreme Court, Neil Gorsuch, an extremely conservative judge who could be expected to vote to limit gay rights, to uphold restrictions on abortion, to invalidate affirmative action programs, and to reduce the power of labor unions. [39] Gorsuch was groomed for the position by Leonard Leo, the head of the very conservative Federal Society which has played an inordinate role in shaping the Supreme Court and played the leading role in choosing three of its current justices. [40] Evasive about his views during the Senate hearings, Gorsuch was confirmed on a near party-line vote in the Senate with Republicans being joined by three Democrats for a vote of 54 to 45.

The Budget and the Tax Plan

The other major Trump initiative in the first 100 days was a proposed budget that would have to pass Congress as a continuing resolution by April 28. Trump's budget proposal for the fiscal year, would total over \$4 trillion, called for large increases for Defense (up 10 percent), for Homeland Security (up 7 percent), and for Veterans Affairs (up 6 percent) while at the same time cutting the Environmental Protection Agency (down 31 percent), the Agriculture and Labor departments (both down 21 percent), Justice (down 20 percent) "through cuts to crime victims, for example, though the FBI will see an increase" Health and

Human Services (down 16 percent), and Education (down 14 percent). [41] As *The Washington Post* observed:

If you're a poor person in America, President Trump's budget proposal is not for you. Trump has unveiled a budget that would slash or abolish programs that have provided low-income Americans with help on virtually all fronts, including affordable housing, banking, weatherizing homes, job training, paying home heating oil bills, and obtaining legal counsel in civil matters. [42]

The budget also eliminates nineteen small programs whose cost is only \$500 million but many of which are particularly disliked by conservatives, among them: Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the Legal Services Corporation, AmeriCorps and the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities. [43] At the moment Trump's budget seems headed for problems in Congress from both Democrats and the Republican Freedom Caucus, raising the possibility of yet another government funding crisis and possibly a government shutdown.

Trump's proposed tax plan also works to further enrich the wealthiest. Proposed in April, it would, according to *The New York Times*, "amount to a multitrillion-dollar shift from federal coffers to America's richest families and their heirs." [44] The plan would repeal the state tax, cut corporate taxes from 35 to 15 percent, and end a surtax that funds the Affordable Care Act. Like presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush before him, Trump argues that tax cuts will lead to economic expansion that will recoup lost taxes, so that there will be no increase in the deficit. Voodoo economics all over again, and virtually no one believes this. The budget sits in Congress at the moment.

Trump Reverses Himself on Nearly Everything

Candidate Trump had told his followers that he rejected the

American foreign policy of military intervention and attempts at regime change, and he specifically promised that he would not become involved in Syria. But when he received news of a chemical weapons attack that killed 72, men, women, children, and infants, as well as sickening dozens of others, Trump ordered a missile attack on the airbase that had supposedly carried out the chemical attack. According to the Pentagon, 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles had been fired at Al Shayrat airfield in Syria, though there was no report on damage or casualties. Three other U.S. airstrikes in Syria in April, which had received less media attention, reportedly killed dozens of civilians.

Democrats, while criticizing the process, "either condoned or did not take issue with the military action":

[Charles] Schumer, the Senate Minority Leader, said on Thursday night that "making sure Assad knows that when he commits such despicable atrocities he will pay a price is the right thing to do," while House Minority Leader [Nancy] Pelosi said the strike appeared "to be a proportional response" to the chemical weapons attack. Senator Elizabeth Warren said the "Syrian regime must be held accountable," while Senator Mark Warner said that Assad "could not go unpunished," and Senator Dick Durbin called it a "measured response." [45]

Democratic Party leaders supported Trump's airstrike, though polls showed that 61 percent of Democrats disapproved of America's latest belligerent act. [46]

The attack on Syria's airbase in reprisal for the chemical attack and the aftermath constituted a series of dramatic shifts in Trump's foreign policy positions. Previously Trump had seen Syria as a de facto ally in the struggle against the Islamic State (ISIS), but not only had Trump ordered an airstrike in Syria, but a few days later his Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, stated that the Assad era is "coming to an end." [47] Second, Trump would no longer be a friend or Russia, which had condemned the U.S. airstrike as a violation of international law. Russia also denied that Syria had

been responsible for the chemical attack and suggested that it had been carried out by the regime's opponents. Russia also rescinded the agreement to coordinate air operations in Syria to avoid potential U.S.-Russian conflict there. Third, Trump, who had previously condemned the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as obsolete, now hailed it as bulwark in the defense of Europe and the United States and definitely, "not obsolete." [48]

Trump reversed himself on a host of other issues. After meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, he announced, breaking a campaign promise, that he would not label China a currency manipulator. He also declared that the Export-Import Bank, which he had previously characterized as unnecessary, was now "a very good thing." New York Times reporter Alan Rappeport wrote that, "The shifts confounded many of Mr. Trump's supporters and suggested that the moderate financiers he brought from Wall Street are eclipsing the White House populist wing led by Stephen K. Bannon, the political strategist who is increasingly being sidelined by the president." [49] Trump the populist had knuckled under to the Wall Street and Washington establishments.

Trump's aggressive language with regard to Korea, most recently stating that a "major, major conflict" with "socialist" North Korea is possible, represents a continuation of longstanding U.S. hostility to North Korea because of its production of nuclear weapons and development of a long range missile to deliver them to targets as far away as America. President George W. Bush had famously called North Korea, together with Iraq and Iran, the "axis of evil" and Obama had warned president-elect Trump that Korea was the number one national security priority. While Trump has adopted a more threatening attitude, accompanied by dispatching naval forces to the region, his policy is not new.

What sort of

administration is this?

Trump's administration has proven to be neither the populist administration that his supporters had hoped for nor the fascist regime that many liberals and leftists feared—which is not to say that we should be unworried about his government's clear authoritarian tendencies. What seems to have happened, at least in the first 100 days, is that lacking experience and overwhelmed by events, he has been coopted by the Establishment. Guided by these more moderate, but still quite conservative Republicans, Trump has adopted a foreign policy more in line with those of previous administrations, the Bushes, Clinton, and Obama. If more assertive, as demonstrated by the strike on the Syrian airbase and the dropping of the jumbo bomb on an ISIS site in Afghanistan, his policies are based on the same underlying view of America's role as the "indispensable nation," as Bill Clinton's Secretary of State had put it.

Similarly Trump's domestic policy, despite his populist appeal, also continues the harder Republican version of the austerity budgets of both political parties over the last few decades. We do not face at the moment an iron fist, though we can expect the state's gloved hand to push down continuously on those below. Most to be feared is Attorney General Jeff Sessions' combination of law and order and an attack on the voting rights of the Black and the poor as Trump's secretaries of regulatory and social welfare departments oversee their withering away.

The Resistance Grows

People recognize the dangerousness of the Trump administration. The Resistance that had begun the day after Trump's inauguration continued throughout the first hundred days as various groups engaged in street protests or in putting political pressure on their representatives.

***Day without an Immigrant -** On

February 16, thousands of immigrants in cities across the country took the day off work to protest President Trump's policies on immigration and refugees. Some employers, either because they are immigrants themselves or because they are sympathetic to the immigrant cause, shut their businesses so that their workers could participate. In other cases immigrant workers simply didn't show up for work in what was in effect an immigrant worker strike, and at least 100 workers in different cities were fired for their participation. In some cities, such as Milwaukee, the Day without Immigrants involved mass demonstrations of thousands of immigrants and their supporters who marched to protest Trump's policies.

***Not My President Day -** Less than a week later, thousands of protestors in New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Los Angeles, and some two dozen other cities marched in opposition to President Donald Trump and his policies on what is usually called "President's Day" (Monday, February 20), though this year this occasion was marked by many as Not-My-President Day. On what was in the Midwest and the East a beautiful spring-like day—thanks to climate change and global warming—protestors marched to protest Trump's environmental and immigration policies and just about everything else that the new president stands for.

***Town Hall Protests -** Thousands of people also showed up at town hall meetings across the United States later in February to challenge Republican congressional representatives and senators. Angry voters rose to demand that the health care plan's fundamental features be preserved, that immigrants' rights be respected, and that the Environmental Protection Agency be funded. Nothing like this has taken place at local town hall gatherings since the rightwing Tea Party's demonstrations in 2009 and 2010, protests that provided the model for the current left-of-center protests.

Many of the protests were coordinated through an anti-Trump movement linked to the Democratic Party called "Indivisible" that claims 7,000 affiliated groups throughout the

country. The group takes its name from the recently published handbook titled: "Indivisible: A Practical Guide for Resisting the Trump Agenda" written by former congressional staffers, Leah Greenberg and Angel Padilla. In New York, the Working Families Party, which supports progressive Democratic Party candidates, has also been involved in organizing protests. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has also provided resources.

While they overlapped politically with earlier protests such as the Women's March, the immigrant rights protests at the airports, and the Day with Immigrants demonstrations, the town hall demonstrations represented a different cut of the population. Senior citizens and the middle aged were often present in large numbers, though those in their twenties and thirties who have formed the majority of the street demonstrations also turned out in significant numbers in many locations. Led largely by Democratic Party-related organizations, the militant town hall protests often had more moderate politics than the crowds in the streets over the past month. Still one saw in the town halls signs for "Single-Payer Health Care" and "No Muslim Ban" and in some cities heard from the floor not only anti-corporate speeches, but occasionally anti-capitalist ones as well. In February, with the emphasis on Town Hall meetings, the Democratic Party appeared to be taking leadership of the Resistance, the name given to all forms of opposition to Trump.

***Anti-War Protests -** After Trump bombed Syria, there were a number of anti-war protests in major cities around the country, but the protestors numbered only in the hundreds, and the organizers from groups like ANSWER were supporters of Assad, Russia and Iran. Quite unlike the mass protests of women, immigrants, and the town hall rallies, the anti-war demonstrations with their sectarian leadership lacked a genuinely popular character. The anti-war movement that was needed, one that could oppose U.S. imperialism, but also Putin, Hezbollah and Assad, had yet to appear.

***March for Science** - Tens of thousands, many of them scientists, joined the March for Science on Earth Day, April 22, in cities across the United States and around the world. There were some 400 marches in the US with crowds estimated at 20,000 in New York and Los Angeles, some 15,000 gathered on the Washington Mall, and 10,000 in several cities. Other marches took place in hundreds of other cities around the world from London to Tokyo.

The march was largely motivated by President Donald Trump's proposed budget that would cut funding for many science programs, including the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which is being cut by 31 percent. Marchers in Washington carried signs reading, "Save the EPA," and "Save the NIH" The NIH is the National Institutes of Health, which is also being cut by 18.3% or \$5.8 billion. Other marchers in various cities carried signs reading, "There Is No Planet B," and "Make Science Great Again" among many others.

The march was sponsored by a variety of scientific organizations among them the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Geophysical Union, the American Chemical Society, and the Paleontology Society. Public health physicians, nurses, and other health workers participated in significant

numbers. Many of the scientists marched with their families in spring rains on the East Coast.

Originally organized through the social media site Reddit and then through a Facebook event site, within a week the supporters grew from 200 to 300,000. Popular educator Bill Nye "the science guy," Mona Hanna-Attisha, pediatrician and the key whistleblower in the Flint Water Crisis, and Lydia Villa-Komaroff, a cellular biologist and among the first Mexican-American women in the United States to receive a doctorate in the sciences served as the public faces of the March.

While not so central to the leadership of the March for Science as they have been in other protests, in several cities Democratic Party politicians spoke at the rallies. In Los Angeles, Democratic Congressman Brad Sherman told marchers there, "Not since Galileo was condemned by the Inquisition have science-deniers had such powerful friends."

In San Francisco, however, no politicians were permitted to speak. "Science is nonpartisan. That's the reason that we respect it, because it aims to reduce bias. That's why we have the scientific method. We felt very strongly that having politicians involved would skew that in some way," Caroline Weinberg, a public

health researcher and co-organizer of the march, said at the National Press Club earlier this month.

The Need for a Politically Independent Movement

While opposition to the Trump administration has spread throughout the society and now involves many social groups, the movement does not have a clear and independent political position. The Democratic Party, still thoroughly corporate, neoliberal, and therefore "unreliable" as demonstrated for example in its failure to support single-payer health care ("Medicare for all") "has taken the lead in the organization of much of the Resistance, and especially in its more political expressions. If the Resistance is to be successful not only in stopping Trump and the Republican Party, but also in fighting the corporate Democrats, and more important the capitalist system, we will need to build a movement that creates its own political identity, even if we have no political party of our own.

April 30, 2017

Source: [New Politics](#).

A state of crisis in North-East Asia

12 May 2017, by Pierre Rousset

A peace never signed

The Korean War (1950-53) dates back to 65 years ago - but no peace treaty was signed, only an armistice. The peninsula is still officially in a state of war - a situation that is not simply formal. In particular, the United States hopes to win a victory that

escaped it in the last century.

Peninsulas often occupy a disputed geostrategic position and that is definitely the case here. Japanese influence was asserted at the end of the nineteenth century, at the expense of China, militarily defeated by the first Asian imperialism. In 1910, the country was simply annexed by Tokyo. It regained its independence only in 1945 with the capitulation of Japan.

Moscow and Washington then decided to disarm the Japanese army themselves, creating two zones of occupation, north and south of the 38th parallel.

In the south, an influential committee made up of communists and left nationalists proclaimed the creation of a People's Republic, opposing the Provisional Government of Syngman Rhee that the United States

supported. This struggle was endogenous; it was "exported" neither by Moscow nor by Beijing nor by Kim Il Sung. Washington retaliated by establishing a military regime in Seoul. The US Army suppressed the national independence committees, relying on the Japanese police, Japanese officials and their Korean collaborators. In 1948, Syngman Rhee was elected President of the Republic of Korea (South Korea). Communist guerrillas resisted the establishment of his dictatorial power. The People's Republic was in its turn proclaimed in North Korea - with clandestine elections organized in the South.

