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What lies behind the blockade of Qatar?

30 June 2017, by **Gilbert Achcar**

GA I interpret this as the coup de grace of what I have called the "relapse of the Arab uprising", which began in 2013. Since then, it has returned to a phase of counter-revolutionary ebb on a regional scale. This has taken the form of a marginalization of the progressives and of the domination of the political scene by the confrontation between the supporters of the former regimes and the Islamic fundamentalist alternative.

Both of these two counter-revolutionary poles, each of them opposed to the true aspirations of the "Arab Spring" of 2011, have supporters in the Gulf monarchies. The Saudi kingdom, faithful to its historical role as a reactionary bastion, defended the old regimes with two exceptions: Libya, where they remained neutral and did not participate in the NATO bombing, without however supporting Gaddafi, with whom they were frequently in conflict; and then Syria, because the

Assad regime is closely allied to Iran. As for Qatar, which has sponsored the Muslim Brotherhood since the 1990s, the Arab uprising was a godsend, enabling its emir to assert his role in the eyes of Washington and play the card of getting the regional uprising under control by means of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The two options were therefore antithetical. We saw it from the very beginning, during the Tunisian uprising. Qatar, with its channel Al Jazeera, supported the uprising, especially the Ennahdha movement linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, while the Saudi kingdom offered asylum to the dictator. Today, the ongoing offensive aims to stop Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood, to put an end to the role of troublemaker that Al Jazeera has played since its creation in 1996, insofar as it welcomes oppositionists from various countries, which is not to the taste of the Saudis. This is not to say that Qatar is "revolutionary", of course, but

it is the option of accompanying the uprising to gain control over it by means of the Muslim Brotherhood which is under attack. The Saudi kingdom wants to give it the coup de grace to the advantage of the option of defending the old regime.

YL: What relationship is there with the recent visit to Riyadh of Donald Trump, who first attacked Qatar, before advocating the "unity" of the member countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)?

GA What really tipped the situation, in fact, is the change in Washington. The Obama administration appreciated the opportunity of playing both sides and benefiting from the option of the Muslim Brotherhood taking control. That is why there was a chill in relations between this administration and General Sissi in Egypt when he carried out his coup d'état in 2013. Trump, on the contrary, counts among his advisers Islamophobes who want

today to classify the Muslim Brotherhood as "terrorist"; they thus find themselves on the same line as the United Arab Emirates, who are pushing in the same direction. The Saudis, under their new king, initially wanted to unite the Sunnis against Iran, and this included the Muslim Brotherhood. In Yemen, a broad front has been formed comprising the Saudis, the Qataris and the local Muslim Brotherhood, against the Houthis and the president who was deposed in 2011.

This was shattered by the change in Washington. Trump has no sympathy for democratic upsurges, as his predecessor might have had, however limited his sympathy may have been. He counts among his advisors hard-line Islamophobes, supporters of defining the Muslim Brotherhood as a "terrorist organization". They have worked with the Emirates, who have been fiercely hostile to the Muslim Brotherhood for years. With the blessing of Trump, this has led to the blockade of Qatar that we are witnessing.

YL: Is this about-turn of the Sunni oil monarchies - Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) - aimed at Iran, which itself has been the target of attacks claimed by the Islamic State ?

GA For the Saudis, the number one enemy is of course Iran. In the present conflict, Qatar has been accused of calling for dialogue with Iran. It would seem that there have been

manipulations of "false news" to project this image of Qatar. Qatar is very much committed to supporting the Syrian opposition, and is therefore in direct opposition to Iran, and so far has been taking part in the war in Yemen. However, it has just been excluded from the coalition that is bombing Yemen. The question of Iran is not the real reason for what is happening to Qatar. What is at stake is Qatar's role in regional politics, especially its support for the Muslim Brotherhood in tandem with Erdogan's Turkey, not with Iran. In this, Qatar is the black sheep of the Gulf monarchies.

YL: While in Syria the battle of Rakka is taking place, in Iraq the battle of Mosul seems unending; what evolutions do we see in Daech and its branches, what are the relationships of forces?

GA It was clear from the beginning that the so-called Islamic State could not continue as a territorial entity. Daech's men seized the exceptional opportunity offered by a combination of factors to capture a vast territory, but it was unthinkable that they could control it over the long run. They took advantage of the moment when the United States had left Iraq and when the Sunni-Shiite religious tensions were at their height, as well as in Syria the Sunni-Alawi tensions.

Since then, the broad front of the opponents of Daech has been able to pull itself together and to take the

offensive. Daech is in the final phase of its existence as a so-called state. What slows down their current rout is the struggle between different parties to decide who will take over the territories previously occupied by Daech. On the Syrian side there is a race between the Syrian regime supported by Iran and the Kurdish forces supported by the United States. Similarly, there is a conflict between the Kurdish forces in Iraq and the government forces closely linked to Iran. These conflicts within the conflict among those who are fighting Daech is delaying the whole process.

YL: What is the link between this growing destabilization of the region and the resurgence of attacks in Afghanistan, Iran and London?

GA Daech today is a beast at bay. When we see the most recent London bombing, a van and assailants armed with kitchen knives, this underlines the limits of their means. They can still use explosives, as in the Manchester bombing, but they mainly rely on rudimentary means, which can be terribly murderous but at the same time show the limits of what they can do. Unfortunately, they still find enough weak minds to embark in murderous follies by exploiting the resentment created by the experience of social marginality and racism in everyday life.

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One-Half Cheer for Trump on the Climate?

29 June 2017, by **Against the Current**

To be absolutely clear, we are not adopting a stance of "the worse the better." Not at all. What socialists and all environmentalists actually want is a U.S. government committed to implementing the inadequate Paris accord, and rapidly surpassing it. It is inadequate, as briefly outlined below — at best an international agreement

to begin addressing a climate-change crisis that threatens human civilization. But the kind of U.S. commitment that the situation demands wasn't on Trump's desk, or anywhere near his brain.

In announcing U.S. withdrawal, Trump overrode the pleas of his main

corporate advisors, including many fossil fuel executives and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who argued that "keeping a seat at the table" would enable Washington to obstruct, slow down and sabotage any part of the Paris accord that it deemed damaging to "our economic interests."

Indeed, as negotiated under president Obama's leadership, the climate accord allowed each country to set its own voluntary carbon-reduction targets, which could be watered down at will. What was to be gained from pulling out, aside from Steve Bannon's appeal to Trump's hardcore nationalist supporters, the megabucks pumped in by the Koch brothers, and the applause of coal-country voters who bought Trump's lies about bringing back the miners' jobs?

Had Trump followed the stay-and-sabotage course, the result might have been a collective sigh of relief. Instead, four U.S. states - California, New York, Washington and Connecticut - close to 200 cities including the used-to-be coal and steel center Pittsburgh, and scores of academic institutions have been reaffirming their own commitments to the Paris targets.

China, India, Germany, the European Union and many national governments proclaimed that they're still in - wiping away the fear that U.S. withdrawal from Paris and from the commitment to fund emerging nations' carbon-reduction efforts would cause the entire accord to unravel. Arguably, in making the United States a climate-change pariah, Trump has succeeded in strengthening the global commitment to the accord and support for it in the U.S. population. So he may have struck at least a small blow for the environment.

Of course, the environmental movement can have no confidence that capitalist governments, which answer to their own ruling classes,

can or will make the urgent transition to a renewable-energy global economy work. Of course, Paris itself is inadequate.

Consider that climate scientists are almost unanimous that a two-degree Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) increase in global temperature over mid-19th century levels is the outer limit of what civilization is likely to survive; that a much safer goal is to hold global warming to 1.5 degrees C, and that very close to one degree C has already occurred. Now consider this: "Under the Paris deal, countries submitted voluntary pledges that, various analyses have found, would put the world on pace for three degrees [5.4 degrees F] of warming" — which is in catastrophic bordering on apocalyptic territory.

The hope must be that starting the global carbon-reduction process will create accelerating momentum that by mid-century could bring the two or 1.5 degree target within range. The justification for Paris is the gamble that it sets only the floor, not the ceiling, of a sustainability revolution that must be accomplished — through the combination of political will, technical innovation, investment in renewable energy, and above all profound changes in social relations and our collective understanding of how to live full and meaningful lives.

Donald Trump, on the other hand, looks to the most advanced technology - of the 19th century— when coal fueled the industrial transformation of human life. His blustering pronouncements that Barack Obama's policies waged a "war on coal" has

only one, unintentional, element of truth. What's killed off an already declining U.S. coal industry isn't really regulation, but the spectacular growth of natural gas and shale oil production, primarily through hydraulic fracturing (fracking) during the Obama administration.

In 2012 alone, this technology produced 280 billion gallons of wastewater in ten U.S. states (see the extensive report "[Fracking by the Numbers](#)." In a strange dialectical quest, the dirtiest fossil-fuel industry has effectively been supplanted by a technology that is itself destructive, a massive threat to clean water supplies and the global environment, and must be replaced as rapidly as possible.

But the fear and loathing created by Trump's sneering withdrawal from the climate accord - instead of staying to kill it from within - may have moved the needle in an important positive direction. For the first time, mainstream media are picking up what experts and environmentalists have said for years, that a transition away from fossil fuels will create more and better jobs than those lost, and that rural and coal-country America will share the benefits. — along with those many nations whose physical existence depends on ending capital's war on nature.