It was in this context of civil war in the South that the Korean conflict broke out in 1950. It quickly took on an international dimension. Under the flag of the United Nations, the United States sent a powerful expeditionary force. The army of the North was driven back to the edge of the Chinese border. Beijing (which wanted to devote itself to the reconstruction of its own country) entered the lists, pushing back the US forces to the 38th parallel. The front stabilized and, in 1953, a demilitarized zone four kilometres wide was constituted between the two states - becoming in fact one of the richest natural reserves on the planet.

What Philippe Pons calls the Korean "communist nebula" consisted of four components: the internal resistance, exiles in the Soviet Union, the Ya'nan group having rallied to the Chinese Communist Party and a unit of partisans operating in China without having joined the CCP. Kim Il Sung led this unit. He only returned to North Korea a month after the Russian army. Moscow favoured his rise to the head of the new regime, although his faction was very much in a minority to the leadership of the Korean Communist Party. He did not, however, become Moscow's liegeman. During the 1950s and 1960s, he consolidated his power through a series of purges. The first to be sacrificed were the communists of the interior, eliminated on the occasion of rigged trials. The "pro-Soviets" and "pro-Chinese" later suffered a similar fate. The regime became despotic, then dynastic.

A heavily-armed region

Despite the Sino-US rapprochement that began with the entry of the People's Republic of China into the UN Security Council (1971) and Nixon's trip to Beijing (1972), conditions were never ripe to put a definitive end to the state of war in the Korean Peninsula. The United States maintained the military forces that they had strengthened during the Vietnam War, which were particularly powerful in North-East Asia. China did not want to take the risk, in the event of Korea's reunification, of seeing US forces camping on its borders. No German-style solution, therefore, only a prolonged freezing of the situation.

Moreover, the North Korean regime did not collapse, as was probably expected by American leaders; this was in spite of internal social crises (famine in the second half of the 1990s, shortages...); the implosion of the USSR; the rallying of Beijing to capitalism and the development of its links with South Korea; the death of the Great leader (Kim Il Sung), then that of his son; international sanctions; the pressures exerted and the very concrete attacks carried out by Washington (electronic warfare)... As Philippe Pons notes, "if he had only been a Stalinist, he would not have survived", despite the recourse to terror. The besieged fortress mentality would have in particular enabled him to mobilize a nationalism/patriotism, ethnic rather than political, forged under the Japanese occupation and to build a "national narrative" linking the recent past to the resilience of a "guerrilla state".

The interest of this question lies in the fact that it makes it possible to understand why US policy has failed, the permanent threat reinforcing the ideological mechanisms of survival of the regime. Pyongyang has also learned a lesson from the present international situation: only possession of nuclear weapons effectively protects an "enemy" country from Western intervention.

The chain of events that followed the announcement of the North Korean

nuclear programme could probably have been stopped on the basis of the agreements negotiated by Washington in 1994 under the presidency of Bill Clinton; but these agreements were unilaterally broken by George Bush, who also placed North Korea in the "axis of evil". The Obama administration basically maintained the same posture. The large-scale US-South Korean joint aviation manoeuvres have as a theme a landing or infiltrations in the North. An entire electronic warfare system has been put in place to sabotage at a distance the North Korean programmes.

A window of opportunity has closed with the rise of Sino-American tensions in East Asia. The entire region is now on a war footing. In the South China Sea, Beijing has conquered the initiative. Seven artificial islands have been created, on which military installations, airport runways and missile bases have been built. The Chinese weapons programme is developing and a second aircraft carrier has just been launched, entirely built within the country (the hull of the first was purchased from Russia).

Under these conditions, the United States is all the more determined to maintain its control over maritime straits, thanks to the Seventh Fleet, as well as its military predominance in North-East Asia. It possesses a tremendous network of bases, in South Korea, Japan and Okinawa in particular, and of allied armies (South Korea and Japan).

The escalation continues. Washington has just installed a base of THAAD anti-missile missiles in South Korea, officially charged with destroying North Korean missiles. However, given their scope, THAAD missiles can operate over a large part of China. In this way, they neutralize China's nuclear deterrent. Consequently, China, in order to protect its deterrent, is planning the modernization and the deployment of its strategic submarines in the oceans.

Although supposed to have only self-defence forces, Japan already has the sixth-biggest military fleet in the world, including four helicopter carriers. The government and the

military-industrial complex are trying to get rid of the remaining political obstacles to complete rearmament - including nuclear rearmament - despite the explicitly pacifist Constitution and the strength of antimilitarist feeling in the population.

The North Korean programme, the US anti-missile shield in South Korea, the expansion and modernization of Chinese strike capability, the projects of the Japanese militarist right ... The infernal cycle of provocations and counter-provocations has relaunched the nuclear arms race in the Far East. All the regimes concerned are responsible for it and the question of who fired the first shot of the Korean War is no longer important in the face of such a disaster.

The will to power

The Donald Trump "factor" adds further uncertainty to a situation that is already very dangerous. He diverted a US aircraft carrier and its flotilla in order to position them off Korea; in the course of his declarations he blows militarist hot and diplomatic cold.

However, two elements are particularly disturbing. During the first hundred days of his presidency, Trump accumulated setbacks on the domestic level, countered by the judges, the states and the Congress, Republican as it is. He is confronted by a series of massive marches and mobilizations in defence of women, immigrants, the Earth, scientific research, against his fiscal programme... He is seeking to get things under control by invoking external threats, reversing his Russian and Syrian policy, affirming the unparalleled firepower of the United States, ordering spectacular strikes in Syria and in Afghanistan to show that the US can act without warning and without consulting its allies...

Moreover, Trump has formed a government of businessmen and generals. He has promised a massive weapons programme, but his funding may in turn be challenged by Congress. The general staff and the military-industrial complex are concerned. Continually invoking the North Korean danger is one way of

putting pressure on the parliamentarians.

The bombing carried out in Afghanistan made no sense in this theatre of operations. A network of underground Al Qaeda shelters has been destroyed, but this organization is only a minor component of the conflict. The real enemy is the Taliban, who were probably politically strengthened by the destructive violence of the attack. An international "signal", including towards China and North Korea, was certainly given as to US determination, but there is more. The "mother of bombs", the most powerful bomb in the world, had never been used. However, all weapons must be tested in a real situation.

This is why, in August 1945, Hiroshima and Nagasaki were victims of nuclear attacks: it was necessary to hurry to compare the effects of the A-bomb based on enriched uranium and the A-bomb through the plutonium route before the Japanese capitulation was officially announced - and so much the worse for the multitude of human guinea pigs, for a civilian population that was annihilated and irradiated in the nuclear holocaust.

Armaments must be produced - and therefore used. Such is the warmongering logic of the military-industrial complex.

Trump has reasons that diplomatic reason ignores. He knows nothing of the world (apart from business) and does not ask for the advice of the embassies or the departments of the administration concerned. His political action remains erratic; since his election, he has more than once sharply changed his orientation on the international level. He is a factor of instability and unpredictability, and the allies of the United States are aware of this, in Japan as well as in South Korea and Australia. US unilateralism worries them. They know that the White House can make decisions that have far-reaching consequences without even consulting them.

The peoples speak up

The reasons for hope, however, are not lacking. The South Korean population overthrew, after months of giant mobilizations, a corrupt presidency and a militarist party. It opts, for the most part, for a policy of negotiation rather than provocation towards the North. Symbolic actions have been taken, as by those forty feminist activists who crossed the demarcation line together. Demonstrations took place near Seongju, where the anti-missile shield THAAD is based, and clashed with the police. A coalition of movements also opposes the establishment of a naval base in the southern island of Jeju.

In Japan, civic resistance to the remilitarization of the country remains very deep, despite North Korean missiles landing in the sea off the coast of the archipelago - despite also the constant propaganda of the radical right. In Okinawa, opposition to US military bases does not falter.

Across the region, the idea is making its way that only the demilitarization of maritime space will make it possible to prevent war.

The stakes in the conflict in East Asia are very directly global. Anti-war movements should give their support to Asian resistance - in Europe, but more importantly, in the United States.

A reference book on North Korea

Editions Gallimard have published a book by Philippe Pons, *Corée du Nord. Un Etat guérilla en mutation* (2016, 710 pp, â, ~34.50). It is a particularly welcome initiative in that this country is not well known. The author, a journalist with *Le Monde*, has lived for decades in Japan and has travelled extensively on the Korean peninsula, on both sides of the demarcation line.

The purpose of this book, says Philippe Pons, is to "try to understand why North Korea is what it has become, by trying to unravel the mechanisms of its regime and to situate it in a historical context, in order to understand the socio-cultural anchorage, the dynamics and the social changes underway. This does not mean, it must be said, ignoring a dark reality..." In so doing, the author challenges many commonplaces. It is the work of a historian attached to the study of cultures (see his publications on Japan) and not just a journalist. Reading this book is warmly recommended to those who want to go beyond clichés.

Chronology

1894-1895: First Sino-Japanese War (victory of Japan).

1904-1905: Russo-Japanese War (victory of Japan).

1910: Annexation of Korea by Japan.

1931: Conquest of Manchuria by Japan.

1937-1945: Second Sino-Japanese War and Second World War.

1945: Liberation of Korea. Creation of two zones of occupation in the North (Russia) and the South (United States). Civil war in the South

1948: Proclamation of the Republic of Korea in the South (Syngman Rhee) and the North Korean People's Republic (Kim Il Sung).

1950-1953: Korean War.

1994: Death of Kim Il Sung. His son Kim Jong Il succeeds him.

1994-2001: Agreements to freeze the North Korean nuclear programme signed with the US administration of Bill Clinton.

2001: Election of George W. Bush in the United States. Unilateral breaking of agreements.

2006: First underground nuclear test

in North Korea.

2009-2017: Development of a network of military bases in the South China Sea by Beijing. In 2017, it becomes operational.

2009-2017: Barack Obama presidency in the United States

2009: North Korean nuclear test.

2011: Death of Kim Jong Il. His son Kim Jong Un succeeds him

2012-: Abe Shinzō, Japanese Prime Minister.

2013: Missile Crisis. North Korean nuclear test.

2016: Election of Donald Trump in the United States (taking office in January 2017). Dismissal of President Park Geun-hye in South Korea.

2017: North Korean missile launches. Installation of the THAAD anti-missile missile system in South Korea, where elections are scheduled for May. Continuation of the arms race in the region. State of crisis.

Regulation - Who Needs It?

11 May 2017, by Dianne Feeley

Trump sees regulations for higher fuel efficiency burdens auto manufacturers and drives up the cost for potential buyers. In Trump's vocabulary, regulations are ALL bad. (Of course Trump sees regulations around reproductive rights as good, but consistency isn't one of his characteristics.)

Trump talks as if regulations were designed by federal bureaucrats to give them greater power over corporations and consumers. That view turns the history of health and safety regulations upside down!

We have all heard of food contamination in preparation and packaging. Every year we learn of products that must be recalled

because they have resulted in deaths and injuries – whether we are talking about GM ignition switches or baby cribs.

But these are cases where the company did not meet regulations that had been established. Take away inspectors so regulations are not enforced, or reduce/wipe regulations off the books and we knowingly endanger ourselves. Why should companies be allowed to sell products that are unsafe at whatever cost?

Fuel Efficiency

Originally passed during the Middle East countries' oil embargo back in

1975, fuel efficiency legislation only later became a mechanism for decreasing human-caused CO2 emissions. Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) regulations are based on how far the vehicle travels on a gallon of fuel. Standards were not increased for 20 years; as oil prices declined automakers built bigger vehicles and doubled the average horsepower.

But California, concerned about air pollution, adopted a higher benchmark in 2002. The Environmental Protection Agency, in charge of the CAFE standards, granted the state, and more than a dozen others, waivers enforcing more stringent rules. But when California cited climate change

as the reason for a waiver during the George W. Bush administration, the request was denied. California's attorney general then sued.

The issue was settled when Barack Obama became president and negotiated to have the EPA adopt the California standard. In the first phase (2012-16) increased fuel efficiency, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists, saved Americans more than \$17 billion. Yet the UCS noted that each year, under the current CAFE standard, 53,000 people suffer early death from vehicle pollution. [50]

For its part, the EPA projected that by 2025 the higher standards would decrease oil consumption by 12 billion barrels, produce six billion fewer metric tons of greenhouse pollution and save consumers \$1.7 trillion. [51]

Additionally a 2012 study by the Blue-Green Alliance "an organization made up of environmental organizations, businesses and unions" reported that the new technology would create 50,000 auto parts and assembly jobs by 2030. [52]

Investigating a wide range of factors to set the standard for CAFE's second phase (2022-25), the midterm report established an average of 54.5 miles per gallon. Since the review was finalized a year early, Obama signed off on it last January.

On March 15th Trump announced he would direct the EPA to reopen and review the report at the request of automakers who claim the evaluation was truncated. The EPA website states that the evaluation will be completed by April 1, 2018.

Unless Trump demands an end to waivers, states with a higher standard will continue to set the bar because they represent 40% of the national market. This means manufacturers will be forced to adhere to the higher standard. And given that the U.S. industry exists in a world market where competition demands greater fuel efficiency and electrification, the consequences of a review with a revised lower standard might not mean much for auto manufacturers, although they are always pleased when they have more wiggle room.

Trump's announcement does accomplish three goals. First, it makes his administration seem like they are moving ahead on their promise to rebuild U.S. manufacturing, creating thousands of jobs. Second, he underscores his mantra that regulation is a ball and chain that inhibits industry. And third, he thumbs his nose at those who want to drastically curtail usage of fossil fuels in the name of saving the planet. As Trump remarked, "The assault on the American auto industry is over. Believe me, it's over."

Regulation and Labor's Trap

Regulations in capitalist economies enforce standards to protect workers or the larger community when people demand action. The passage of the Clean Air Act of 1970 and creation of the EPA is the direct result of unions, organizations concerned with public health and environmental organizations.

In particular, Tony Mazzocchi of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers read Rachel Carson's book, *Silent Spring* and realized OCAW workers were in danger. He pushed workers to understand why they needed to fight for clean air legislation, made a bridge to the environmental movement and educated them to support worker health and safety. That's why it is shocking that the U.S. labor movement has been trapped by Trump's promise to create jobs through deregulation.

Building trades officials were delighted with Trump's order to the Army of Engineers for a go-ahead to complete the Keystone and Dakota Access pipelines. In fact drastically reducing dependence on fossil fuels means employing people to make buildings energy efficient, building a mass transportation system both regionally and nationally and continuing to develop solar, wind, geothermal and water power. These are the jobs we need to demand!

My own union, the UAW, embraces Trump's "Buy American" Hire American" mantra. But it's not

possible to oppose some of the Trump agenda and enthusiastically support other parts. Unions don't realize that the narrow "We only care about ourselves" perspective takes us away from seeing ourselves as having more in common across the globe with other workers than with the multinationals who employ us and pollute our cities and countryside.

Frankly it is chilling to read that the Trump budget calls for a 21% cut to the Department of Labor and a 34% cut to the EPA. If those cuts are implemented, inspectors who carry out the work of enforcing the laws may be on the chopping block.

When the Occupational Health and Safety Act was passed in 1970 there were 14,000 on-the-job fatalities and two million workers with serious on-the-job injuries each year. Today worker deaths have been reduced by two-thirds. Thousands more suffer debilitating injuries from improperly maintained equipment, tools and machines.

In the auto parts plant where I worked, one young woman was scalped by an assembly line that was later determined to be running too fast. Of course some industries are far more dangerous than others, but injuries such as carpal tunnel syndrome occur at every workplace. We need a strengthening, not a weakening, of health and safety protections. This is particularly true for non-union manufacturing plants where the injury rate is high.

More Cars on the Road?

It is also chilling to hear Trump speak of the production of many thousands more cars. Last year the U.S. auto industry produced more than 17.6 million! Climate change isn't a problem for the future; we already see the effects of burning coal, oil and gas. We need to move rapidly from reliance on cars and trucks to a system of mass transit. Auto plants can be retooled to produce trains, fuel efficient busses and even components for turbines. That's the kind of infrastructure we need to build, not more pipelines, cars

and highways!

During World War I and World War II, auto plants were quickly converted to defense production. But workers were laid off and communities surrounding the plants left to make do as best they could. That must not happen again! Environmental justice demands that society guarantee full compensation to workers and frontline communities most directly affected.

In the process of moving to an energy-efficient society we have the

opportunity to guarantee economic security and reduce inequality. The destruction that capitalism has unleashed in its continued demand for accumulation and profit needs to be replaced by the imperative to put the wellbeing of all at the center of the transition – beginning with those most harmed by pollution and climate change.

Just as regulations have offered some protection to the hazards of industrial production, a “just transition” is an essential tool to move from our fossil fuel economy to a sustainable one. No

one should have to choose between a job and one’s life.

Certainly we are far from the kind of democratic planning that could bring us this transition, but only in maintaining the vision of a better life are we able to counter the rhetoric of right-wing populism – where words are twisted to mean their opposite, and a bully tells us that everything will be all right if we let him make the decisions.

[Against the Current](#)

The worst has been avoided - time for a Defiant Left!

10 May 2017, by **Ensemble!**

Nearly 11 million votes went to Marine Le Pen, revealing a surge in support for their rotten ideas across society. We have to argue that the FN’s ideas are not “respectable”, fascists have always used despair when it takes hold in the population, exploiting it for their own ends.

We have to get to the root of the problem. Le Pen is making advances by conning people into thinking the FN cares about their lives! French socialist President Hollande’s policies over the last five years bear responsibility for people feeling left behind. It is essential to put an end to the neo-liberal and neo-conservative policies of successive governments during the last fifteen years. They have brought no social gains for the majority of people and have brought into question basic rights. By continuing unjust policies, Macron will make things worse and the threat of the FN will increase, if Macron is not fought and his policies rejected on a radical left and pro-environmental basis.

Don’t wait to take on Macron

The vote does not give Emmanuel Macron a mandate to implement his policies. He was elected “by default”, taking votes from all sections of society in a bid to stop Le Pen being elected, not giving support to the policies he wants to develop – he obtained less than a quarter of votes in the first round. He has no mandate to dismantle the welfare state, increase social security contributions, attack employee rights and change pension plans as he sees fit. Following the rejection of the traditional two parties of government, the French Socialist Party and the Conservative style Republicans, we have seen the rise of a real left with 20% of votes cast for the radical left candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon. We can be certain that Macron will face a strong social movement and will not be able to get away with his attacks without a major political crisis. Macron intends to develop his ultra-liberal policies and force them through by presidential decree over the summer. Mobilising people against Macron’s policies must

begin now.

Uniting to form a political alternative in the French General Election

The next parliamentary elections will be decisive in mobilising the hope raised by Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s success in the first round of the French Presidential election.

We need to elect genuine left representatives who will fight Macron’s policies and build an alternative. We have everything to play for. Macron must be prevented from obtaining a majority of deputies, drawn from the traditional parties of the right and the French Socialist Party, which will continue and worsen the policies of Hollande’s last five years in power.

For this reason, it is essential that the progressive forces who supported Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s candidacy stand

in constituencies across the country and build on the success of the first round. It is necessary to unite left and environmental activists in choosing candidates and break from the social liberals. This will give sufficient force to opposing the policies of Macron and challenge both the extreme right and other conservative forces.

The time to build is now!

Re-founding a left alternative is a priority. The forces exist for a broad

popular movement. They need to regroup and go beyond from the dynamics of the Jean-Luc Mélenchon campaign and bring together the hopes and aspirations of a genuine left movement. This is a crucial challenge for the left.

[Ensemble!](#)

Our Planet, Our Lives! - The climate and science marches

9 May 2017, by Solidarity's Ecosocialist Working Group

A Systematic Crisis

With Trump's barrage of absurd "alternative facts," his administration attempts to cover up the scientific analysis that points to a systemic ecological crisis. In order to avoid a major catastrophe we must drastically reduce the use of carbon as an energy source, transitioning to sustainable energy within twenty years. There is no technical fix or more efficient use of coal, gas, oil, or nuclear power that will do the job.

Carbon as an energy source is linked to other ecological and social problems. Perhaps the most pressing is the reality of 65 million refugees, many of whom are fleeing from war.

Wars in Somalia, Sudan and Syria were preceded by destabilizing droughts. The ecological crisis has threatened the ability of rural communities and indigenous peoples to maintain their way of life. And even those seeking sanctuary in other countries can find themselves forced into their host country's neighborhoods with the worst environmental degradation. Flight from climate change does not promise safety.

Our Lives, Our Jobs

Trump promises to intensify the production of coal, fracking, and oil through cutting health and safety regulations and dramatically downsizing the Environmental Protection Agency. Construction union officials and some unemployed miners were delighted with these promises. Yet these are the very same people who suffer debilitating health injuries from their work!

Continuing to measure "progress" by the expansion of commodity production and industrial agriculture will lead civilization to a dead end—more droughts, intensified storms, greater inequality, diminished health, and more refugees.

Capitalist methods of agricultural and industrial production rely not only on the use of fossil fuels but competition that requires continual expansion. Businesses must either grow or perish, accumulating greater profits for their owners. This drive for profits dictates that each company must find labor and resources at the cheapest cost.

With the scientific community sounding the alarm not just on climate

change, but on the links between the air we breathe and the acidification of oceans, the destruction of coral reefs, the extinction of species, the growth of atmospheric pollution, and the degradation of the soil, we demand an economic reorganization that can restore an ecological balance, beginning with food sovereignty and mass transit.

Where will there be jobs if the country reduces its dependence on fossil fuels? Instead of building more pipelines that go through indigenous lands and under the rivers and lakes that provide pristine water, we need to be building the infrastructure for solar, wind, and water energy, for public transportation and insulating, weatherizing, and renovating buildings. That also means ending a military budget that eats up our resources and teaches us that violence is the way to protect ourselves.

Who Pays?

Our safety lies in facing climate change head on. In place of fossil fuel-dominated industries, we demand safe jobs that benefit our communities. Our rulers will try to make workers pay for the cost of moving toward environmental sustainability. We cannot allow that! Workers didn't make this mess, there is no reason

why workers should pay for it. We assert that working people and communities must be fully compensated as work sites are retooled or shut. The demand for a “just transition” is essential.

Why System Change Is Necessary

Central to the project of transition to a sustainable future is the vision of a

society where working people will have the capacity to collectively solve the ecological issues that face us. That means rejecting the notion that people who are fleeing from droughts, wars and repressive regimes are to be feared rather than embraced. As allies have done in supporting the Black Lives Matter movement, U.S. citizens can stand in solidarity with those who are impacted by the global ravages of capital.

Together we can challenge growing inequality with the demand that “no

one is illegal.” On April 22 and 29 and on May 1, we march to affirm that another world is possible—“one where justice, equality, and sustainability replace the greed and cruelty that characterize the proto-fascist neoliberalism of the Trump administration and the economic system upon which it rests. We need a socialist economy where it’s working people who collectively make the decisions. Today’s struggles are how we build toward the future that we need and desire.

[Solidarity](#)

Protesting Trumps threat to the planet - Marches for Science and Earth

9 May 2017, by [Alan Thornett](#)

There are many reactionary aspects to the Trump administration: racism, misogyny, homophobia, islamophobia, and the destruction of health care that are competing neck and neck.

Two things stand out, however, in terms of direct planetary threats. One is his militarism with his finger on the nuclear button following his intervention in Syria and his use of the biggest non-nuclear bomb in the US arsenal in Afghanistan and his naval flotilla heading for the Korean peninsula.

The other is his attitude to the environment, which is less dramatic, and is getting less attention, but is equally a planetary threat. Here too the threat from the Trump regime reaches planetary proportions; not just because it affects everyone on the planet but that it is a direct threat to the ability of the planet to support life itself, including that of human beings.

Trump is a climate change denier. He has called the notion of man-made climate change “a hoax”, and vowed to reverse the (rather minimal) environmental policies put in place by Obama. On November 6 2016 he

tweeted: “the concept of global warming was created by the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive”.

One of his campaign slogans was: “Trump digs coal.” He is pledged to reopen and expand coal production. He wants to open vast new areas to oil and gas exploration and boost the exploitation of tar sands and shale gas and build more pipelines. This is a phenomenal potential regression, and a huge step towards unstoppable global warming.

He is threatening to dismantle parts of the federal government’s repository of scientific data on everything from rising sea levels to the number of wildfires in the country. Alarmed scientists have begun a feverish attempt to copy reams of government data onto independent servers in hopes of safeguarding it from political interference.

Cabinet of fossil fuel extractors

On climate change, as on other issues, some of those that Trump is surrounding himself with are at least as dangerous as him. His administration is stacked out with

direct representatives of fossil fuel extractors.

Vice President Pence, as well as being a born again Christian and anti-abortionist is an outspoken supporter of the coal industry. As governor of Indiana he opposed and rolled back renewable energy and energy efficiency programmes. Although he does not openly deny climate change he is opposed to anything being done about it.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, was the long-time Chair and Chief Executive of ExxonMobil. Exxon is under investigation by New York’s attorney general for misleading investors on the risks of climate change. It has consistently lobbied against proposals to mitigate climate change and pushed to open the Arctic up for drilling.

Scott Pruitt, heading up the Environmental Protection Agency has been a long time opponent of the Agency and a close friend of the fossil fuel industry. He helped lead a lawsuit from 28 states against the agency’s clean power plan, an initiative to cut carbon pollution from coal power

plants by Obama's administration. Pruitt has stated that he believes that "the climate is changing, and human activity contributes to that in some manner", but questions whether carbon dioxide "is a primary contributor to the global warming". [53]

Rick Perry the former Texas governor who has taken over the Energy Agency famously wanted to abolish it but could not name it during his presidential bid in 2012. In 2011, Perry said that global warming was an unproven scientific theory.

Other people, with similar background and views populate every corner of the administration.

This certainly has the potential to revitalise climate denial. The Paris COP in December 2015 unanimously agreed that global warming is a result of human activity: mainly as a result of the burning of fossil fuel. This was a historic statement and indicated that climate deniers had been marginalised. Now they have been thrown a lifeline by the election of Trump.

And although the United States currently contributes only about 15 per cent of global carbon-dioxide emissions, a failure on its part to act to reduce emissions would push the world more decisively toward the 2°C tipping point. Trump has not announced the withdrawal of the US from the Paris agreement, but in a sense this does not matter because he is already going in the other direction...

In the event that the principal per-capita global emitter and the hegemonic global power bows out, any worldwide effort to reduce carbon emissions will be severely jeopardized. For this reason, climate scientists are increasingly turning from the United States to China as the main hope for leadership in combatting climate change.

The administrative order signed by Trump at the end of March has begun the process of rescinding the EPA's Clean Power Plan as well as rescinding a 2016 moratorium on coal leases on federal lands. Meanwhile a

permit for the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline, which would connect Alberta's oil sands to refineries in Texas, has been signed by the State Department, while Energy Transfer Partners, the company building the \$3.7 billion Dakota Access Pipeline, notified a federal court that it has pumped oil into the pipeline. [54]

Trump's attention on the environmental stage therefore is focused on delivering at home to the fossil fuel industry. And there is an ideological link between climate denial and many of the other anti-scientific positions taken by many of his followers, such as the rejection of evolution.

Resistance

But the environmental movement like other opponents of Trump's presidency are not taking any of this lying down. There were remarkable responses such as the return of 1,000 US military veterans of the Vietnam and Iraq wars in December 2016 to defend the indigenous people opposing the Standing Rock North Dakota access pipeline the pipe line from a militarised police force after Trump had signed an executive order allowing work to resume after it was closed down by campaigners.