In the end, if civilization survives and future historians exist to tell the tale, they might offer up a muffled half-cheer for Donald Trump, for helping to bring the world face to face with its real condition.

June 22 2017

The Marawi Siege and the Declaration of Martial Law in Mindanao (Part 2)

28 June 2017, by Raymund de Silva

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) has already thrown all its available resources, military

hardwares and air assets into the battle with the extremists for the control of Marawi. This includes

putting into action once again the SF 260 fighter/bomber which were suspended earlier because they had

unleashed a “friendly” bomb killing and wounding their own soldiers (10 deads and 7 wounded). Almost everyday aerial bombings and artillery shelling have rained the City sparing no one and hitting everything resulting to the continuous burning of buildings. AFP’s reinforcements coming from the different parts of the country are seen almost everyday.

But to date, the Jihadists have repelled this sustained push by the AFP to retake the City using all available resources and tactics at their disposal like the skilled snipers, rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) to knock out and immobilize the armoured vehicles of the AFP. The extremists have also used skillfully their numerous high velocity assault weapons in the close quarter combat urban warfare.

On the other hand, the AFP have learned fast to counter the deadly and destructive effects of the RPGs by rigging wooden panels or soft materials like putting up back packs around the armoured plate of their vehicles to soften the impact of the RPGs.

It should be noted that both (AFP and the Jihadists) are not really experienced in urban warfare. The government security sector has been oriented and trained mainly in conventional warfare in which the setting is almost always in the rural areas while the extremists have similar weakness but they use to their advantage their familiarity of the city including the location of buildings and the streets to outmaneuver the AFP in this very brutal urban warfare. The close quarter combat has been done in every area, street, building and every room to wrest and assert control over these quarters from each other.

Meanwhile, the civilians who are still trapped in the city are facing serious problems. With almost non-stop fighting and intense bombings they have limited options. Either they die inside the house while hiding for a month because of hunger or they die getting out from the snipers of both AFP and the extremists to quench their thirst for freedom.

Based on the accounts of the

survivors, they had to hide in the house cellars during the day so the Jihadists would not find them but their problem was how to survive the intense artillery shelling and the massive aerial bombings which usually start very early in the morning.

The survivors would sometimes dress in black like the Maute/Abu Sayyaf in order to find any available food left behind by the residents.

Accordingly, they are happy if the places they were hiding happened to be near the grocery stores because they could avoid hunger while supplies last. Their problem would be their supply of water. It would be their lucky day if it rained, otherwise they would have to navigate their way around the debris and decomposing human cadavers to get the much needed water.

But what made them survive from these seemingly unsurmountable ordeals was their very creative way of communicating to their loved ones. Many of these survivors had used the solar powered panel to charge their cellphone batteries and maintained their sanity and helped them to understand their self worth and their reason to continue living by communicating with their loved ones. These human connections and commitments had to be renewed everyday. Their reason for living helped them a lot to bear almost anyhow in these most difficult and trying situations that they had found themselves in.

Such conditions can help people in the outside or those safe from Marawi’s rampage to know the reasons of a group of Christian workers who had decided to escape and leave behind their co-worker with his seven month pregnant wife so they could give to the two their little remaining food to last them for a few more days. This would be their first child so their co-workers who made the successful escape believed that the thought of having their first born would be reason enough to make them cherish this new hope and survive in whatever it would take and lead them in spite of the fact that they were just hiding below the Maute’s sniper’s nest.

Situations and cases like these have made doctors and psychotherapists appreciate the resilience of such people who spent weeks surviving in a conflict zone and witnessing horrific violence around them.

Last June 16, 2017, eleven nameless victims (7 men, 3 women and 1 girl) who died in the first few days of the Marawi’s siege were buried in a cemetery in Iligan City. They were among the 20 other victims who were brought to a funeral home in Iligan City. Only 9 bodies were identified and were claimed by their relatives. The other 11 victims had remained unidentified and no relatives had come to claim them. They might be Christian or Muslims but nobody knew. It has surely manifested a fact that they are more civilians who were killed in the Marawi attacks and counter attacks than the almost unchanged figure of civilian casualties presented by the security sector and re-echoed by the mainstream media.

But who cares about these unknown and nameless entity of Christian workers who have gone to Marawi to work for their living. Not a few young men and women from the different municipalities of Lanao del Norte had come to the city of Marawi to find employment in the business establishments as well as in the residences of the Marawi elites. Hundreds of them have not been accounted for and those few who have been “rescued” or have done a daring escape on their own would say that it was the extremists who had been in control over those places they had been hiding. They could see them patrolling openly on the streets near the places that the survivors were hiding.

There is indeed a big gap in presenting objective and accurate figures of the situation on the ground with the media (broadcast, print and television) almost repeating the figures and the messages which the security sector or their spokespersons want them to communicate to the world. They are not just embedded in the army or the government’s command center but they also become virtual spokespersons of the latter. In most cases, when the media talk to the civilians who had escaped or rescued

it was always after the so-called debriefings of the security sector or the intelligence operators where strict instructions given to the victims or survivors to limit the information to the media.

This could be the reason/s behind the “no question asked” by the media when the deadlines set or fixed by the AFP to finish the extremists and their rampage of the city had lapsed three times. The media do not simply have other means and ways to counter check and validate the information given by the security sector.

It is important to note, that the armed built up and the muscle flexing of the Maute Jihadists have started since last year specifically in the Butig siege and the Piagapo armed encounters between the AFP and the extremists. In fact, earlier on (in August 2016) there was big arrest of 8 Maute militants who were bringing a large quantity of explosives near the municipality of Butig but no follow up was done. Interesting personalities were involved here including a brother of the Mayor in a neighboring municipality of the province of Lanao del Norte. In depth investigation of this particular case could have opened a Pandora's box on the intention of the extremists.

The reports that was given by the tri-media had been that the Maute and the Abu Sayyaf groups were almost annihilated and were pushed into the mountains. The information is almost always coming from the security sector's spokesperson. In addition it was reported that Isnilon Hapilon was seriously wounded in these encounters and air strikes. But in the video shown by the security sector in the early stage of the Marawi rampage, Isnilon was shown together with the Maute brothers presiding over the planning to seize the Islamic City.

This kind of reporting has shown a serious gap in the appreciation of real and objective data or information about the Jihadists movements and their activities. And only real and deep intelligent works could have analyzed these information; identifying and separating propaganda from the objective facts. Preparation and appropriate actions should be based

on or guided by these validated facts.

This made not a few people to think that when the Maute had declared in the last quarter of last year to take over Marawi and burn it and President Duterte dared them to do it and said that he (President) would declare martial law could be a well thought decision by the latter. But nobody had made a profound analysis of the signs at the time and what was behind in the Presidential statement.

The unfolding events after the warning of the President would strongly lead to a disaster waiting to happen in Marawi. The intelligence works of the security sector in the area could hardly manifest that some activities by extremists leading to the take over of the city were detected. They have failed miserably.

In fact, there were obvious signs that the Maute group had made their moves in the first quarter of this year as shown by the information gathered by the security sector when it raided an apartment occupied by the Maute's relatives in the campus of the Mindanao State University (MSU). There was also the information that the President himself had announced in his speeches in the last few days that some politicians had connived with the Maute Jihadists to bring in weapons and stockpile them in Marawi before the siege.

The politicians that the President was referring must be the former Mayor of Marawi and his brother who lost in last year's election for the Mayorship of Marawi but both were met by the President in the last part of the 1st quarter of this year. What had happened in this special meeting in Davao City? Surely, they were not arrested during the meeting and yet their names are on the wanted list when martial law was declared in Mindanao.

And lately, the security sector and its spokespersons were telling the country through the media that they had early knowledge about the military training of the extremists including the participation of children and the planning of the Marawi takeover where no other than Isnilon Hapilon and the Maute brothers were

seen in a video actively participating.

This vital information from the intelligence community must be the basis for the declaration of martial law in order to avoid civil war in Mindanao and secure the interest of the public. In fact the draft for Presidential Decree 216 must have already been prepared before the President and all his key security and defense officials went for a state visit in Moscow.

One has to take into account that the PD 216 was declared at 10pm on May 23, 2017, just few hours after the Maute and Abu Sayyaf groups have rampaged the city of Marawi, after the failed joint military and police operation to arrest Isnilon Hapilon. So it must be the events before May 23, 2017 that President based his declaration of martial law in Mindanao.

If one takes the above-mentioned points into account, then the following questions are wanting to be answered; why did the President and his security sector allow these fanatic Jihadists to continue their stockpiling of arms and making logistical and technical preparation for the siege? Why was the 103rd Brigade of the 1st Infantry “Tabak” Division not reinforced and in fact continue to do its business as usual like allowing vacation and leave of its officers and the rank and file?

Why did the Brigade have a change of command just before the Marawi siege? Why did the PNP provincial command not make some preemptive actions? Why did the Local Government Units not act against the unusual activities by religious extremists in the city and neighboring municipalities? Why did the MSU administration as well as other educational and Islamic institutions not do something when the Mautes were openly campaigning and recruiting students and teachers to their Jihadist plan in their campuses as well as in social media?

The answers and the attention given to the questions would have prevented the declaration of martial law in Mindanao. They could have saved Marawi from ruin and into deep crises it has suffered now. They could have prevented the dislocation and

destruction of the city's population and their homes and livelihood.

Or is it a case of the intelligence community having the correct data and information but miserably failing to appreciate them as correctly mentioned by Secretary of Defense Delfin Lorenzana?