Another such reaction is the March for Science called in January following the threats from the Trump administration to close down scientific research on climate change and destroy the vital data that has been gathered on global warming by US scientists over many decades, and which is crucial for the protection of the planet.

Trump's policy changes have caused heightened worry among scientists, and the incredible and immediate outpouring of support has made clear that these concerns are also shared by hundreds of thousands of people around the world. The mischaracterization of science as a partisan issue, which has given policymakers permission to reject overwhelming evidence, is a critical and urgent matter. Scientists in the US are calling for everyone who supports scientific research and

evidence-based policies to take a public stand and be counted.

Over 600 marches for science were held around the world, in events that coincided with international Earth Day, as a part of a coordinated response to Donald Trump's attack on climate science and the 'post truth' ideology that he has promoted. Marches took place in Australia, the USA and across Europe with big turnouts in Sydney, Brisbane, Washington DC, London and Edinburgh.

2,000 marched in Edinburgh and between 3,000 and 4,000 assembled outside the Science Museum in London to march to Parliament Square Westminster.

The London march was a completely new constituency of people entering the political arena. The left was completely absent, as was (surprisingly) the regular climate campaigners. It was very much the science community in all its diversity, with large numbers of students and young people.

The banners and placards were individually made, and there were large numbers of them, but with a bit more of a cerebral tone than the average demo. My favourites were: 'The oceans are rising and so are we!' 'Evidence not ignorance' and 'What do we want? evidence based policy! When do we want it? after peer review!' I tried not to think about those written in Latin or were comprised mainly of mathematical equations.

It all gave a good flavour of the depth of the impact of Trumpism and the potential for mobilising against it.

The press release for the London march explains why these campaigners are protesting: At a time when fake news is rife and independent experts face challenges in getting their message heard, the March for Science is a celebration of the vital role that science plays in each of our lives and the need to respect and encourage research that gives us insight into the world. The March for Science champions science and the cross-border collaborations

that are vital in enabling progress.

London has long been a global centre for the advancement of scientific thinking and The London March for Science is part of an international movement that recognises the need to preserve the productive and diverse research partnerships in the UK and around the world. We understand that the most effective way to protect science is to encourage the public to value and engage with it.

One week later we will see the People's Climate March in Washington, with sister marches across the country. Called for the 100th day of Trump's presidency.

The marches will

• Advance solutions to the climate crisis rooted in racial, social and economic justice, and committed to protecting front-line communities and workers.

• Protect our right to clean air, water, land, healthy communities and a world at peace.

- Immediately stop attacks on immigrants, communities of color, indigenous and tribal people and lands and

workers.

• Ensure public funds and investments create good paying jobs that provide a family-sustaining wage and benefits and preserve workers' rights, including the right to unionize.

• Fund investments in our communities, people and environment to transition to a new clean and renewable energy economy that works for all, not an economy that feeds the machinery of war.

• Protect our basic rights to a free press, protest and free speech.

Updated from [Socialist Resistance](#)

Macron as president: the capitalist offensive will sharpen. Build the fightback!

8 May 2017, by NPA - Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste, Philippe Poutou

Marine Le Pen, the candidate of the National Front has not been elected, and we are pleased. For us, the FN will never be a party like the others. Behind some demagogic social demands, its programme remains the destruction of democratic rights, challenging all the rights of the trade union movement and other social movements. Its programme is division of exploited people, aimed at reinforcing discrimination against people of immigrant origin, a racist hate programme aimed at sparing the people really responsible for poverty and unemployment. Today, the candidate of the FN has been pushed aside and that is good.

Macron the banker is heir to Hollandeism and fully embraces the policy of his predecessor. As a minister, he inspired laws of social regression such as the one that bears his name or the labor law which was massively opposed in the streets a year ago. Beyond that, Macron intends

to amplify the liberal counter-revolution and will therefore pursue without a break a policy of austerity for the popular layers, in the name of freedom of enterprise, rigour and budget balance ... His programme ? To put an end to the 35 hours, to break Social Security, to reduce the number of civil servants, to go even further in the breakage of the labour code ... This policy is precisely the one that prepares the ground for the Front National, stepping up the destruction of our social gains.

We must therefore prepare to fight new battles, to unite to prepare the resistance against the steamroller of a Macron who declares that he wants to govern by decree to impose his antisocial programme. A period of struggle is before us, and we must organize the "all together", all-out mobilizations, to reverse the balance of power, build a front to defend in unity our social and democratic rights.

Already, trade union and social movement activists have begun to prepare the response. For us, "taking our affairs in hand" means building struggles, demonstrations, and strikes. The demonstration tomorrow [Monday] at 2 pm in Place de la République [Paris] and in a number of cities is part of it, because social conquests have never been the gift of a government but won by the workers and the youth in action.

To prepare for this confrontation, we need a political force to represent us, to organize our social camp facing the bosses and owners. A fighting party, anchored in daily struggles, that is not afraid of attacking capitalist property rights, that defends the need to break with national and European institutions. A feminist, ecologist, internationalist party for a revolutionary transformation of society. It's urgent.

Montreuil, May 7, 2017

A new federation?

7 May 2017, by **Amandla!**

Zwelinzima Vavi, in the interview [here](#) accepts that the labour movement is currently in a very weakened state. It is never an advance for the working class when its mass organisations split, even if it is sometimes necessary. We have seen how capital and the state are determined to capitalise on this weakness. They have become emboldened in their attacks on workers. Faced with a weakened and often compliant Cosatu (not to speak of Nactu and Fedusa), they believe they can get away with taking away significant workers' rights. They can tamper with the right to strike and there will be no significant response. And so far they seem to be right. Not a whimper from Cosatu, who signed up to them. And only a whimper from Numsa, who issue plenty of press statements but haven't been "on the streets" for more than a year.

The new federation is also weakened by its failure to win Amcu into its ranks. The federation says it will be independent of all political parties, although that doesn't mean that it will refuse to be political. Amcu is an independent union. It looks like they belong together. Amcu would have been a powerful force for constructing a militant and independent trade union federation

"Social distance" or bureaucracy?

But there are other areas of concern, other baggage that the former Cosatu unions, Numsa and Fawu, bring with them from the tradition of their former home. Cosatu for a while called it social distance, although they have stopped talking about it at all in the last while. But "social distance" has always been a euphemism, a polite way of describing a toxic practice of providing union leadership with the material base for a lifestyle entirely different from that of its members.

The material base of social distance is there for all to see.

Jan Theron is former General Secretary of Food and Canning Workers Union and also Fawu - now destined to be the second largest affiliate of the new federation. In his book (profiled on the inside front cover) he recalls a conversation he had in the '90s with Johnny Copelyn, then General Secretary of Sactwu. Copelyn was extolling the virtues of the Histadrut - the Israeli trade union organisation which owned a significant proportion of the companies in the Israeli economy. In 1989 it employed 289,000 workers. It dominated the Israeli services sector together with the government. It also dominated public transport, agriculture, and insurance industries. One of the most important companies it owned was Clalit Health Services, Israel's largest Medical Aid.

Clalit was the only medical aid to accept people without discrimination based on age or medical situation. You had to be a member of Histadrut to be able to be in the Medical Aid. So, many Israelis were dependent on Histadrut membership for their health insurance. Johnny Copelyn is now a wealthy man, running businesses which also benefit Sactwu members.

But it seems that secretly Johnny Copelyn was not the only one to admire the Histadrut. He was just the most successful. Which Cosatu affiliate today doesn't have an investment company? That includes the two who have left and lead the new federation. Fawu has Basebenzi Investment Group - a property company and a financial services company. Numsa has a property company which owns the union's buildings and a financial services company.

There are a number of problems with investment companies. They provide

resources independently of the members' subscriptions. A proportion of those resources go to the leadership of the union, at national and provincial level. For a union investment company that wants to sell financial services products to the union's membership, it makes business sense to look after the union leadership. So it gives privilege to the union leadership. That privilege creates a bureaucracy.

A bureaucrat is not just someone who works in an office. A bureaucrat is an office holder who has a personal, material interest in remaining in office. It could be a full-time shop steward (another target in Theron's book) who wants to get re-elected because as a full-time shop steward she gets an office, access to a car, and freedom from shopfloor work. It could be an elected office bearer, who gets anything from a fancy car to a house in the suburbs. It is someone for whom access to the position is access to a source of comfort and lifestyle. Bureaucratisation is the process of undermining worker control in favour of those who benefit from their leadership positions.

There are those who go further and loot the wealth, with predictable results. Who would have expected to see the Deputy General Secretary of a union take the General Secretary to court to remove him from positions in the investment company? But that is what happened in Ceppwawu. The value of the investment company assets is estimated at between R3 billion and R4 billion. In Satawu, the former President was convicted of stealing to fund his lifestyle, which included buying a R3.6 million house.

But whether or not the investment companies are run "honestly", whether or not Office Bearers benefit personally, whether or not, in fact, the leadership speaks very revolutionary politics, the result is the development of a bureaucracy.

This dynamic is simply incompatible with healthy trade union life. A trade union needs to be dependent on its members' subscriptions. It is the single most important relationship in the union – the union runs on workers' contributions. So it has to look after the interests of workers.

The SACP tried to find a middle road on this issue and got itself into a muddle. In a discussion document for its 2015 special congress, it approves of the idea of union investment companies. In principle, it says, they are good ways "to improve members' lives and those of their dependents through benefits such as bursaries, pension funds and funeral schemes." But then, without analysing how it happened, it says "Sadly, they have often become entry points through which the capitalist class has inserted its DNA into the head offices of many unions." Sadly. As though this was an act of god, not a predictable outcome.

The new federation?

The initial signs from the new federation are positive. It was a

Workers Summit last year that agreed to set up the federation. One of the principles it agreed to was:

"Financial self-sufficiency, accountability and opposition, in word and deed, to business unionism, corruption, fraud and maladministration within its own ranks and in society as a whole."

But that principle raises questions rather than answering them. What does it mean for union investment companies? Are they part of "financial self sufficiency"? Are they compatible with it? And what about "business unionism", a term coined by the SACP to attempt to discredit the Numsa leadership before its special congress in 2013.

Other key challenges

A section of our trade union feature is on precarious workers. In the introduction, on Page 5, we ask whether the federation will turn rhetoric on organising these workers into reality. Will it be able to show the

flexibility and commitment that is needed for this task? Or will it remain an item on the agenda, with reports every now and again of the latest failure?

And how will the federation deal with the need to revive the workers' movement? In our interview, Vavi talks of campaigns on jobs, on the minimum wage, on defence of the right to strike and on education. Waging an effective campaign on any of these is not an easy task. It is relatively easy to win a s77 protected strike at Nedlac and have an effective one day strike. Relatively easy, but by no means guaranteed. It is interesting that Numsa settled its wage bargaining last year, with no hint of industrial action. Does that tell us something about the mood or the balance of forces?

But what after the s77 strike? An effective campaign is more than a one day affair. The state has calculated that it can get away with attacks on workers' rights. Can the new federation prove them wrong?

March 2017

[Amandla](#)

New trade union federation launched

6 May 2017, by **Amandla!**

Amandla! (A!): The launch of the new federation has just been postponed. Why is that?

Zwelinzima Vavi (ZV): Two unions that are very critical in the process are facing some challenges internally about resources. They are the unions who will be sending most of the delegates to the congress: Numsa 702 delegates and Fawu 270 delegates. With the challenges they were facing it became apparent that they will not be in a position to send full delegations on 24 March.

Because we want to make not a half statement but a full statement, we found that it was better to just

postpone and allow them to be with us in full, so that is why we postponed it. So it is postponed just for a month to April 21 to 23.

A: And what has been happening on the ground to build for the launch?

ZV: There is an excitement, I mean on the ground people are ready, people are looking forward to this new giant rising and if you judge by the numbers of people that have been coming to the shop steward councils. Wow... Western Cape was a full house, a small venue but quite full, but in Limpopo we had 1,000 shop stewards

plus. Incredible. In Gauteng we had 1,000 shop stewards. In the Eastern Cape we had 1,000 shop stewards. Last year in December we visited Northern Cape and North West provincial shop steward Council. We are going to KZN and I can promise you now we will have a full house, and then we go to Mpumalanga. That will be the last one. In those shop steward councils we get them to endorse their own provincial programmes, Secondly, we get them to set up their own interim structures. And we get them ready to back the demands we have submitted at Nedlac through our section 77 Notice.

In all of those structures, all of those campaigns are so warmly received. As I speak to you, in all of these provinces we are setting up locals, we have had a picket in the Western Cape, we have had demonstrations already in Gauteng around the budget day, they are linking up with the Outsourcing Must Fall.

A!: There are some people who will say that you talk about a federation but actually this is really just Numsa and a few friends. Most of the shop stewards council is Numsa. What would you say to that?

ZV: No, they will be mistaken. Of course Numsa is the biggest union in South Africa. Even in Cosatu it used to draw the biggest numbers in any march. That's natural. But 21 unions have written letters to us to say they have a congress mandate. That gives us a membership of 684,000 plus. And 17 unions are in the queue. They need to go through the similar mandate processes.

Nobody before has ever put together a federation of nearly 700,000 members, even before a launch, even before agreement on a logo or a constitution or even leadership. This is history in the making.

And there is diversity. There are completely different organisational cultures and political backgrounds. But I think we have the glue that can get those unions to stick to one another.

A!: So what difference is this federation going to make? What is the difference going to be between this federation and Cosatu? Or is it just a kind of Cosatu Mark 2?

ZV: No ways. We have closed the chapter on Cosatu. Cosatu was part of the alliance – that was its mainstay, even during its best days of battles against e-tolls, battles against labour brokers, even when it fought privatisation and fought against job-loss blood baths from as early as 1999 / 2000. But Cosatu was always open to an attack that you are campaigning and fighting and all of this things, but then we had to go and vote for the ANC in the next elections.

Now that will not be. That card will not be played against us. We are completely independent from any political party. And the Alliance is shaking to the core, because they fear that for the first time workers will be politically uncompromised and that they will be able to stand up on their own and challenge a terrible status quo that works for the 1% in South Africa and the 1% all over the world.

A!: So will the new federation be willing to rebuild the unity of the labour movement by participating in joint events with other federations, including Cosatu?

ZV: We look at this launch as a very important milestone in the history to build worker militancy and worker unity. But it is only an important milestone, it's definitely not a point of achieving that unity. We are putting together 41 unions for now. That is a remarkable achievement.

But we are not naive or arrogant. We know that this is only a first step in a journey that we are undertaking to build that unity of workers in South Africa. So in this congress we will be acutely aware that there are 182 registered unions in South Africa. To get 41 of them under one roof is absolutely a critical step, but it is not the end of the road.

We have invited both Fedusa and Nactu to form part of the deliberations and to have their say in terms of what they think the road should be in terms of unifying South African Workers. We have decided not to invite Cosatu. Frankly, in the view of the majority of the members of the steering committee, Cosatu forms part of the ruling elite of society that has brought misery, pain, confusion and the highest levels of unemployment, and widespread poverty that is now deciding that black workers are worth R20 an hour, and that is forming part of this feeding hyena that is eating on the carcass of South Africa's moral fibre.

And people felt that it will be quite an insult to bring those people into a congress where workers are desperately trying to build something new from the ashes of the old. Frankly in our view, the ashes of the old is

Cosatu itself.

A!: Do you rule out in the future marching together with Cosatu workers as well as Nactu workers?

ZV: No ways, no. I am not ruling that one out because the future is the future. If Cosatu for example was to fall in a different type of leadership. If its unions were to have a different kind of leadership that embraces full unity of workers and that is genuinely taking up issues. Not the one that currently exists where all of its issues are influenced by how they advance the interest of those factions in the ANC. They have learnt nothing about being a Zuma federation before. They are now embracing another capitalist in the form of Cyril Ramaphosa. They are trying to pull wool over the eyes of workers to tell them that this multi-billionaire will be a messiah of workers. And we know that if Ramaphosa goes to the Presidency it will be about advancing neoliberalism. It will be about NDP, Gear and appeasing rating agencies left, right and centre. It will be about giving the hot air of a radical economic formation to the working class, when their unemployment is deepening and deindustrialisation is deepening and poverty and income inequalities are deepening and widening.

Ramaposa won't shake any of the fundamental foundations around which neoliberal and frankly austerity measures are now sitting.

A!: So you talk about the new federation, as an campaigning federation as an active federation. What do you see as the key campaign targets for the new federation and how would the federation pursue those campaigns?

ZV: There are issues we submitted at Nedlac as demands:

Number 1 we said is jobs, is the economy that must be restructured. It's about finding a plan that government must pursue the demands we have frankly been making for many years. The current structure of the economy is just not in a position to create jobs for South African workers.

We have taken up a campaign against the proposed minimum wage that they have now signed, all three federations, deep in the pockets of government and the bosses. They are putting R20 an hour, which will have declined in value by 2018 or 2019. And even in 2018 the deal says the employers can still write letters to exempt themselves.

We have taken up the campaign against the assault on the right to strike. These fellows have agreed that workers must be forced to ballot. This opens a window to employers to interdict strikes based on the technicalities of the ballot process. And they are saying now that strikes must be limited. Whenever the bosses feel the strike is taking far too long, as the 5 months Marikana strike did, the bosses must be able to force the parties into a compulsory arbitration, even on issues of interest.

We are taking up the battle on education, on the dysfunctional public education system. In line with our philosophy that the trade union movement can't afford to be narrow about just service to members, just issues of wages, just issues of overalls and health and safety.

We want a movement of working people. A movement of the working people will have to consciously cater for the interest of the unemployed and will have to take up the battles of the students. It will have to take up the battles of the pensioners and it will have to take up issues of social wage and comprehensive social security with the same vigour as it takes up issues of better wages and improved working conditions.

From grade R, basically there is absolutely chaos now. We have a basic education system that sidelines 50% of our youth, who leave the system without any form of education and enter the long queues of what the bosses are now saying are the lost generation - unemployable.

We want to take up the battle for free compulsory, decolonised but high quality public education at the university level.

We will take up the battle for the

collapsing public health care system, just like in education. There is excellent education. There is excellent public health care for a tiny minority in society whose standards compete with the best of the world. And there is a health care system that is victimised by Esedimeni and the death of psychiatric patients in Johannesburg. We are taking up that battle.

And we will be recruiting in the process of doing that. And, of course, we are already engaging a battle now for Outsourcing Must Fall and there are tremendous victories that have been scored. We are pushing that campaign in Johannesburg broadly so that it is no longer just about universities. We are taking it up with Transnet and Prasa and other state-owned enterprises.

The campaign against labour brokers gave workers in this country limited victories such as the amendment to the LRA to make sure that no one is employed perpetually for more than 3 months. But we know that employers are just sidelining that and they are doing as they please. They are not being held accountable by the unions that are weak and they are not being held accountable by the department of labour that is directionless.

A!: There are clearly far more precarious workers in the South African labour force than there used to be. And the unions seem to have been really poor at organising them - unwilling or unable, however you see it. They have been organised by students or by small unions who were set up for the purpose or political organisations. What is the federation actually going to do about this, apart from just talk about it?

ZV: We are already doing something about it. On 22 March we marched to the Gauteng legislature. The intention was to occupy it for a day and to bring it the attention of the country and to demand action on the part of government to better monitor and to ensure compliance with the law in every firm.

We were in a rally on 18 February, the first rally where we raised the flags of

the new federation, to say outsourcing must fall. We have teamed up with these workers and students who have been campaigning alone. They are no longer campaigning alone. They are campaigning alongside the new federation to fight the outsourcing.

And it's not just an issue confined to the capitalists. The government has outsourced thousands and thousands of workers in hospitals, in schools and in the prisons, everywhere. A federation or union that does not take this up will not become a labour movement. They will become just a narrow trade union of the few employed, who are only very happy to get predictable wages at the end of the month. Whereas others out there get wages minus any form of benefit in the form of either medical aid or in the forms of pensions.

A!: Broadly, how do you see the state of the labour movement? You can see that there has been quiet for a long time. The government obviously feels like it can get away with things like the minimum wage and the restriction on the right of strikes. Is the labour movement at a historically weak point at the moment?

ZV: It is at its weakest point, and that is demonstrated by the free fall of the numbers of workers who belong to unions. This year it has fallen to 23% or 24%. It's demonstrated by the fact that 54% of all wages are set by the employers without any negotiations either with the unions or with the workers themselves. Only 23% of wages are set through collective bargaining structures, and worse, only about 9% through the sectoral bargaining system. South Africa has 182 registered unions. That is a full blown fragmentation. The Department of Labour says there are another 400 unions waiting to be registered. That is a disaster.

We are moving away from one union, one industry, one country, one federation, towards a one man, one union, one woman one union situation. We think that this new federation can lead to a serious deepening of unity amongst workers.

A!: What happened to Nactu and

especially what happened to Amcu in this situation? I think a lot of people were looking forward to the giants Amcu and Numsa joining together. What happened?

ZV: Both Fedusa and Nactu, at the senior leadership level, were in agreement that the time to unify has arrived, up to the workers summit. Fedusa pulled out even before the workers summit. Nactu stayed beyond the workers summit and had a historic May Day celebration with us.

Amcu, even on May Day, had their own rally. They blamed it on the fact that it was long planned and all of that. Amcu worked with us to develop a framework for a campaign against job losses and that framework is still there, by the way.

We were excited at the possibility and I don't know what happened. Only Amcu can say. All of a sudden we heard noises that they didn't want to be swallowed and we couldn't just understand what does that mean. They are so big and they were being offered a chance to shape the constitution that will give adequate autonomy to every union to run its own affairs.

Look, we have not given up, either on Nactu or Fedusa or even Amcu. This is only a start of a process and we hope that one day very soon, whenever the Nactu congress will be held, that the majority will say that the federation was started by us with Nactu, because that is literally what happened. They wouldn't be able to explain to anybody why they are not part of it and why they slowly just moved away from it.

Al: When Amdla! interviewed

you in 2015 we asked you whether you were going to be available to be the general secretary of the new federation and you said no, you have done your time now. What are you saying today?

ZV: That would have been my feeling. People must get a new champion to be general secretary, a younger person as I said. And frankly I've not seen any discussion about that alternative. People seem to be advancing an argument that says if I had to pull out now it will be such an anti-climax, in the context of the role I played to bring everybody together.

That discussion is not over, the leadership discussion is only starting now and let's see what happens.

[Amdla](#)

? In South Korea, War Hysteria Is Seen as an American Problem

5 May 2017, by Tim Shorrock

Gwangju, South Korea—“When I arrived at Incheon International Airport near Seoul on April 2 to start a two-month stay in South Korea, I was immediately struck by the sharp contrasts between America and this bustling country of 50 million.

First was the airport itself. Incheon is one of the best-designed and most efficient airports in the world; it's years ahead of the dilapidated structures that US air travelers are forced to endure. The lines for immigration and customs move briskly, and weary travelers are assisted by guides who speak English and politely lead you to the right gate.

Upon entry, the government agents who stamp your passport (and demand your fingerprints on a fancy electronic device) have the same authoritarian air as in most countries. But they're a far cry from the grim and determined

Customs and Border Patrol agents who have become notorious under President Trump for their rude and insulting behavior toward foreign visitors and refugees.

Then, as soon as you emerge into the terminal itself, you encounter South Korea's fabulous and mostly public Wi-Fi system. Smartphones and computers are immediately connected to the Internet without charge or registration, making it easy to e-mail or text friends or family upon disembarking. High-speed Wi-Fi is prevalent throughout the country, and makes South Korea the most wired place on earth.

And right across the street from the terminal is the beautiful, futuristic structure for KORAIL, South Korea's high-speed train system, which connects Incheon with every major city in the country. As with Europe,

Asia has invested heavily in rail—“unlike the United States, where such systems are still pipe dreams. My 159-mile trip the next morning to Gwangju, a city of 1.5 million in the southwest that's known as the cradle of Korea's democratic revolution, took less than three hours.

So far, however, my stay here has overlapped with the greatest contrast of all: the sharp difference between American and South Korean coverage of North Korea's nuclear and missile program and the huge perception gap about the situation by US and South Korean citizens.

Shortly before I flew from Washington, DC, to Seoul, a US Navy aircraft-carrier group led by the USS Carl Vinson was ordered to move toward Korean waters. Immediately, the US media started broadcasting dire reports about the possibility of US

pre-emptive strikes from these ships on the North's military facilities. With CNN available on most cable systems here, the alarming news spread far and wide.

The reports were fueled by a steady flow of threatening tweets from President Trump and dire predictions and warnings from his cabinet (led by the oafish secretary of state, Rex Tillerson). Their pronouncements were reinforced by the hawkish and frequently unhinged Korea "experts" who dominate cable television.

For the most part, the US media have been split between lurid speculation about what such a war might look like and gleeful guesswork about whether Trump will send SEAL Team 6 assassination squads to take out Kim Jong-un, the North's boyish, 33-year-old dictator.

Observers with deep understanding of Korean affairs, such as John Delury, a professor at Seoul's Yonsei University who recently mapped out a sensible plan for diplomacy with the North in *The New York Times*, are rarely consulted. And, as is usual with coverage of North Korea, most American reporting lacks any historical context, includes virtually no Korean voices, and is almost universally in favor of the confrontational approach adopted by both Trump and his predecessor, Barack Obama.

As the historian Bruce Cumings pointed out in *The Nation* last month, the American press assiduously avoids any mention of the horror inflicted on the North by US warplanes during the Korean War, as well as the long history of US military provocations on the peninsula. (His article should be required reading for anybody seeking to understand Kim's motives; perhaps Chris Hayes, a *Nation* editor at large, would consider inviting Cumings on his MSNBC show, *All In with Chris Hayes*, to counter the inflammatory, one-sided discussions on his network.)

Sadly, though, NBC has been the source for the most abysmal stories. On April 13, the network, citing "multiple senior US intelligence officials," proclaimed that Trump was "prepared to launch a preemptive

strike with conventional weapons against North Korea should officials become convinced that North Korea is about to follow through with a nuclear weapons test."

But the story was widely rebuked as reckless and without foundation. According to South Korea's Hankyoreh, "reporters covering the South Korean Ministry of National Defense for other US news outlets unanimously dismissed the report as false. South Korean foreign affairs sources bluntly called the report 'a canard.'" The story was so outlandish that the Trump administration itself was forced to repudiate it, with a National Security Council spokesperson telling ABC the story was "way wrong."

Pyongyang, of course, added its own hyperbole. "North Korea will immediately make its own kind of appropriate super-hardline response according to the kind and the intensity of the American provocation," the Korean People's Army declared in a statement on April 14, *Hankyoreh* reported.

If attacked, the KPA said, it was prepared to strike, including with nuclear weapons, at "all of the bases of evil," including the US military bases "in South Korea such as those at Osan, Gunsan and Pyeongtaek." In a swat at Japan and the US bases there, the KPA reminded Trump "that all American bases throughout the Pacific region, including those on Guam, Okinawa and the Japanese main island, are within the sights of our strategic rocket forces."

The sensational US coverage and the North's statements convinced many Americans that war was imminent. My 93-year-old father in California, who worked as a missionary in Korea for many years, was deeply frightened by the reports. All last week I received e-mails and Facebook messages from family and friends urging me to come home as soon as I could. My response was always: No worries, ordinary South Koreans are not concerned at all.