There must be other reasons for the President to immediately declare martial law in Mindanao and possibly other parts of the country later. The Marawi is a necessary collateral damage in a bigger and complex picture of a new development paradigm in an undemocratic framework.

Building by Destroying

In the interview (the only interview) of a Marawi based broadcast journalist to the Maute spokesperson Abu Hafs few days after the extremists took over the city, the journalist asked the spokesperson about the Islamists' reasons in taking over the city. The candid answer of Abu Hafs was to forcibly implement Sharia Law in the Islamic City of Marawi. Furthermore, the spokesperson had emphasized that they wanted the people of the city to sacrifice their lives and properties for the total implementation of Sharia Law. In addition, Abu Hafs said that these sacrifices are nothing compared to the favor Allah (SWT) will give them soon.

The danger of distorted understanding of a religion which is founded on peace can inflict serious destruction both spiritually and physically to people who are deprived of their inherent right to decide for their lives and future. For the fanatics there is no room for people who do not follow their literal interpretation and obedience to Sharia Law. For these extremists the kafirs (unbelievers-Christians) do not have the right to share the world with them.

At this point, one cannot help but be reminded about the present government's campaign against illegal drugs. The drug users are mainly seen not as victims but undesirable

elements of society and should be eliminated in whatever forms and means in order to save the nation especially the young people from perdition.

There is no room for healing, dialogue and understanding of other faiths and their predicament. It is as if saying that their destruction (killing and elimination) will be the basis for building a nation. Or in the case of the fanatical Maute's belief that true Muslims can only enjoy in the afterlife not in this world of human beings who share the natural resources with all other living things.

Furthermore, one easily compare the logic behind the declaration of martial law in Mindanao. Democracy cannot be saved by destroying it even if it is expressed in the most beautiful way. Public safety can be achieved by securing and promoting the environment for the promotion and attaining all sided development of the public's well-being.

Marawi cannot be saved and rebuilt without its people's well-being as its paramount objective. And this can only be done with people's active participation in all the stages of its rebuilding and strengthening. The Marawi's siege and the declaration of martial law should not be a cover up of the failure of the security sector to ensure public safety as well as the obvious failure of the illegal drug campaign of the government. Securing the well being of the people shall be doing concrete actions to resolve the causes of the proliferation of illegal drugs like poverty and social inequities.

One should take into account that while the Maute and Abu Sayyaf are doing their rampage in Marawi, illegal drug related killings have intensified in other parts of the country. Everybody is made to understand and witness the events of the connivance of drug lords and the extremists and terrorist groups in the burning and ruining of Marawi City. One should not be surprised that the government's answer to this phenomenon in other parts of the country is martial law.

Solidarity Amidst Conflicts

Extraordinary solidarity from below is developing but has been overshadowed by big events of the offensives and counter-offensives by the extremists and the security sector of the Philippine government in Marawi City.

Not a few instances, one could witness the protection of the Moro civilians and employers of their Christian workers against the threats of the Jihadists. The Moro Muslims have shown their willingness to lay down their lives first if the Mautes would kill their Christian workers. In several cases the Christian men were made to dress like the Muslim Maranao and the Christian women were made to put on hijab to facilitate their safe escape.

Both the Moro and Christian would help each other to survive while they were trapped in the buildings in the city against the artillery shells and aerial bombings of the AFP and the Maute's sniper fires. The Muslims would not escape because the extremists might kill the Christians if they would be left behind.

On the other hand, it is mostly Christian humanitarian volunteers who went out their way in Iligan City and the neighboring places to help the Moro Internally Displaced Person (IDPs) to help lessen their burden both physically and psychologically to survive during these trying times.

This kind of solidarity developing from below must have been the reasons that the intrigues and the biases between the Moros and Christians that some sectors would want to revive could not simply succeed.

It is as if the Marawi crises have created new opportunities for an interfaith solidarity to be strengthened. That those decades of peaceful co-existing in Marawi and freely practicing and professing their faith have been put into test but the Moro/Muslim majority and the Christian minority in the city have weathered them and further tempered

their solidarity.

It is this type of heroism by ordinary people which is given less projection in the media. One could not describe for instance the feeling of seeing ordinary Christian humanitarian volunteers giving relief food and non-food items to both the rich and the poor Moro/Muslim IDPs. One of the results of the current human made disaster like the Marawi crises is that it becomes social equalizer. One can oftentimes see the rich and the poor mixing together transcending the social divide and their Maratabat (self-pride) to receive the help of Christian humanitarian volunteers.

Another reality brought about by this humanitarian crisis in Marawi is that the Moro/Maranaos do not stay in the evacuation centers. According to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) only 5% of the almost 350,000 IDPs can be found in the Evacuation Centers (ECs) and 95% of them stay in their relatives' houses. One can just imagine the almost heroic efforts of the Christian humanitarian volunteers to find and help those 95% of the IDPs in the private houses of the Moro/Muslim in the City like Iligan and the neighboring municipalities.

In addition, one can also find Christian religious institutions and congregations houses open up their doors as sanctuaries for those IDPs who have experienced human rights violations and would need special care and protection.

Furthermore, international humanitarian donors and solidarity groups have exerted tireless efforts to collect relief funds and goods to timely help Marawi's IDPs. Their show of utmost concern to the plight of the IDPs in Mindanao made them extend their solidarity and friendship to the IDPs and the peoples of Marawi and Mindanao.

This kind of solidarity from above is the best preventive action that can neutralize if not stop the hatred based solidarity of the ISIS to the Maute/Abu Sayyaf extremist to use religion to force other people to follow them.

The solidarity both from below and

from above (International solidarity) is the best answer to the International Jihadists' movement and divisive activities.

In two days from now, the Muslim world will celebrate the Eid al-Fitr or the official end of the month of Ramadan and of the month-long fasting of Muslims. The solidarity between the Moro/Muslim and the Christians will be further put into test. There are strong indications that the Moro/Muslim or the Maranaos will also end their inaction in what is happening to their city. The traditional as well as the civilian leaderships will try to do something to recover their own city and will not anymore let the security sector of the government alone to continue their countersiege to retake the city.

Either they will directly talk and negotiate (with or without the President's approval) with the fanatic extremists or they will do intra-tribal solution. They can always find all those related to the people involved in burning and ruining their city and then make them accountable - in a clannish framework of rido [vendetta].

The Christians can engage their Moro/Muslim brothers and sisters into intense dialogue and active peacebuilding. It can be done in the interfaith and dialogue frameworks and help in countering the Salafist/Jihadists ideology into building the communities based on trust and understanding. It can also be done in promoting a liberative religion which can only be holistic and inclusive. A belief that the liberation of persons is not only in the spiritual aspect but from economic deprivation, political isolation and cultural alienation as well.

It can also be done by spreading and living the message of Ramadan that is cleansing not only spiritually but also against self-centeredness and exclusivity in our different ethnic and multi-nationalities nation. That authentic religion can only be a free choice of everybody and that it (religion) cannot be the basis in building a nation.

Defending and strengthening a city or a nation is everybody's business not

only by the security sector much less by a President even if he is the most popular leader in the country.

Securing the interest of people and protecting its democratic institutions cannot and can never be done by eliminating people and destroying democracy by the few.

The Peace Process and Martial Law

When President Marcos declared martial law in the whole country in 1972, his main reason was to stop the rebellion by both the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). At that time, the MNLF had just started to build up their forces and their strength. They first tested them in 1974 of with famous battles at Jolo, Marawi and Upi. In Jolo alone, 20,000, both combatants and non-combatants, were killed and 40,000 residents were dislocated. The CPP was still in its early sub-stage of its strategic defensive when Marcos declared martial law.

When the dictator was ousted in 1986, 14 years after he declared martial law, the CPP could claim to have reached its strategic counter offensive in which in 1972 the CPP had only a few hundreds members and a few dozens of weapons in the New People's Army (NPA) but reached to 26,000 members of Red fighters and more than 30,000 full member of the CPP in 1986. The MNLF has not only developed into regular formations of its armed components but has even internationalized its struggle for the right to self-determination. It has been recognized by the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) then and Organization of Islamic Cooperation now as the only legitimate representative of the Moro people.

Both the CPP and MNLF have claimed that the martial law and the dictatorial manner of governance by President Marcos were their best recruiter.

Martial law at that time made no positive impact on the socio-economic lives of most of the country's population, in fact it worsened

peoples' lives.

President Marcos, the dictator, used full military means to confront the insurgency questions, but it ended up promoting and strengthening the insurgents' rank and file and their cause.

It will not be different with President Duterte's declaration of martial law. He can not definitely solve the socio-economic problem like the insurgency and rebellion by applying a purely military solution, even if the country is confronted seriously by the terrorists like the Maute and the Abu Sayyaf as in the case of Marawi City.

Other sectors and stakeholders should be involved in facing the terrorists' threats and managing rebellion.

Everybody should give and support more stress and attention in reaching political settlements with revolutionary groups and the Moro Liberation Fronts. The terrorists should never be allowed to make foothold and take roots in the rural and urban areas by effective and sustainable poverty alleviation programs and social services.

Peace Processes and peace negotiation should address the resolution of the root causes of the rebellion not only in the negotiating tables but more so on concrete steps done on the ground with the communities of peoples.

The form of the government like federation should be the result of a true and democratic consultation with all the stakeholders. It cannot be done under the framework of martial law.