With the exception of a tiny minority of fanatical anti-communists, South Koreans have largely been unfazed by

the headlines. "I'm much more worried about anything President Trump might do than the threats of war and retaliation from North Korea," a friend of mine who teaches engineering at a local university in Gwangju told me over dinner one night. His sentiment is widely echoed throughout South Korea.

In Seoul, people are going about their regular business. "For many South Koreans, the concerns about the North can feel like a rite of spring, along with the rain showers or the cherry blossoms that crowds flock to see this time of year," two Seoul-based reporters for *The Wall Street Journal* wrote last Friday. On Saturday, James Pearson, the Reuters correspondent in Seoul, took time out from his extensive coverage of North Korea's missile tests to tweet that "South Koreans in general are not interested in the fireworks north of the DMZ."

As if to make his point, that day thousands of South Koreans turned out nationwide for an emotional issue close to home: observing the third anniversary of the Sewol ferry disaster. In 2014, more than 300 people, most of them high-school students, died when the ferry capsized just over a mile from shore. Many Koreans blame their recently deposed president, Park Geun-hye, for the government's botched rescue of the ship. (She was indicted for bribery, abuse of power, and other corruption charges on Monday.) Park's cold response to the victims—"she was reportedly getting her hair done during the disaster and refused to meet with the bereaved families"—was a key factor in the movement to impeach her.

In fact, preventing a return to conservative, right-wing rule seems to be the dominant theme for Korean citizens. In Gwangju, which was the scene of a violent South Korean military crackdown and massacre in May 1980, the focus is the country's future after Park's forced resignation and recent arrest. The sentiment was best expressed by a large sign in Gwangju's downtown last week (seen in my photograph at the top of this post). It demanded the immediate imprisonment of Park and the chiefs of Samsung, Lotte, and other

conglomerates under investigation for bribing her while she was in office.

To be sure, the escalating rhetoric between the United States and North Korea over the past few weeks, as well as Trump's threats to "do it alone," have greatly alarmed Korean politicians of all stripes.

South Korea will choose its next president on May 9. The two leading candidates, the liberal Moon Jae-in and the more centrist Ahn Cheol-soo, have wide leads over the likely conservative candidate, Hong Jun-pyo. The United States has been closely following the election with growing trepidation. As I reported last year before Park was deposed, US military officials and analysts have expressed alarm that the left opposition could win this year.

Moon was a top adviser to the late former president Roh Moo-hyun, who was a progressive labor lawyer before entering politics. Moon has staked out a position very different from Trump's: He has called for direct dialogue and negotiations with North Korea and a reopening of the economic cooperation with the North championed by Roh and Kim Dae-jung, the beloved opposition leader who was president in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

These ideas are very attractive to Koreans tired of the years-long dispute between Pyongyang and Washington. "We in South Korea can do this on our own initiative," one of my colleagues at the Gwangju City Archives told me over lunch on Monday, referring to Kim's "Sunshine" policies toward the North. A professor of European industrial history at a nearby university told me many Koreans are convinced that the United States wants to maintain the North as

an enemy to "help your military industry."

He has a point. Moon has also said the United States should delay deployment of the controversial Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system known as THAAD (built by Lockheed Martin) until the next government is in place, although he has wavered on that in recent days. But the THAAD antimissile batteries were hurriedly dispatched to South Korea last month by the Pentagon despite the concerns of Moon and others that it could destabilize relations with China.

Ahn, who made his name as a software executive, has taken a more hard line, saying he agrees with the immediate deployment of THAAD. But like Moon, he has emphasized the importance of negotiations and China's involvement in the process. Meanwhile, at their first group debate on April 13, both Moon and Ahn expressed strong opposition to a unilateral US preemptive strike and emphasized that South Korea must play a lead role in any dealings with North Korea or China. The candidates are now running neck and neck, and either one could win the presidency.

That will likely force a change in Trump's policy, away from confrontation and back to the combination of sanctions and military strength emphasized by the Obama administration. By week's end, the Associated Press was reporting that a White House review of North Korean policy had, in fact, settled on "maximum pressure and engagement"—a shift away from the hard-line rhetoric of the past few weeks. "In the end, they settled on a policy that appears to represent continuity," the AP concluded.

And on Sunday, as Vice President Mike Pence was arriving in South Korea to consult with the acting government in Seoul, H.R. McMaster, Trump's national-security adviser, seemed to confirm the new policy. "It's time for us to undertake all actions we can, short of a military option, to try to resolve this peacefully," he said on ABC's *This Week* program, according to Reuters.

For the progressive forces here, however, the war talk coming from both Trump and Kim Jong-un is deep cause for concern. In a stinging editorial on Easter Sunday, the *Hankyoreh* newspaper, which was founded by journalists purged during the authoritarian 1970s and '80s, blamed both sides for aggravating tensions.

"A military clash on the Korean Peninsula would have disastrous consequences not only for North and South Korea but also for all neighboring countries," the newspaper said. "That is why we will never agree with hardliners who are willing to go to war and who see war as inevitable. The brinkmanship of the U.S. and North Korea, which appear to be engaged in a battle of nerves, is tantamount to taking hostage the entire populations of North and South Korea."

Still, the feeling here in Gwangju and elsewhere seems to be that this, too, shall pass—until someone comes along with the courage and stamina to buck the United States and try serious engagement for a change. After all, this is their country. That's a lesson too many Americans, in their obsession with North Korea as a strategic enemy, seem to forget.

Source: *The Nation*.

After the first round of the presidential elections

3 May 2017, by **Antoine Larrache, Léon Crémieux**

The first round of the French presidential election has confirmed what was apparent during the three months preceding the vote:

- A deep crisis of the two parties which have structured the country's institutions for 60 years. Les Républicains (LR, the heir of the UMP, the party created by Jacques Chirac) and the Parti Socialiste (PS), with a strong political polarization to the right.

- The taking root of the Front National (FN), which came first in half of the departments and has gone forward to the second round, testifying to the "de-demonization" of this far right party and of the fascist wing of its leadership, by polarizing the popular classes through a nationalist and racist politics.

- The intervention of Macron, with his "anti-system" image succeeded in dislocating the electorate and a part of the Socialist apparatus and attracting a significant fringe of the centre right electorate.

- Significant progression for Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who also siphoned off a part of the socialist vote and succeeded in appearing as the only solid candidate of the left.

- The ability of the NPA to overcome the obstacle of gaining 500 signatures and to conduct an excellent anti-capitalist campaign making a broad impact on several social issues and policies, even if there has been a lag between the sympathetic response met and the score obtained.

1/ Deep instability, polarization to the right

The crisis of the PS and LR will, in different ways, go on deepening after the first round. The PS could actually break up, with a part of the apparatus around Valls announcing already the

decision to split so as to join a possible presidential majority around Macron. It will be difficult for the rest of the apparatus to hold back this drift. On the one hand, the return to a social democrat and Keynesian identity had been widely acclaimed by the voters of the primaries of the left, in January, which rejected the continuation of austerity policies. On the other, the essence of the PS apparatus has been won long since to social liberalism and Macron occupies this space. The survival of the PS as a party of the first level is therefore no longer ensured.

LR face difficulties of a different nature. With his candidacy, even before its scandals, Fillon had crystallized a combative far right, galvanizing the most reactionary and traditionalist sectors of the right electorate. It is around this axis that the campaign has been conducted, ruling out any program able to address a popular right electorate shocked by scandal and corruption. LR will try to rectify this. If their crisis is less deep than the PS, here also a part of the apparatus and party leadership, like the young people around Alain Juppé, Estrossi and Le Maire, are ready to play the Macron card, inasmuch as he is ready to open the door to them sufficiently after the 2nd round.

In any case even if, in the event of the election of Macron, the latter receives enough momentum for the legislative elections to win a majority for "En Marche", the heterogeneity of this formation would open a period of parliamentary instability which has already pushed Macron to promise to legislate by decree.

If the institutions of the Fifth Republic have been able to adapt over 60 years to many political and social convulsions, they require the presence of a president structuring a majority party. Hollande has been blocked during his period in office by the inability to manage his own majority. This could be repeated in the coming months. Windows will open for

mobilizations and questioning of the legitimacy of the regime.

This overall situation reflects the general difficulty of the bourgeois parties in maintaining any political credibility and adequate social base after decades of undermining of the social state, of massive unemployment, and austerity policies which are hitting the popular classes. This policy, implemented in France in the framework of the European Union, has resulted in the fact that the extreme right plus the combative right (Le Pen + Fillon + Dupont-Aignan + Asselineau) polarized 47% of the vote in this first round and more than 24% voted for a candidate who promises the accelerated implementation of a neoliberal capitalist programme. The nature of the FN, the policies of LR and the willingness of Macron to govern by decree show that the dominant class knows that to push through its policies, it will have to use increasingly authoritarian and repressive means.

2/ The place of the Front National

Even if it she not achieved her objective, Le pen is present in the second round and begins to polarize beyond her political borders as is evidenced in the rallying of Christine Boutin and Dupont-Aignan. In jumping these barriers and breaking the rule of insulation, the objective, beyond the presidential election, is to make the second round a springboard for the legislative elections, by imposing an FN group in the National Assembly that is capable of having political weight, all the more so in the event of parliamentary instability.

The Front National, with a million more votes than in the presidential elections of 2012, three million more than those of 2002, continues to root itself and strengthen its activist implantation. The vote for Le Pen is in the majority among workers,

employees of the public sector and the unemployed who have voted. The FN has deepened its implantation in the north of France where it came first in all the departments of the Hauts-de-France, in rural communes and now also in the medium-sized cities.

The challenge for us before and after the second round is to combat this idea that the National Front should become a party like the others. It is a party of the extreme right whose basis is still the legacy of the fascist FN of Jean Marie Le Pen. Its program is the destruction of democratic rights, the challenging of all the rights of the trade union movement and the social movement. To advance its base in the popular classes affected by capitalist policies, it has demagogically taken up a few social demands such as increasing low wages or retirement at 60, while its economic program is a bosses' program and it develops a program of division of the exploited, aimed at strengthening discrimination against persons of immigrant origin, a program of racist hatred, sparing those really responsible for poverty and unemployment. The FN is a direct threat to the immigrant populations and those of immigrant origin, in the first place refugees. We must therefore both denounce the FN as being also a party of the system, a capitalist party protecting the capitalists and the banks, but we must also denounce it as the worst enemy of the labour movement, the exploited and the oppressed.

3/ A left in deep crisis

The left, in all its components scored less than 30% and only ten million votes. The parties originating from the workers' movement have been removed from the second round of the election. With a score of 19%, Mélenchon managed to consolidate his candidacy and to appear as the main candidate of the left. He played on several registers: he succeeded in capturing and polarizing the bulk of those who mobilized last year against the El Khomri law and, in general, the bulk of the currents of social mobilization of recent years, incorporating the main demands of

these movements. At the same time, he has, like Macron, siphoned off an important part of the electorate of the PS, who saw the possibility of having a candidate of the left in the second round. Also, in the last few weeks, the Mélenchon campaign became increasingly a republican, nationalist, campaign, erasing the most radical aspects and the axes of combat against austerity. It was, at the end of the account, about bringing the radicalism and the revolt against the system of millions of people into an institutional and republican framework.

In any case, by refusing before and during the campaign to build a framework of campaign and democratic convergence, JLM has found himself before a difficulty. The galvanization around his own campaign cannot continue. It will be difficult for him to escape the debate on what happens now, because the need to create a relationship of social and political force will grow. The Keynesian program of Mélenchon, even if it reflected many of the requirements of the social movement, evaded the issue of the necessary confrontation with the employers, of popular mobilization to impose even the program of France Insoumise. The lessons of Greece show that any program against austerity faces, nationally and at the EU level, capitalist interests and the institutions which guarantee them. In addition, the rejection of any democratic and pluralistic construction will reappear with force during the legislative elections with the competitive division of the forces who made the electoral success of JLM (particularly between the candidates of France Insoumise and the PCF, Mélenchon having so far refused any agreement on the distribution of seats). The left of the PS, the PCF, Mélenchon's voters, and NPA sympathizers are therefore facing a common problem, despite the deep differences: the reconstruction of the organized labour movement, of sectors prepared to fight on a daily basis to defend the exploited.

4/ The Campaign

of the NPA: elements of reconstruction

Week after week, the candidacy of Philippe Poutou imposed itself in the NPA, around him and in the media. At the end of the campaign, we can say that at the scale of its forces, it was an undeniable success.

In the context of the disrepute of professional politicians and the scandals of Fillon and Le Pen, Philippe Poutou appeared very widely, and all the more so after April 4, as a worker candidate, expressing very loudly the concerns and the resentments of popular classes in relation to the institutional parties.

He also strongly impacted upon public opinion with his denunciation of the FN. The campaign made an impact, more than in 2012, on several political issues: the disarmament of the police, the removal of the privileges of elected representatives, in particular, and to a lesser extent the prohibition of redundancies. In an election which was strongly personalized and focused on media appearances, there was a first phase of marginality, including up to the obtaining of the 500 signatures needed to contest the election. In contrast, the Poutou candidacy benefited from a strong media profile after the great televised debate between the presidential candidates on April 4th. It confirmed that, in a presidential campaign, enormous efforts bear fruit in the last three weeks. The interventions of Poutou and other spokespersons and the campaign material allowed us to advance other aspects of the program of the NPA, such as climate change, nuclear power and the airport at Notre-Dame-Des-Landes, health issues, discrimination and support for the reception of migrants, the rejection of French military intervention and solidarity in the fight against Bashar Al Assad.

The echo was positive and growing, even if in the final days the shooting on the Champs Elysees put in difficulty the positioning on the question of the disarmament of the

police. On the other hand, the campaign was not able to develop other important points of the emergency program of the NPA: the fight against unemployment (sharing of working time, a ban on redundancies, increase in the minimum wage and so on) and the overall project of society. By contrast, the rising pressure for a “useful vote” to take Mélenchon to the second round or even for Macron limited the success of the campaign in strictly electoral terms, of the number of votes. This climate also largely hampered the debate and the expression of positions on the question of the representation of the exploited and oppressed.