Concrete political solutions to the root causes of the insurgency should be achieved in a full democratic framework. Martial law cannot provide the appropriate atmosphere in reaching a mutually-agreed solution.

It is important to take into account that the CPP has initiated tactical offensives outside and even in Mindanao. It should be obvious that the Party leadership is setting a trap for President Duterte to declare martial law as well in the whole country, just like what the Dictator Marcos did in 1972. The CPP knows that the Duterte administration will be drawn to make undemocratic moves and become more repressive in governing the country. This can create an intensification of contradictions of different groups and classes in the country pushing Duterte to become dictator and can be easily weakened and isolated.

President Duterte has also promised to approve and sign the current draft of the Bangsamoro Basic Law but its full implementation will be in the second half of his term as President. It will be in the context when the 1987 Philippine Constitution has been revised to fit the change of the form of the government into a federal one where the MILF will have its prominent role. But the President should make sure that the 17th Congress of both legislative houses will approve the draft BBL.

Under martial law, the Constitution will be revised and elections in 2019 will be held. But there will be substantial developments in the country two years from now. The coming Barangay elections should have been postponed in October of this year. The President will be appointing all the barangay officials in the country. In the case of Marawi and Lanao del Sur, the government will be virtually creating its own armed militias called Civilian Defense Force (CDF) composed of 13 appointed Barangay officials and 13 civilians.

There will be big infrastructure and economic projects in Mindanao as the

aid and loans coming from China or maybe Russia are coming in. In the framework of martial law, the government can easily hurdle the problems that it will encounter with regards to its new development paradigm.

And for the MILF it should be allowed to set up the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) to replace the current Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and prepare for a democratic elections in 2019.

Meanwhile the President should help provide the annual budget of the Bangsamoro Transition Commission (BTC) to enable it to perform its functions in preparation of setting up the BTA. It is important to note that since last year the President has not given the BTC its budget almost paralyzing its function.

The obvious fact today, is that the President wants to focus his attention and the strength of the AFP and PNP in ending the Marawi crises. The tactical offensives of the NPAs in Palawan, Iloilo, Samar and in Davao do not get the Presidents attention for now. The government cannot afford to spread thinly its very limited assets and resources. Opening another or several fronts will be a sure formula for a disaster.

The President has manifested the burden of growing old and facing a complicated and multi-faceted problems of the country is making a toll on his health. And since the President has shown to be a good student of history he will not want to prolong any longer the Martial Law in Mindanao or dare to declare it in the whole country. His current relationship with the US will not assure its help in flying him and his family safely out of the country. China and Russia are still too far away.

June 23, 2017

The Protests of June 12: Beginning Russia's

Cold Summer of 2017

27 June 2017, by **Ilya Budraitskis**

Anti-corruption protests took place in Moscow, Petersburg, Nizhniy Novgorod, Kaliningrad, Lipetsk, Tula, Vladivostok, Norilsk, Sochi, and other cities, a continuation of the high-profile protests of March 26, when people demanded Prime Minister Medvedev answer for his appalling wealth. But it wasn't as straightforward as that. In Moscow the rally was initially planned to take place on Prospect Sakharov, but was later split up by the decision of Aleksei Navalny, who was not satisfied with the amplification system (he couldn't find another, he said, because the authorities put pressure on providers who had agreed to rent out equipment). Clearly, what was at stake in this decision was not amplifying the sound but the tension with the authorities. Navalny himself was arrested and given a 30-day sentence. Indeed, the total numbers of arrests—750 in Moscow and in 900 in Petersburg alone suggest that escalation was indeed achieved. The protests were better organized than those that came before, and everywhere they encountered even stronger police resistance. In both cities, they took place against a backdrop of historical WWII-era decorations: field kitchens, Czech hedgehogs and costumed re-enactors added a touch of surrealism. Comrades from Moscow report below about what it was like there:

Aleksei Gaskarov:

I was asked to speak on Sakharov, and I was planning to talk about why it seems important to me to support the campaign against corruption despite differences in political viewpoints. Basically, I was going to say that we need to do this so that mass representation of dissent is necessary to stop a reaction, so that the elite wouldn't think that they can simply crush or neglect to notice anything that gets in their way. There is a common goal now—to restore political

freedom. Contradictions are secondary. Considering the scale of the actions across Russia, it all turned out pretty well. It's clear that people have stopped being afraid and that intimidation tactics no longer work. In Moscow the change from the rally in Sakharov Avenue to a walk in Tverskaya St. was absolutely called for given the behavior of the Kremlin. Everyone who wanted to avoid arrest had the opportunity to do so. There were missteps, but when viewed on the colossal scale of the confrontation, they will not seem meaningful.

Ilya Budraitskis:

Of course, today's events across the country can't not be welcomed: a new protest movement is rising up before our eyes, begun by the demonstrations of March 26. This protest today is inseparable from the presidential campaign of Aleksei Navalny, and is indebted to the campaign in its positive aspects as well as its increasingly obvious weak points. Despite the fact that the Navalny campaign could jump-start a wide movement from below, the campaign itself is in fact constructed as a vertical, personalist "political machine," in which decisions, proposals of a narrow group of experts and approvals by the leader are necessary for the rank-and-file. This kind of structure develops the political consciousness of the majority of participants only to the level that is necessary in each concrete moment of the campaign. The political strategy of the leader, his goals, the meaning of this or that tactical decision, are not up for discussion: Navalny is to be believed in the way one believes in the charismatic head of a corporation. The important thing, by this logic, is that he is personally honest and "has a plan." On the eve of the authorized Moscow meeting of June 12 the rank-and-file of Navalny's "political machine" discovered a new element of the plan—everyone had to go to an

unsanctioned action, which predictably ended with arrests and criminal charges on the already familiar model of the March 26 actions.

The organizers' logic is transparent—it is necessary to maintain the momentum of the campaign at all costs, to keep it the focus of public attention and to use the threat of disorder to pressure the Kremlin. More than that, this kind of radicalization of the information sphere drives the whole complex composition of Russian society to a simple scheme of resistance: the thieves in the Kremlin against the honest leader who unites the nation. In this narrative, any form of social self-organization, any social movements are secondary and insignificant, and their long-term interest in the final analysis consists only of whatever it might take to make Navalny president. However, even the most dedicated supporters of Navalny today should take a moment to think: will his campaign become weaker if space is made for internal criticism? Or would this instead create an opportunity for horizontal discussion of the campaign's political program and strategy, turning from a "political machine" directed by a few into a real coalition, where differences are not fatal and instead contribute to the process of agreeing on shared goals? [1]

Anna Ivanova:

"There's no Sakharov Avenue"—Navalny informed listeners in a morning video address. Navalny's close associate Leonid Volkov was somewhat more democratic: "There is a special circle of hell for the hypocritical scum who came up with the 'meeting of the opposition on Sakharov.'"

Yet there was a Sakharov Avenue after all. Those who came out to it were

mostly those opposed to the Moscow law on urban development—local activists and people living in homes that were to be demolished, as well as defrauded investors, those with hard-currency mortgages and other casualties of the construction sector. They came out, however, in somewhat fewer numbers than they had on May 14—even taking into account the fact that some of the indignant anti-development Muscovites were out with Navalny on Tverskaya. The protest ebbed and flowed, like the sea, and the mood was placid. These people were older women, families, old men—the kind of people who wouldn't show up to an unsanctioned protest. They understand that Moscow's problems are only one issue of the Russian political system, and they are not in a hurry to support Navalny and other registered members of the opposition—because what is at stake for them are not the

high ideals of civil freedom, but their homes and property.

At the same time on Tverskaya, young people were realizing that all cops are in fact bastards. In Moscow around 700 people were arrested, and even more photos of courageous protestors surrounded by shiny black helmets flooded social media. The full effects of the protest will be realized only after a while: if there will be new criminal proceedings, and if so, why. But everyone loves “riot porn” (both looking at it and taking part), though it's no less effective at dulling one's feelings than the regular kind. It is for exactly this reason that the protests “for everything good” are dangerous, concentrated around a few middling political goals or figures: not too fat, not too thin, not old but not young either, not socialist and not nationalist, but in general agreeable and better than what came before. In

this situation a protest risks turning into a social order unto itself where everything is decided by storm and pressure—not the worst prospect according to some, but a catastrophe according to others. But, like it or not, the proverbial “young Russian people, dreaming of revolution” are now demanding that “Dimon will answer” and hitting the streets.

Today in Moscow we saw two worlds, but they didn't collide. One, the world of mostly older people, whose property is being taken away and who think of politics as building an urban environment. The second, the world of brave youth (and their slightly older idols), set on regime change. If some kind of democratic politics is to emerge from all this, it would be best if these two worlds met and acted as one.

Source [LeftEast June 22, 2017](#).

Baghdad in France

26 June 2017, by **Gilbert Achcar**

After the annus horribilis that France experienced in 2015, marked by the January and November terror attacks, 2016 seemed to spread this bitter feeling across the globe. The European xenophobic right's post-Brexit jubilation, the bloody Bastille Day in Nice, which came with a new surge of Islamophobia, the election of the ultra-reactionary demagogue Donald Trump, Aleppo's martyrdom, Vladimir Putin's triumph: enough to make you wretch with the nightmarish feeling of living through a new version of last century's interwar years.

At the very outset of the present century, in the wake of the September 11 attacks, I wrote the first edition of this book. The diagnosis-prognosis that its title revealed can be summarized as follows: the conjunction of neoliberalism's devastating social effects and the United States' imperialist greed following its Cold War victory created

a fertile ground for a new release of the barbaric tendencies inherent to each cultural area, which were countered and repressed by the civilizational process during the first post-1945 decades. Instead of this progressive dialectic, a reactionary one was set in motion, in which opposing barbarisms reinforce each other and the violence of the strong stirs up the asymmetric violence of the weak.

During the fifteen years since then, this clash has only worsened. The Bush administration's rapacity let the barbarism of the American military go unchecked. It thus allowed Al Qaeda's brutality to root itself in Iraq and establish the precursor of the abominable “Islamic State.” In 2014, the latter managed to seize vast swathes of both Iraq and Syria in reaction to the barbarism of Bashar al-Assad and of regional forces manipulated by Iran.

Those fifteen years have also seen the emergence of a neo-czarist Russia led by Vladimir Putin, whose brutal, macho cynicism won him the admiration of the whole spectrum of populist and nationalist right-wing forces, from Silvio Berlusconi to Marine Le Pen, Donald Trump, François Fillon, Beppe Grillo, Nigel Farage, Viktor Orbán, Benjamin Netanyahu, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Rodrigo Duterte, and many others of the same ilk or worse. At the height of this global reaction, the United States, once the last resort against Nazism, elected the most unpredictable leader to seize the helm of a great power since Adolf Hitler. And if today, by an odd historic reversal, Angela Merkel's Germany represents “centrism” and “moderation” in world politics, it is unfortunately no match for the United States's swing to the far right, not to mention the precariousness of the situation in Germany itself.

Compared to this planetary lurch away from the *longue durée*'s civilizational process and the values it promoted — cosmopolitanism, political liberalism, feminism, antiracism, gender equality — how important is the terroristic barbarism deployed on behalf of a deadly, exclusivist interpretation of Islam that bears the name ISIS? From a historical perspective, ISIS will mainly appear as a formidable catalyst of opposed and stronger barbarisms. Its own barbarism will play straight man to the rise of a whole set of currents that belong to the political continuum's right, most of which feed off Islamophobia.

The Illusion of Micropower

ISIS's murderous gang represents, above all, a few thousand individuals' phantasmagoric reaction to the feeling of being crushed and oppressed, shared by various categories of Muslims: Sunni Iraqis exasperated by the Iran-controlled Shia sectarian government that the Americans bequeathed to them; Sunni Syrians infuriated by the extreme barbarism of the Assad clan, backed by Tehran and Moscow; young Tunisians and others disappointed by the abortion of the Arab uprising, who see ISIS's barbarism as an outlet for their frustration and a means to escape a daily life of unemployment and misery; young French, British, and other Europeans "of Muslim migrant descent," enraged by their experiences of social precarity aggravated by Islamophobic racism deeply rooted in the colonial legacy; young migrants from Muslim-majority countries who confront the same racism, which becomes more virulent the less its targets are "assimilated." All of them resent the United States, as well as France, Britain, and the other Western countries involved in the wars waged in the lands of Islam, whether in the Middle East or in Africa.

In the face of this colossal adversity, a fringe element takes the plunge. Subject to bullying by the state's representatives and frustrated that they cannot participate in the society

of overconsumption without resorting to theft and its associated risks, they hope to exchange their status as pariahs for the status of participants in an authoritarian regime that is all the more alluring because it is unbridled. (The other option they have for accessing a parcel of power is joining the police, whose actions are restricted in most states.) The illusion of micropower without limits fascinates even those who convert to Islam. The appeal of this turn to fundamentalism only grows for young males, thanks to the ideological legitimation it provides for uninhibited sexual domination, including the prospect of sexual enslavement, which ISIS dangles skillfully.

Others, looking for still more extreme adventures, succumb to the promise of achieving ecstasy by blowing themselves up. A fatal option that requires self-annihilation — and therefore unfailing determination — it attracts a far smaller number but enough to bring about spectacular massacres. Those who perform ISIS operations in Western countries have the same psychology as the one described in this book. The "ecstatic joy" of their murderous escape brings them an immediate satisfaction that adds to the prospect of an unlimited stay in paradise. This variant of Pascal's wager, shared by all those who go down the path of no return by joining one of the avatars of Islamic terrorism, carries more risk than the original: for these suicide bombers to swipe the stake not only would God have to exist, but that God would have to approve of their organization's peculiar, minority interpretation of the Islamic religion. Otherwise, they would be better off if there were neither a hereafter nor a last judgment.

To believe that entering paradise is the primary motivation of fundamentalist terrorism's recruits, rather than a side bet, is to confuse them with mystics or "fools of God," which, in their overwhelming majority, they are not. It also attributes more importance to the religious rationality of their commitment than it really has.

The same applies to all doctrines that are irrational from the standpoint of the *longue durée*'s humanistic

ideology. The reasoned appeal of Adolf Hitler's grotesque anti-Enlightenment ideology would have been very limited without the cult of hatred and the fascination with violence that he carefully nurtured and staged under historic and social circumstances conducive to political reaction.

ISIS has understood this perfectly: as all observers have emphasized, it has brought totalitarian propaganda to a new degree of sophistication in its macabre staging as well as in its production and diffusion of images. The cult of hatred and the fascination with violence play key roles in Islamic terrorism's recruitment strategy, whether in Muslim or in Western countries.

And yet, hatred and violence do not develop as if by spontaneous generation: they need aggravating circumstances. When they support a weak-to-strong strategy — a strategy of the oppressed against the oppressor (or more accurately, of a member of the oppressed category against a member of the oppressor category) — their intensity matches the sense of humiliation and injustice that underlies them. At its origin, Al Qaeda's barbarism stemmed directly from the encounter between the barbarism of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the obscurantist culture propagated by the Saudi kingdom and the Pakistani military dictatorship supported by the United States. The intense resentment created by the criminal embargo imposed on Iraq after the ravaging onslaught launched by the United States in 1991 fueled it, the American occupation of Iraq starting in 2003 further intensified it, and the extreme barbarism of the Syrian regime, backed by Iran and its auxiliaries, brought it to a climax.

Barbarism directly inspired by Al Qaeda and ISIS has raged in France in a spectacularly deadly way since January 2015. The relationship between this sad singularity and France's long and very brutal colonial history in Africa, followed by the social, political, and cultural consequences of decades of French exploitation of a cheap labor force that originates from the same continent, is as obvious as the relationship between

these same facts and the 2005 suburban riots. In a fleeting moment of political lucidity, from which he quickly recovered, then-prime minister Manuel Valls himself recognized the link between the attacks in Paris and the conditions of the people originating from African immigration, which he rightly described as “an ethnic, social, and political apartheid.”

This apartheid, aggravated by harassment from repressive apparatuses, constituted the ground on which ISIS and Al Qaeda successfully recruited volunteers. They had little difficulty convincing followers that France had declared war on “Islam” in light of the military adventures waged in Libya, Mali, Syria, and Yemen by François Hollande, who tried to offset his wimpy image by proving himself trigger happy. His remarkable readiness to shoot was narrowly linked to his achievements as a weapons dealer who presided over an impressive increase in French arms exports, a gunsmith willing to overlook the criminal records of his clients.

The New Reactionary Axis

It is still too early to take the full measure of the global landslide represented by Donald Trump’s victory in the US election. Let us note, however, that, when this preface was written “more than one month before his inauguration” Trump had already largely disabused people of the belief that he would act in a “presidential” fashion once elected “a surprising hope considering that it was by behaving in the opposite manner that he managed to get elected in the first place (admittedly, by only a minority of voters). Some commentators emphasized that, in 1933, many thought Hitler’s verbal delirium would give way to a more reasonable attitude after he donned the coat of chancellor of the Weimar Republic.

The German-Italian-Japanese axis that

formed in the 1930s was counterbalanced by the states that would found the United Nations in 1942: the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union. To be sure, the course of history is still far from being as tragic as World War II, but the prospects are quite worrying. This time, the reactionary axis in the making includes the United States and Russia, the two major military powers, while a strong rightist wind is blowing over Europe and Japan.

Fortunately, no third world war is looming on the horizon, but that is because the configuration of the global confrontation has changed. This shift is apparent in Trump’s rants against Mexico, China, and downtrodden Muslims. The new reactionary axis seems disinclined to engage in a North-North clash or even in a “clash of civilizations,” in which religion would be the principal fault line, preferring war between North and South, between rich and poor. This will only escalate the clash of barbarisms that we have become familiar with since the turn of the century.

Over this somber horizon, a ray of hope nonetheless shines. The 2016 American election’s most surprising element was not Donald Trump, whose rise continued the Republican slide toward the ultra-reactionary right, which began with Ronald Reagan and his “conservative revolution” “a designation first used by the political current that preceded Nazism in Weimar Germany” gained power during George W. Bush’s presidency, found itself outflanked by the Tea Party insurgency, and reached its climax in the fierce and racist opposition to Barack Obama.

But nothing, on the other hand, had permitted us to imagine that a man who openly calls himself a socialist would excite millions of Americans, mostly young, and would only narrowly lose the Democratic primary against the party’s establishment. Add to this the polls that gave this man, Bernie Sanders, a better chance of winning in a duel with Trump than his

Democratic rival, Hillary Clinton.

This is because the radicalization provoked by neoliberalism’s ravages does not occur exclusively on the Right. Indeed, it takes the shape of a polarization between right and left, as it did in the interwar years, albeit in a very different form today.