Attendance at the meetings reached a peak as did the number of contacts and this has restored a positive dynamic to the militant activity of numerous sections of the NPA. It remains to transform this into an activist force and to maintain a political presence which is audible and visible on a wide scale.

5/ Build the fight against the FN and neoliberal policies

During the campaign the NPA has, in several cities, initiated or been at the heart of mobilizations against the FN, with a broad united front arc and real success in several cities. By contrast, the party was less reactive in those mobilizations which took place in hours and days that followed the outcome of the first round, subject to resignation concerning the presence of FN in the second round and often not having dared, due to the low score and limited legitimacy, to take initiatives.

For the second round on May 7th, what matters is convincing people that the FN is a serious threat to the exploited and their tools of resistance, a threat reinforced by the increased resources of the state of emergency established by exploiting the terrorist attacks. It is essential to fight against any vote in its favour, to say that, in the camp of the exploited, there should not be one vote for Le Pen.

We do not put an equals sign between Macron and Le Pen, although that does not mean advising a vote for Macron. If voting for the latter may reveal illusions in the institutions, abstention can symmetrically reveal an under-estimation of the danger of the FN. On our side, we argue for mobilizations that will reduce the vote FN, reduce the legitimacy of Macron and prepare the fight against the next government. It is logical that the mobilizations target as a priority the FN, which is a deadly enemy of our social camp, but the battle against the FN must not be disconnected from a battle against the neoliberal policies which nurture it, which have been carried out for years by the PS and LR, backed by the European institutions, and will continue with Macron. We want to prepare the labour movement to militantly oppose the policies that the latter will conduct from before the summer. We must fight the FN today, but be aware that five years (or less) of the ultra-neoliberal policies conducted by Macron will only strengthen the far right if at the same time we are not moving forward in the construction of a political expression of the exploited and oppressed which disputes the field with it, opposes racism and competition between the oppressed, and has an emancipatory perspective based on solidarity and the common struggle.

6/ Rebuild the labour movement

One of the balance sheets of this election is the weakness of the weight of the organized labour movement, the setbacks of confidence in collective class action against austerity policies, a loss of confidence and consciousness which benefits the FN. However, the mobilizations of last year against the employment act, those around Notre-Dames-Des-Landes, Guyana, COP21, show that the basis exists to ensure that social mobilizations take on all their political dimension.

It is on this terrain that we will put all our efforts in the weeks and months to come, acting to build and strengthen the tools of collective action, unions, associations, unitary frameworks. It is

vital, especially in the current political conditions, that the roots of the NPA are firmly planted in the social movement, in the struggles that our activists have as compasses of formation of collective action, through mobilizations, opposition to institutional pressures, and endeavouring to ensure the convergence of social, ecologist, feminist and internationalist struggles.

7/ Ensure the positive dynamic generated by the campaign

The NPA should, by multiple local initiatives, public meetings, meetings and the preparation of the summer university, stabilize and organize the activist contacts made during the campaign. The workers, the exploited have expressed themselves in various ways in this election. Beyond the foreigners without voting rights, many abstained. Others, too many, have been attracted by Le Pen, seeing this as a popular vote. Others voted Mélenchon, or even Hamon, seeing this as the expression of their struggles, of the demand for social justice. Others have even voted Macron in the first round, seeing in him a bulwark against the FN. The vote for Philippe Poutou recognised the anti-capitalist struggle.

We now have to address all of them; the absence of a party representing the interests of the exploited and oppressed leaves hands free to the enemies of the popular classes. Also, we want to try to gather in the streets and the mobilizations our class, that of the exploited and oppressed, as it is gathered against the El Khomri law, as it mobilized in French Guiana, involving also the small employers and the other intermediary sectors.

But we also want, beyond these struggles, to chart the course of assembling a common political force around an anti-capitalist program, a revolutionary break with capitalism and with its institutions, be they national or European.

We want to discuss this project with all those who seek the path of this necessary gathering, certainly of the constituted organizations or activist groups formed activists, but especially by addressing ourselves, through open

meetings of activists in the social movement. The refoundation of a political-social project and ideological alternative to this capitalism which destroys social rights and the environment will only be credible and attractive if it emerges from pluralistic

and democratic practices, anchored in the activist networks, rejecting the subordination of social movements to political parties - therefore by inventing a radical redefinition of the "political".

Defeat Le Pen, fight Macron, and rebuild a vibrant Left

3 May 2017

Jean-Luc Mélenchon's result in the first round of the presidential election, 19.6% of the votes, ranking fourth, is a remarkable breakthrough. This success has roots in the strong discontent against Hollande and Valls's [55] policies, in the social movements against the Labour Bill ('loi travail') last year, in the Nuit Debout movement, and in the environmental and democratic movement that developed over the last years.

For the first time, a left-wing candidate opposing the Socialist Party (PS) government's policies and challenging that party's hegemony, has been seen as a credible contender for power, and not just as a way to pressure the PS from the left.

There has been calls, including through the [Appel des cent](#), [Front commun](#), and other public expressions, for the alternative left to come together on a platform breaking with neoliberalism. Jean-Luc Mélenchon appeared, particularly in the last phase of the campaign, as the candidate representing that desire.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon's campaign, with France insoumise (Insubordinate France), has been a tool allowing tens of thousands to get involved. The momentum harnessed by that multifaceted campaign (public meetings, social media, Internet, caravan, etc.) is an asset for the future.

The possibility that Marine Le Pen wins the election shouldn't be underestimated. It would be a disaster for the country. When the far-right comes to power, it destroys democracy, social rights, and the equality of all. We cannot let what is happening in the US with Trump, in Hungary with Orban, or with other far right leaders in Europe, happen in our country. As soon as they came to power, they started cracking down on immigrants and smashed social rights. Let's develop popular mobilisations against the dangers facing us. Ensemble calls for mobilisation, in the streets on May Day, by voting and defeating Le Pen on May 7, and against Macron immediately after.

The campaign around Jean-Luc Mélenchon must get stronger, but also broader. Bringing together a new left, a vibrant left, is the only way to defeat the National Front (FN), as well as the reactionary politics that have been fueled by the mainstream left's treasons, with Macron now as a successor. They need to be defeated immediately, and for a long time.

The upcoming legislative elections are an essential battle to sustain the hope that emerged during the presidential election, and to tackle the challenges we face. Macron will seek to constitute a parliamentary majority including MPs from the traditional right and from the the Socialist Party right, in order to further the disastrous politics of the Hollande government. It is absolutely necessary

that the forces that have supported Jean-Luc Mélenchon find an agreement to stand together in the constituencies. That goal must be achieved. Beyond that, Ensemble ! stands for common candidacies of the forces of the Left (France insoumise, Parti de gauche, French Communist Party, Ensemble, NPA, the Greens, dissident Green and PS activists, grassroots activists...) on a platform that breaks with social-liberalism, for a majority opposing Macron's policies, and for a front against the far-right and the rights. We seek to implement this orientation nationally, as well as locally with due consideration for the diversity of local situations.

Macron will implement his neoliberal agenda from day one: liberalisation of the labour market, undermining of the pension system... including via emergency procedures. The mobilisation of all political and social forces against those projects will be essential. It is through the social and democratic struggles that the neoliberal consensus must be defeated, and the anti-social attacks fought against. Ensemble ! will help the emergence of broad fronts allowing the widest participation possible.

The question of rebuilding a real left, a class-based left, is now posed. The forces for a broad popular movement are here. They need to come together, building on the momentum of Jean-Luc Mélenchon's campaign, and on the desires for unity of the alternative left.

This is a crucial task and we must address it now. Ensemble ! has stated that our project was to participate in and help build a political force breaking with neoliberal and productivist policies, along with their

'liberal-lite' counterparts, and holding a project of emancipation. In the frenzy of initiatives and meetings that will take place in the coming years, Ensemble will seek to facilitate the rapprochements and convergences, to

turn into reality the renewal of a democratic, social, environmental left, that has popular participation at its heart.

30 April 2017

General election: Labour must present a radical alternative

2 May 2017, by **Alan Thornett**

And the fact that Labour's barrage of policy announcements over the last week had started to see some improvement in poll ratings had nothing to do with it either. [John Prescott's article](#) in last week's Sunday Mirror, commenting that discussion was shifting to policy questions - such as free school meals for all or an increase in carer's allowance (to bring it in line with JSA) - rather than news of splits and divisions, was completely irrelevant in May's calculations.

A Tory victory would put May in a position to force through the hard-line 'tax haven' Brexit that the Tory right craves while going to the polls early avoids divisions in her own party unravelling in front of the electorate. It would also, were she to win, give her the opportunity to stamp her authoritarian style on a new Tory government, consolidate her position in the Tory party, and get rid of any Cameronites who might cause trouble during the Brexit process. All this will push Britain even further to the right than was the case after the referendum in June last year. A Ukipisation of the Tory party mark 2.

Jeremy Corbyn is right to welcome the announcement and pledge to fight the Tories all the way on Brexit and on social policy, the NHS, and on the economy.

The announcement represents a huge U-turn on May's part, since she had ruled out a general election on the many occasions she was asked since the EU referendum in June 2016, but it is more of a gamble than it might seem at first sight. It is effectively a rerun of the referendum and she is banking on the Brexit vote holding up, but the reality is that no one knows "almost anything can happen. She is gambling that her chances are better now than in 2020 if Brexit unravels.

The job of the left now is to get behind the Corbyn campaign and drum up every vote we can.

The key for Labour in this election is to put forward a radical left programme with socialist measures that can present a clear and attractive alternative to the Tories. It must also present an alternative to the hard Brexit being planned by May, including the retention of free movement in the event of access the

single market. Labour needs to be seen as an answer by many amongst the 48% as well as amongst the 52% "but that can most effectively be done by showing why a hard Brexit would be disastrous for all working people living in Britain.

It is crucial that Labour is prepared to work in a progressive alliance with other anti-austerity parties in Parliament (i.e. the Greens, SNP and Plaid) in order to form a government if that is necessary. This means supporting the call of the Scottish parliament for a second independence referendum. This is of course very different from the sort of alliance that Tony Blair is angling for (again) where Labour accommodates to the Liberal Democrats by moving to the right.

And finally it is crucial that Labour takes on the issue of the electoral system. A declaration in favour of a PR system for Westminster should Labour win would strongly increase Labour's appeal in this election and ensure that we do not get elected dictatorships on the basis of minority votes in the future that we have had in the past.

[Socialist Resistance](#)

Assad Must Fall

1 May 2017, by Joseph Daher

There is another strain on the left, those who see no hope and no justice in either American or Russian involvement. Rather the case for Syrian emancipation requires a critical account of the different international forces at work in the civil war. Not just Russia and the United States, but also the roles played by the Gulf powers, Turkey and Iran. This is the premise of every serious analysis. And this is a vital part of Daher's standpoint.

The following *Souciant* interview with Joseph Daher examines the poison gas attack on Khan Sheikhoun in the context of the civil war, as well as the interventions of foreign powers, the class character of the Assad regime and the politics of the Syrian opposition.

***Souciant* - The gas attack on Khan Sheikhoun stirs memories of the Ghouta attack in 2013 for a lot of observers. Why do you think the Assad regime resorts to such measures?**

Joseph Daher - First of all, I would like to say that since the chemical attacks Eastern Ghouta in 2013 until the gas attack on Khan Sheikhoun, many attacks with chemicals occurred and on a regular basis since 2013. This despite the fact Assad declared in June 2014 that chemical weapons had been removed from Syria to be destroyed. These kinds of attacks have become so frequent in Syria that most have not made it to the international news headlines.

The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has actually documented 167 attacks using a toxic substance since the first U.N. resolution in September 2013. Forty-five of those attacks were carried out after August 2015, when the U.N. passed a resolution establishing the Joint Investigative Mechanism to identify perpetrators using chemical weapons in Syria. In 2017, SNHR documented 9 attacks using toxic substances by regime forces.

The chemical attack was another step in the murderous campaign to destroy what is left of the popular opposition to the Assad regime. After putting under siege and destroying Eastern Aleppo, the most important center of the popular and democratic opposition, and forcing the survivors as well as the survivors from other besieged opposition areas to go to Idlib, the regime is now concentrating its forces on bombing the civilian population in Idlib and Aleppo provinces. Syrian regime has actually focused its use of poison gases on opposition-held areas where 97% of its chemical attacks targeted opposition-held areas while 3% of the attacks were carried out in ISIS-held areas.

The objective of chemical weapons is clearly to instil terror in people, while there are few ways for civilians in liberated areas to protect themselves. This also showed the impunity with which the regime conducts its war against the Syrian people.

Many people have called for a military intervention against the Assad regime and we've just seen the US bomb a Syrian government airbase. What's your view of Trump's missile strike in response to Khan Sheikhoun?

I think we need to understand why for some sections of Syrians, especially within the country, were satisfied or happy at US bombing of a regime's military base from which the chemical attack was launched. After more than 6 years of a constant war and in total impunity of the regime against the Syrian people, this was the first time a military base of the regime was targeted for its murderous actions.

This said, no kind of optimism or illusions should be put in US administration in bringing anything positive to the Syrian people to achieve democracy or relieve even their pain. Many Syrians in liberated areas also understand this very well, as we can find many testimonies saying for example that the strikes were not to punish Assad too harshly,

but to make him understand that he must not cross the "red lines", in other words the use of chemical weapons, while it is okay that its military forces continue to use barrel bombs, vacuum rockets, cluster bombs, phosphorus weapons, etc.

Residents of Khan Sheikhoun actually suffered from regime's bombing few days after the chemical attack on Saturday, 8th of April, which killed one woman and wounded several other people. Regimes and Russian warplanes also bombed last weekend various provinces, resulting in the deaths of new civilians.