Several recent events bear witness to this: the Arab uprising of 2011, which, despite the formidable setback it has experienced since 2013, nevertheless revealed an enormous progressive potential, especially among young people, that continues to manifest itself intermittently, as in the social movement that started in Morocco in the fall of 2016; the surge of left-wing movements in southern Europe; and the remarkable ascension of Jeremy Corbyn, a man of the radical left riding a wave that swelled the UK Labour Party’s ranks from two hundred thousand to half a million members. Even in France, where the political conditions seemed to predict a second-round presidential election pitting the hard right against the far right, 2016 saw a remarkable mobilization against the labor law enacted by the government of Manuel Valls, who, by aspiring to be the French Tony Blair, only managed to prepare the ground for an admirer of Margaret Thatcher: François Fillon.

The first edition of this book underlined the idea that “the struggle against neoliberal globalization” born in the last years of the dying twentieth century, and growing rapidly among the new generation on the verge of the twenty-first century “is our best hope for defeating the wave of reaction” fueled by the global crisis and our best hope for thwarting an upsurge in the clash of barbarisms that it forebodes. Fifteen years later, it is even clearer that the ongoing accumulation of catastrophes can only be interrupted by a change in the balance of social and political forces that could shift the socioeconomic paradigm at the global level and finally bring the ravages of neoliberalism to an end.

Source [Jacobin](#).

Scottish Independence on Hold

25 June 2017, by **David Broder**

Coming the day after [the Scottish independence referendum](#), September 19, 2014, was a rather different election hangover from June 9, 2017. Three years ago, the young and forgotten used a lively campaign to lay their own claim to Scotland's future, investing their hopes in the promise of [a new democracy](#).

The historically high turnout â€” only one in seven Scots abstained â€” reflected the urgency of the dreams riding on the referendum. Yet ultimately, a slim majority voted to keep the country in the United Kingdom.

The vitality of 2014's "Yes" movement, rising in a few months from below 30 percent in the polls to an eventual 45 percent, owed to a diverse array of local groups and autonomous voices. Among these, [Women for Independence](#), [Common Weal](#), and the [Radical Independence Campaign](#) were but the most prominent.

Without their activism, it would have been an entirely different contest. Yet the very fact that the referendum took place owed above all to the [Scottish National Party \(SNP\)](#), and in particular its long-time leader, [Alex Salmond](#).

The day after the 55 percent "No" vote to independence, Salmond announced his resignation as First Minister and SNP leader. He could be proud of having taken his party from the doldrums of the 1980s to a devolved Scottish Parliament and, since 2007, an SNP government in Scotland. Reflecting on the defeat of the "Yes" campaign, he [echoed](#) Ted Kennedy with his defiant promise: "The Dream Shall Never Die."

The Scottish independence movement did indeed continue after the referendum, and the SNP itself reached historic highs in the [2015 general election](#), winning fifty-six of

fifty-nine seats, and a fresh mandate at the [2016 Scottish Parliament election](#). In March 2017, new SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon announced her intention to organize another independence vote.

Yet Salmond's defeat in his Gordon constituency in Thursday's general election symbolized wider difficulties for Scotland's biggest party. Political predictions are risky when the United Kingdom is so unstable; the question is whether the SNP can navigate a course through the crisis.

Electoral Rise

Without doubt, Alex Salmond was â€” and is â€” divisive. He is also a hated figure, often caricatured in the press, particularly (but not only) in London. In the 2015 election, the Conservative campaign strongly foregrounded the idea that a Labour-led coalition under [Ed Miliband](#) would be held hostage by the Scottish Nationalists: one Tory poster showed Miliband in the SNP leader's pocket.

But this was also a backhanded compliment to Salmond's strength as a leader, and indeed the other sense in which he is "divisive." For Salmond's greatest achievement was that he drew new dividing lines in Scottish politics.

While in the 1950s, the Conservative-linked (but separate) Unionist Party represented a strong right in Scotland, and in subsequent decades a country representing under ten percent of the UK population had little impact on general election results, this changed beginning in the 1990s. As both a Westminster MP and Scottish leader, Salmond was instrumental in establishing unionism versus independence as a central basis of political identification in Scotland.

This was also linked to the hollowing-out of Scottish Labour, which had held a large majority of seats during the Thatcher and Major governments of 1979 to 1997; today, it is only the third-largest party in Scotland, behind the Tories, the strongest anti-independence force.

Indeed, the SNP has not always enjoyed a dominant position in Scotland. Before the creation of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, it had never secured more than eleven Westminster seats (one sixth of Scotland's total).

Labour minister George Robertson famously promised that Tony Blair's creation of a devolved assembly in Edinburgh would "kill nationalism stone dead," satisfying the demand for national autonomy. Yet this parliament in fact provided a platform from which the SNP could build itself as a party of Scottish government, even while in permanent opposition to UK administrations.

This was the strategy advocated by Alex Salmond, an SNP MP since 1987, who became its leader in 1990 at just thirty-five years old. Although in the early days of the Thatcher government, he was a leading figure in the republican-socialist "79 Group" â€” and was thus briefly expelled from the SNP in 1982 â€” Salmond became head of a gradualist tendency, which unlike SNP "fundamentalists" advocated intermediate steps toward self-government within the UK.

2007 saw the surprise formation of an SNP minority government at Edinburgh's previously Labour/Liberal Democrat-dominated Holyrood parliament, and Salmond's party won a majority of seats 2011, despite a semi-proportional voting system designed to favor coalitions.

The SNP's advance also reshaped Scottish politics more broadly. With

Salmond's 2007 breakthrough, the "Scottish Executive" was renamed the more powerful-sounding "Scottish Government," its First Minister now a national leader rather than a regional Labour officeholder.

Other parties began to speak more forcefully of "Scotland's interests" and to at least feign greater autonomy from their respective UK parties. Hapless Scottish Labour leader Jim Murphy even added the word "patriotic" to his party's constitution, peppering his speeches with football metaphors to try to claim back some identitarian territory from the SNP.

Far from historic Labour claims that the once rurally based and Protestant-centered SNP were mere "Tartan Tories," Salmond repositioned the party as a broad church whose demand for the return of Scottish oil revenue (among various other investment policies) could also fund progressive social measures.

At one time invoking Ireland as an example of a successful small country and its economy, after the low-regulation, low-tax Dublin government's disastrous experience of the 2008 financial crisis, Salmond abandoned this toxic comparison to the "Celtic Tiger."

While the Tory destruction of Scottish industry in the 1980s had galvanized a strong Labour vote, the 1990s saw the brief emergence of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), whose leader Tommy Sheridan played a key role in resistance to the Poll Tax. The mass non-payment campaign in Scotland (and in England after it was also introduced there) had helped force Thatcher from office, and this set the stage for a radical left presence in the Scottish Parliament from 1999 onward.

The SSP's self-destruction in the mid-2000s, however, allowed the SNP to Hoover up working-class support and contain the opposition from other pro-independence forces. With Labour growing distant from its historic base, the SNP could portray itself as a bulwark against the running down of the welfare state.

In office in Edinburgh starting in

2007, the SNP pointed to its flagship free education policy and measures to thwart the Tory "bedroom tax" (benefit cuts for those with supposedly "unoccupied" rooms) as evidence that Scotland could follow a different course. While Salmond's SNP was always a pro-business party interested only in electoral politics, it projected a strong progressive image. Its sometimes-sharp opposition to Tony Blair's foreign policy particularly focused this agenda.

While during John Swinney's brief stint as leader, the SNP backed the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, Salmond criticised the NATO intervention in Yugoslavia as "an unpardonable folly" and became among the most dogged opponents of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, calling for Blair's impeachment. The party also opposes the UK government's Trident nuclear weapons program, located close to Glasgow.

Having secured a Holyrood parliamentary majority in 2011, the SNP was finally able to legislate for a referendum on independence (David Cameron having conceded this prerogative), bringing Salmond's gradualist strategy to fruition. Unlike the assortment of local councilors and old hands offered Scottish Labour jobs in Edinburgh (the supposed "talent" went to Westminster), the SNP created an effective leadership team in the Scottish capital.

It had been able to rule effectively even as it opposed London governments' austerity policy and the tightening of the budget it received from UK-wide taxation. With a Tory/Lib-Dem coalition in power in London, Salmond sought a mandate to pursue his government at the head of an independent Scottish state.

Reflecting Salmond's typical strategy, the SNP government's independence White Paper in 2014 sought to speak to a wide array of constituencies. Strongly focused on defense of public services from endless right-wing rule from Westminster, much of the campaign was centered on winning Labour voters to the "Yes" cause.

Yet the SNP also sought to present the independence vote in terms of

continuity, shoring up its significant chunk of middle-class support even as it made raids into territory Labour had taken for granted.

In this vein, Scotland would remain in NATO, but would get rid of nuclear weapons. It would keep the Queen, though there was some vague talk of a future institutional referendum. Rather more damagingly for Salmond's economic credibility, Scotland would be free of London's economic policy and yet continue to use the pound.

Social Attitudes Surveys showed that Scottish voters' policy views were similar to those of their English counterparts. The SNP, however, crafted an optimistic if rather nebulous vision of a progressive Scottishness, able to galvanize almost half the country.

This also provided a platform for a movement to emerge that was **far more radical** than the SNP's planned stage-managed campaign. Salmond's party was strong at its center, with its defining cause of independence giving it a unity, purpose, and leadership quality unknown among Labour or the Conservatives.

Yet the SNP was and is profoundly hierarchical. This monolithism helped win the parliamentary majority necessary for beginning the referendum process, and in this sense Salmond played a decisive role.

However, 2014's more broad-based referendum campaign brought hundreds of local meetings and initiatives that supported independence yet were outside or even critical of the SNP party machine. A notable distinction developed between being a "nationalist" — even in the SNP's civic-minded and clearly anti-racist sense of the term — and being "for independence" as a democratic demand, able to act as a cipher for a range of hopes for change.

Nonetheless, after the referendum defeat, the SNP proved best able to capitalize on this broader mobilization, as young activists and even long-time Labour voters sought a new political home.

The Labour-Tory alliance in the anti-independence “Better Together” campaign sharpened disgruntlement with the “extreme center” politics so widespread in Europe. In Scotland, the SNP was the main beneficiary, under new leader Nicola Sturgeon. More than her predecessor, she initially enjoyed very strong favorability ratings across party divides.

While Salmond had enjoyed a long spell at the top of the party from 1990 to 2000 and from 2004 to 2014, the SNP now made bold advances with new leadership, and indeed new activists. The SNP surge following the September 18, 2014, vote saw the party top 120,000 members “more than one in fifty Scots.

[It won almost every Scottish seat at the May 2015 general election.](#) Mhairi Black, entering parliament at age twenty, a sharp critic of Tory cuts and herself from a Labour family, particularly embodied the SNP’s rise.

Even today, the SNP remains Scotland’s leading force. While at the 2005 and 2010 elections it held just six seats, it today holds thirty-five of fifty-nine Scottish constituencies, after winning 37% of the vote on Thursday. By comparison, the Tories now hold thirteen seats and Labour seven in Scotland.

Yet this is a decline from the SNP’s 50% score in 2015 (fifty-six seats) and the 46.5% constituency vote it secured in the May 2016 Scottish Parliament election. Angus Robertson, a powerful critic of Theresa May in the House of Commons, like Salmond lost his seat. While in March 2017, Sturgeon announced plans to call a fresh referendum on independence, this seems an increasingly remote prospect.

A Weakened Cause

Purely episodic factors do much to explain the SNP’s difficulties. While Sturgeon has been First Minister for less than three years, the party has been in government in Edinburgh since 2007. This is a long time for any administration to maintain support; by the end of this parliament, the SNP

will have been in office longer than either Thatcher or New Labour.

The collapse in oil prices since 2014 has also damaged the economic basis for independence, particularly insofar as opposition parties endlessly repeat that this alone is the basis of the SNP’s economic plan. The carryover of the referendum campaign into the 2015 general election, where the party strongly asserted the possibility of a team of SNPers holding a putative Labour UK government to account, has died away.

Scotland’s other mainstream parties are also recovering, in particular the Scots Tories, posing as the main party of the Union. They have found an effective leader in Ruth Davidson, who robustly (if hypocritically) attacks the SNP’s faltering progress on education and health.

Beyond the fact that she herself is gay, Davidson has also sought to position the party in somewhat more liberal tones, favoring a less harsh Brexit than May (possibly including staying in the single market). This is of particular interest given that the thirteen MPs she leads outnumber the ten MPs of Northern Ireland’s hard-right, homophobic, and loyalist [Democratic Unionist Party \(DUP\)](#), whose support May is currently trying to secure.

[Reduced from forty-one seats to just one](#) in the 2015 general election, the Scottish Labour Party has remained a bastion of anti-Corbynism and seems to have learned little from its recent collapse. Party right-wingers like Scottish leader Kezia Dugdale and “No” campaign coordinator Blair McDougall each called on Scots to vote tactically, Labour and Tory together, to block the SNP.

Yet despite this head-in-the-sand mentality, the increased number of socialist candidates for Labour on June 8, coupled with Corbyn’s rise in the UK generally, offer at least a partial change of tone.

These developments are gaining particular traction given the wider strategic problem for the SNP, namely the meaning of Brexit for Scottish independence. If, in a sense, the UK

looks more divided than ever, the looming disruption does not itself help the SNP cause.

While Sturgeon is often accused of using the European question as a mere pretext for a fresh independence vote, in reality Brexit has forced her to begin calls for IndyRef2 far sooner than she would otherwise have wanted, not least given the lack of movement toward “Yes” in the opinion polls.

[It also causes major problems for the prospectus outlined by Salmond before the 2014 referendum. Beyond the SNP’s anti-racist and relatively pro-migrant stance, opposed to Tory/UKIP racism, its pro-EU position offers [no easy path to independence](#).

In March 2017, Sturgeon appeared to have boldly seized the political initiative, announcing plans for a second independence referendum. Yet this was also a reaction to being backed into a corner. With Theresa May abandoning her promise to consult the devolved administrations before triggering Article 50 to leave the European Union, any hope of special status for Scotland or it staying in the European free trade area was lost.

Knowing that the post-Brexit economic disruption could cause unfavorable conditions for a supposed “leap into the unknown,” Sturgeon would prefer to hold a vote before the UK’s departure from the EU is finalized.

Yet May has refused to allow any such referendum to go ahead, unlike David Cameron in the [2012 Edinburgh Agreement](#).

While in June 2016, Scots went against the UK-wide trend by voting 62 to 38% to stay in the EU “with an only slightly higher Remain vote among SNP voters, despite the party’s strong pro-European position” Brexit provides a rather [contradictory basis for independence](#).

Sturgeon has argued that a referendum toward the end of the leaving process would allow a choice between Scotland in the EU or in a hard-Brexit UK. Even beyond the question of whether Scotland would

remain in the EU uninterruptedly even if it did break from the UK, there has thus far been little apparent shift in opinion on independence as a result of the Brexit referendum.

This reflects both a climate of uncertainty and problems with the EU itself. During the 2014 referendum, the Eurozone crisis made it unthinkable for Salmond to advocate joining the euro. He instead favored keeping the pound, even if not being able to issue currency, or to rely on the Bank of England as a lender of last resort.

This attachment to the rest of the UK is further entrenched by the Brexit vote, and in particular the London government's plan to leave the customs union, possibly even meaning tariffs with EU countries.

This would make it difficult for Scotland to choose the EU over UK-wide "free trade," not least given that Scotland's exports to the rest of the UK are four-to-one greater than to the rest of Europe. To this consideration we can also add the EU's well-known budget straitjacket, undemocratic reputation, and likely future of closer fiscal integration.

The New Landscape

It remains unclear whether there will be another Scottish independence vote in the near future. Once again, the UK election result little reflects how Scotland voted, despite the Tory advances there. Theresa May will certainly not want to allow a referendum, particularly following [her evident miscalculation](#) in calling a general election, and Nicola Sturgeon herself seemed to pitch the idea further into the future during the campaign.

Unsurprisingly, most newspapers and the other parties have already leaped on the SNP's declining support as a rejection of her plans. And it is clear that tactical voting by unionists, or even [the Corbyn surge](#), cannot alone explain the SNP's fall from 50% to 37% of the vote. The momentum of the independence campaign and the hopes

it carried forth are beginning to move away from the SNP, though it remains to be seen whether they will be mobilized in other forms.

Clearly, the vast bulk of those enthused by the 2014 referendum campaign preferred the SNP as a new political home to either RISE "the new coalition formed by a number of socialists that had also been active in the Radical Independence Campaign" or the Greens. There is a continuing movement for independence in which the SNP is the lead actor, and the UK certainly looks far from strong and stable. But with middle-class voters flaking away to the Conservatives, the SNP no longer enjoys the all-conquering aura of recent years.

Scottish Labour, having again come third behind the Tories, is not necessarily well placed to take advantage. Corbyn himself has been quiet on Scotland or constitutional questions, and has allowed Edinburgh-based leaders to continue with their own policy.

Yet the hope of a left-wing Labour government at the UK level, made rather more real on June 8, offers at least the possibility of a recovery. The SNP's long-term rule in Edinburgh, combined with the fact that bad memories of Labour's own 2000s record are ever-more distant, could further fuel this tendency.

In the run-up to the 2015 election, Labour leader Ed Miliband was consistently pressed on the question of whether Labour would reach a UK-wide deal with the SNP. Even if not a formal coalition, which he expressly ruled out, there lingered the suggestion that if he fell only a few seats short of a majority, he could reach some sort of arrangement with Sturgeon's party, not entirely unlike Theresa May's likely confidence and supply arrangement with Northern Ireland's hard-right DUP.

Despite references to a "Coalition of Chaos," the 2017 media smear campaign against Corbyn was more sharply focused on the Labour leader's own alleged "un-British" sympathies than his relations with the SNP particularly.

The dogged rivalry between the SNP and Scottish Labour, and the latter's recent unionist alliance with the Tories, makes accommodation between the two parties essentially impossible, except insofar as they will both be in opposition in Westminster.

The very first attacks on Corbyn's leadership in fall of 2015 were focused on constitutional and "patriotic" questions "his republicanism, his support for a united Ireland, his "refusal" to sing the national anthem, his opposition to nuclear weapons" and he has backed away from "controversial" stances on these issues.

In March, he was quoted as remarking that he could accept a second Scottish referendum; Labour, however, may be drawn away from such a position, due to both pressure from its Edinburgh leaders and the prospect of recovery in Scotland.

Emboldened within party ranks by the general election and the successful campaign, Corbyn now has greater authority to set the political agenda, not unlike Alex Salmond did in 2000s Scotland.