The USA have not changed their strategy in Syria: the priority is still "the war on terror", in other words Daesh, and try to reach stability in Syria in maintaining the regime, with at its head or not Assad. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who is expected to visit Moscow on April 12 for talks with Russian officials, actually said on ABC's This Week program there was "no change" to the U.S. military posture toward Syria.

The way also the US bombing occurred showed that they did not want to hit too "hard", to say the least. Moscow officials confirmed that they received advanced warning from the U.S. about its strike on Syria, while according to some testimonies, regime soldiers were prepared for the 35-minute strike and, in advance, evacuated personnel and moved equipment out of the area. Within 24 hours of the strike, regime's warplanes were actually again taking off from the bombed Shayrat air base. So for the moment, a change of strategy of the USA is still to be seen, although we also have to be careful as well as Trump is unpredictable, as he likes to say.

In addition to this, recent American airstrikes in Mosul, Aleppo and Raqqa, which are supposedly aimed at stopping ISIS, have also brought about large civilian death tolls. They have been some of the deadliest since U.S. airstrikes on Syria started in 2014. On

Saturday 8th of April, At least 15 civilians, including four children, were killed in a suspected US-led airstrike on Saturday near the city of Raqqa. This shows that greater U.S. military intervention in Syria will only lead to more death and destruction. According to Airwars, during the month of March alone, as many as a thousand civilians have been killed by U.S. airstrikes in Iraq and Syria in the name of the "War on Terror".

In general, since coming to office, the Trump administration has given every indication that its goal is to promote authoritarian, racist, sexist Arab leaders and strengthen the repressive environment of the Middle East. These realities not only reveal the Trump administration's motives but also compel us to condemn all the states that are carrying out wars against innocent civilians in the Middle East: The Syrian and Iranian regimes, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Israel, all the other authoritarian regimes in the region, IS, Al Qaida, and other religious fundamentalist movements, as well as Russian and Western military interventions.

These moves are all part of an imperialist logic and the maintenance of authoritarian and unjust systems. They all oppose the self-determination of the peoples of the region and their struggles for emancipation. Hence, anti-war activists whether in the Middle East or the West need to address all forms of repression and authoritarianism, and condemn all forms of foreign intervention against the interests of the people of the region, instead of limiting their criticisms only to the West and Israel.

Clearly, no peaceful and just solution in Syria can be reached with Bashar al-Assad and his clique in power. He is the biggest criminal in Syria and must be prosecuted for his crimes instead of being legitimized by international and regional imperialist powers.

Some people on the left have tried to defend the Syrian Ba'ath regime as a 'lesser evil' to Islamic State and jihadi rebels. How would you describe the character of the Assad regime and its role in the region?

This perception of these sections of the left is completely wrong and destructive of the "lesser evil". The solution to struggle against Islamic fundamentalist movements does not lie in the collaboration with authoritarian regimes like the Assad regime, quite on the opposite. When it comes to the IS and similar organizations, it's necessary to tackle their root causes: authoritarian regimes and international and regional foreign interventions.

IS emerged as the result of crushing the space for popular movements linked to the 2011 uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa. The interventions of regional and international states have contributed to ISIS's development as well. In addition to this, neoliberal policies have impoverished the popular classes, together with the repression of democratic social and trade union forces, have been key in providing ISIS and Islamic fundamentalist forces the space to grow.

The left must understand that only by getting rid of these conditions can we resolve the crisis. That means we have to side with the democratic and progressive groups on the ground fighting to overthrow authoritarian regimes, defeat the counter-revolutionary Islamic fundamentalists, and replace neoliberalism with a more egalitarian social order in Syria and the region. Without addressing the political and socio-economic conditions that allowed and enabled the development of the IS, its capacity of nuisance or that of other similar groups will remain.

The solution is therefore of course to oppose the IS and other reactionary and jihadists forces, which as a reminder the Ba'ath regime has encouraged their developments at the beginning of the popular uprising in Syria by liberating the worst jihadist and Salafist personalities from its prisons, while killing and repressing democratic and progressive forces, but also and especially the barbaric, criminal and authoritarian regime of the Assad family.

The Assad regime is the main responsible of the disaster in Syria and of the exile of millions of Syrians.

Both actors are barbaric and they feed themselves and are therefore to be overthrown to hope to build a democratic, secular and social society in Syria and elsewhere. This requires the support of democratic and popular movements that oppose these two counter revolutionary forces (authoritarian regimes and Islamic fundamentalist forces) and different forms of international (United States and Russia) and regional imperialisms (Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Israel and Turkey) that are all fighting against the interests of the people in struggle in the region.

The Assad regime is an authoritarian, capitalist and patrimonial state using various policies such as sectarianism, harsh repression, tribalism, conservatism, and racism to rule, very far from being anti-imperialist and secular as presented by some of its supporters. The patrimonial nature of the state means the centres of power (political, military and economy) within the regime were concentrated in one family and its clique, the Assad, similar to Libya and Gulf monarchies for example, therefore pushing the regime to use all the violence at its dispositions to protect its rule.

In the economic sector, for example, following the accession to power of Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian regime engaged in an increased and accelerated process of implementation of neoliberal economic policies. The latter have benefited in particular a small oligarchy, which had proliferated since the era of his father, because of its mastery of the networks of economic patronage and their loyal customers. Bashar al-Assad's cousin, Rami Makhlouf, the richest man in Syria, perfectly embodied this Mafia-like process of privatization conducted by the regime in favour of its owns. Makhlouf controlled huge sectors of the economy directly or indirectly, according to some nearly 60%, thanks to a complex network of financial holdings.

In addition it has played a destructive role regionally, collaborating with various imperialist forces. We shouldn't forget that Assad's regime collaborated with the second gulf war in 1991 with US led coalition. Syria participated in 2001 in the war on

terror working with US security officials. In 1976, Syria intervened in Lebanon to crush the Palestinian resistance and the Lebanese national movements, a coalition of nationalist and leftist forces. The regime has also historically instrumentalized and cooperated with jihadist groups after the Iraqi invasion by the USA in 2003 or Fatah al-Islam in Lebanon in 2007, while liberating most of the jihadists and Islamic extremists in the various amnesty calls at the beginning of the Syrian revolutionary process.

In what ways does the regime headed by Bashar al-Assad differ from the way his father ran the country?

The structures and core of the Ba'ath regime were built by Hafez al-Assad at its arrival in power in 1970 and they have rivalled by their murderous repressive campaigns. This being said some real changes did take place.

From 2000, Bashar al-Assad strengthened the patrimonial nature of the state in the hands of the Assad family and relatives through a process of accelerated implementation of neoliberal policies and the replacement of sections of the old guard by relatives or close individuals to Bashar al-Assad.

The first years of Bashar al-Assad in power were actually concentrated on establishing himself as the main decision maker and marginalizing the centers of power within the regime challenging this aim. This process was achieved as we have seen in 2005 with the resignation and then departure of Abdel Halim Khaddam in exile in 2005. It is at this period that the social market economy strategy was launched. It constituted in many ways the culmination of at least two decades of regime-bourgeoisie reconciliation.

The social market economy strategy led to a shift in the social base of the regime constituted at its origins of peasants, government employees, some section, with at the heart of the regime coalition were the crony capitalists – the rent-seeking alliance of political brokers (led by Bashar's mother's family) and the regime supportive bourgeoisie. It was this

bourgeoisie that funded 2007 Assad re-elections and the one that expressed its support for the ruling regime by propaganda and proclamations in the first months of the revolution when demonstrations of support for the Assad regime were still a pressing need for the regime, in addition to funding after militias loyal to the regime.

This shift was paralleled by disempowerment of the traditional corporatist organizations of workers and peasants and the co-optation in their place of business groups, while a new labor law ended what the regime's section pushing for neoliberal policies called overprotection of workers. The corporative and fierce nature of the state under Bashar al-Assad was even more weakened than at the time of Hafez al-Assad, relying exclusively in coercive policies as the corporative organizations were undermined considerably. In other words, the reconfiguration of authoritarianism under Bashar did not strengthen it but on the opposite limited even more its popular basis.

Large section of the society left out of the liberalization process, particularly from villages to medium sized cities, would be at the forefront of the uprising. The policies of the regime were opposing the interests of the popular classes and serving and benefiting a small minority of crony capitalists linked to the ruling class. This is the principle contradiction the Syrian popular masses had and have to face until today.

In terms of foreign policy, the major change was the deepening of relations with Iran and Hezbollah, not only considered tactical allies, which we can use on some occasions, but strategic ones.

The absence of democracy and the growing impoverishment of large parts of Syrian society, in a climate of corruption and increasing social inequality, prepared the ground for the popular insurrection, which thus needed no more than a spark.

It's often said that the Syrian political opposition differs from the military front. To what extent

have Islamists taken over the frontline in the struggle against the state? Does this pose a problem for the revolution?

We should remember first that the Syrian grassroots civilian opposition was the primary engine of the popular uprising against the Assad regime. They sustained the popular uprising for numerous years by organizing and documenting protests and acts of civil disobedience, and by motivating people to join protests. The earliest manifestations of the "coordinating committees" (or tansiqiyyat) were neighborhood gatherings throughout Syria.

The regime specifically targeted these networks of activists, who had initiated demonstrations, acts of civil disobedience, and campaigns in favor of countrywide strikes. Their qualities as organizers and their democratic and secular positions undermined the propaganda of the regime, which proclaimed that "armed Islamic extremists" constituted the entire opposition. Large numbers of dissidents were imprisoned, killed, or forced into exile on the back of this lie.

Despite this Syrians continued to play an important role in the ongoing revolution and led various forms of popular resistance against the regime. By early 2012, there were approximately 400 different tansiqiyyat in Syria, for example, despite intense repression from regime security forces. On top of this, Syrian revolutionaries would later endure the authoritarianism of various religious fundamentalist forces (like IS, Al-Qaida, Jaysh al-Islam and Ahrar al-Sham), which enjoyed wide expansion across the country and attempted to co-opt the revolution or crush its democratic and inclusive message.

Activists also established popular organizations and put together democratic, social, educational, and cultural activities. Local radio stations and newspapers sprang up. Many campaigns opposing both the regime and Islamic fundamentalist forces emerged. All the while, activists and grassroots organizations strove to deliver an inclusive message against sectarianism and racism. These

organizers challenged some armed groups' authoritarian practices and opposed Islamic fundamentalism.

Tragically, each defeat of the democratic resistance strengthened and benefited the Islamic fundamentalist forces on the ground. The rise of Islamic fundamentalist movements and their dominations on the military scene in some regions was negative for the revolution, as they did not share its objectives (democracy, social justice and equality).

These movements not only acted as a repellent for the far majority of religious and ethnic minorities, and women with their sectarian and reactionary discourses and behaviors, but also to sections of Arab Sunni populations in some liberated areas where we have seen demonstrations against them, more especially to large sections of the middle class in Damascus and Aleppo. They attacked and continue to do so the democratic activists, while they often tried to impose their authority on the institutions developed by locals in areas liberated from the region, bringing often resistance from local populations against their authoritarian behaviors.

As I understand it, the Syrian revolution established democratically elected councils to run public services and provide water, food, education and health-care in the areas under rebel control. How do these councils relate to the armed struggle?

By the end of 2011 and toward the beginning of 2012, regime forces started to withdraw, or were expelled, by opposition armed groups from an increasing number of regions across Syria. In the void they left behind, grassroots organizations began to evolve, essentially forming ad-hoc local governments.

On many occasions, popular and local coordination committee activists were the main nuclei of the local councils. In some regions liberated from the regime, civil administrations were also established to make up for the absence of the state and take charge of its duties in various fields, like

schools, hospitals, water systems, electricity, communications, welcoming internally displaced persons, cleaning the streets, taking the garbage away from the city center, agricultural projects, and many other initiatives.

Local councils were either elected or established on consensus. In addition, some local councils encouraged campaigns of activists around democratic, artistic, educational, and health-related issues. It is important to note that many popular youth organizations were established throughout the country, as well free media outlets such as newspapers and radios.

These local councils represent democratic alternatives in Syria, free from the regime and reactionary movements, which is precisely why the areas in which they operate are often the most targeted by the regime and its allies. At the same time, this does not mean that problems and contradictions did not exist in some Local Councils, such a lack of women's participation or a lack of representatives from minority communities. Still, it was impossible to ignore the way that popular power flourished in even dire conditions.

However, all the cities and neighborhoods in which there was a popular, democratic, and inclusive alternative were targeted, such as Eastern Aleppo or the city of Daraya in the province of Damascus. They are in fact still being targeted along with the civilian infrastructures on which these experiences are based. Between March 2011 and June 2016, 382 medical facilities were attacked, killing more than 700 medical workers. Assad and Putin are responsible for 90 percent of these assaults. They have also bombed other civilian institutions, including humanitarian workers, as well as bakeries, schools, and factories.

It is estimated that around more than 250 valid local councils in the opposition-held areas are still operating. In mid January 2017, elections were held for the first time in Idlib to elect a civilian council of 25 representatives to manage their city,

nearly two years after it was overrun captured by an armed coalition called Army of the Conquest (Jaysh al-Fateh), led by Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham. Until then, it was a committee appointed by the Army of Conquest that had run the city's affairs.

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

The relation of local councils with armed opposition groups depended from the equilibrium of forces between these two and if the opposition armed groups had a good relation with local civilians. This said, often problems occurred between these two entities, while at the same time some relations were models to follow such as Darayya before it was recaptured by the regime in 2016 and its population displaced.

In the town of Darayya, the FSA factions were under the direct authority of the Local Council and any military operation had to be coordinated with it. The city also disposed of only one financial treasury, which managed the donations and financial assistance given to the city. The local council was in charge of distributing the funds, which were allocated to various services such as the support of the FSA factions, relief and humanitarian operations and the distribution of daily aid to the besieged population in the city. The Local Council also ordered them to avoid any kind of human rights violations and any extremist sectarian discourse or behavior.

Source Souciant.