Not just defined by its opposition to the Tories or the difficulties of uniting a party base so divided by Brexit, Labour has already begun talking about a different way of doing politics. Notably, this has also meant the mobilization "just like in the 2014 Scottish referendum" of youth and previously non-voting groups, a strategy long dismissed as implausible by media and polling experts.

Despite the giddy heights of the referendum campaign and 2015 general election, on Thursday, SNP was less able to achieve this same feat. Its one million votes were a fall from one and a half million two years ago. Without doubt, it has gained support in Labour's historic heartlands, in last month's local elections even breaking its hold on Glasgow council. And clearly Scots did not vote for a Tory-DUP coalition.

Yet with the UK heading out of the European Union and the meaning of Scottish independence unclear, it is difficult for Sturgeon to provide a

sharply defined vision of what comes next for Scotland. The fate of the now-

weakened Tory government in Brexit talks will be decisive for the SNP's chances of recovery.

[Jacobin](#)

Puerto Rico is always political

24 June 2017

Puerto Rican political prisoner Oscar López Rivera was finally released this March from federal custody after 36 years behind bars—only to find himself at the center of a manufactured controversy that reveals how little has changed in the status of the island he went to jail trying to free.

López Rivera was going to be honored at this year's National Puerto Rican Day Parade in New York City as a National Freedom Hero. Conservatives and police organizations were furious about such an honor being bestowed on a former leading member of the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (FALN), which conducted an armed struggle for Puerto Rican independence in the 1970s.

The right-wing Media Research Center, which falsely calls itself "America's leading media watchdog," [claimed credit for pressuring](#) major media outlets like Univision and corporations like Goya Foods and Coca-Cola from withdrawing their sponsorship of the parade.

Nicole Malliotakis, a Republican state Assembly member, New York City mayoral hopeful [and noted xenophobe](#), held a press conference in front of Fraunces Tavern, where four people were killed by an FALN bombing—one never linked to López Rivera, by the way. [Malliotakis declared that the parade organizers' decision](#) was "equivalent of saying 40 years from now saying it's okay to honor a leader in al-Qaeda, Timothy McVeigh or Ramzi Yousef."

Current Mayor Bill de Blasio seemed to be standing strong in the face of pressure on him to boycott the

[parade](#)—[until he claimed this week](#) that he had been working behind the scenes to pressure parade organizers to rescind their decision honoring López Rivera.

"It's not for me to dictate to them how to do it," de Blasio said. "I just made clear to them that what was going on wasn't going to work and had to be changed."

In the midst of all the frenzy, López Rivera took the high road. In [an opinion article for the New York Daily News](#), he wrote:

Unfortunately, the narrative around the Parade is not celebration and concern for the situation on the island, but rather misinformation about who I am and what I stand for.

We must shift the focus. We cannot let people who are unfamiliar with Puerto Rican history define the narrative and experiences of our community. I want to repeat what I have said in many interviews, both in prison and since my release. I personally, and we as a community have transcended violence — it's crucial for people to understand that we're not advocating anything that would be a threat to anyone...

I will be on Fifth Avenue not as your honoree but as a humble Puerto Rican and grandfather who at 74 continues to be committed to helping raise awareness about the fiscal, health care and human rights crisis Puerto Rico is facing at this historic juncture.

López Rivera was the longest-serving Puerto Rican political prisoner in American history. Of his 36 years behind bars, he spent over a decade in solitary confinement. [As Sandy Boyer wrote in SocialistWorker.org](#) two

years ago:

The government could never tie López Rivera to any injuries or loss of life suffered from the group's armed struggle. [A 1980 Chicago Tribune editorial](#) noted that FALN operations were "placed and timed as to damage property rather than persons," and that the group was "out to call attention to their cause rather than to shed blood."

U.S. officials resorted to charging López Rivera with seditious conspiracy, which has been used overwhelmingly against Puerto Rican nationalists. By contrast, no member of a right-wing militia has ever been convicted of seditious conspiracy....

López Rivera would be free today if he'd been willing to leave his imprisoned comrades behind. He was offered a pardon in 1999, when Bill Clinton pardoned 13 Puerto Rican political prisoners. He refused it because two of his comrades—[José Alberto Torres and Haydée Beltrane](#)—were excluded. He felt he shouldn't be free while they were still in prison. Since then, they have both been paroled, while López Rivera remains behind bars.

The demonization of López Rivera and his comrades served to obfuscate the far more destructive nature of [the U.S.'s century-long terrorism in Puerto Rico?

<https://socialistworker.org/2015/11/10/how-will-puerto-rico-win-its-freedom>]such as the forced sterilization campaign that left one-third of Puerto Rican women unable to give birth from 1936 to 1968, the Ponce Massacre that killed 19 Puerto Rican nationalists and bystanders, and the radiation experiments performed

on an imprisoned Dr. Pedro Albizu Campos, the leading figure of the Puerto Rican independence movement.

[New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo claimed to speak for Puerto Ricans](#) by arguing that honoring López Rivera would detract from the true "purpose of the parade, which is to honor the Puerto Rican community, and honor our connections, and honor their culture."

In fact, López Rivera has broad support on the island—35,000 people marched in San Juan for his release in 2014—and he would have served as a better symbol of hope in the face of the island's prolonged crisis than

[a bunch of corporate logos next to the Puerto Rican flag](#)

in the lead-up to the vote.

"The statehood party is very much threatened by what this parade represents and what Oscar López Rivera represents," [claimed New York City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito](#). "And so now they're engaging in trying to force companies to withdraw, and making certain threats if they don't do so."

The solutions presented by statehood are limited. The vote is nonbinding

and subject to congressional approval. Rossello's pleas to make Puerto Rico the 51st state will likely fall on the deaf ears of a Congress that is currently attempting to dismantle an already scant social safety net in the mainland and has no interest in adding a state in fiscal crisis.

Puerto Rico has been suffering from the crisis for years. Barack Obama's bipartisan solution to address the debt crisis—PROMESA—has only "promised" more austerity and ruin for ordinary Puerto Ricans.

[An unelected Financial Oversight Board](#) representing the very interests that put Puerto Rico in this terrible position now has authority over the island's governance. Not surprisingly, its recommendations include continued reduction of spending on K-12 and higher education, and health care; the sale of Puerto Rico's public resources, such as its shoreline; and the privatization of public utilities.

The callous handling of Puerto Rico's crisis is the latest episode in a long history of negligence by the U.S. government and plunder by American investors and vulture capitalists. The island's colonial status that Oscar López Rivera dedicated his life to fighting continues to limit its ability to fight this sustained injustice.

Those who claim that the Puerto Rican Day Parade shouldn't have "political" elements are ignoring the eternally political nature of the island's status and the conditions of its people at home and in the diaspora. Until Puerto Rico's colonial question is resolved, any talk of Puerto Rico will necessarily be political. And the parade is one of the most highly visible occasions for these discussions to happen.

Puerto Rico's moment now requires a revival of its history of resistance and struggle for self-determination.

[Tens of thousands of students at the University of Puerto Rico](#) are leading the way with an ongoing strike against cutbacks set forth by Rosello's government that would decimate the University of Puerto Rico system, raising tuition and closing the majority of its 11 campuses. The students are also calling for a national audit of Puerto Rico's debt, a demand that has the support of a majority of Puerto Ricans.

Puerto Ricans of the diaspora need a reason to look at their homeland as something more than a lost cause. Puerto Rican pride must be channeled into action.

June 8, 2017

Socialistworker.org

Grassroot networks that help people fleeing fighting in Marawi are acting in an increasingly dangerous situation - They need our support now!

23 June 2017, by Pierre Rousset

Our association, ESSF, has for a long time been supporting a network of some fifty associations, Mindanao Humanitarian Action Network (Mihands), which mobilises in the event of a catastrophe (typhoons,

military conflicts ...). As early as 29 May, we took up an appeal by this coalition. [2] At the beginning of June, we sent them a first direct aid of 3,000 euros. We also endowed a solidarity fund in the Philippines with 6,000

euros in support of these activities, but this must be reconstituted in order to be able to meet other needs later. In the light of developments, we urgently need to help strengthen the capacity of the Mihands network.

The battle of Marawi began on 23 May in a police operation which encountered unexpected resistance from the fundamentalists. Since then, the situation has continued to deteriorate.

Maute and Abu Sayyaf have committed massacres, especially against Christians. The Philippine presidency has imposed martial law throughout the island, under which many human rights violations can be committed. The culture of impunity has reached a peak with President Duterte's "war on drugs" (which killed some eight thousand people). The army is present throughout the region; any displacement is dangerous, censorship of information is the rule.

Solidarity networks should not only help refugees. They must also protect those who have witnessed human rights violations and are threatened to prevent them testifying.

The vast majority of the Muslim population of the Philippines (the Moros) lives in the southern part of the archipelago. For decades, movements have struggled for the right to self-determination: the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). It is only recently, however, that a Salafist current, identifying with the Islamic State, has emerged. Today it is conducting actions of great violence, and possesses considerable firepower. The shock is profound. It makes solidarity more difficult. Most displaced persons are Muslim. They must be welcomed in areas of Christian population. They are in no way responsible for the crimes of the Maute clan and Abu Sayyaf, but may

nevertheless face reactions of rejection or fear.

One of the founding principles of the Mihands network is the promotion of solidarity among the "three peoples" of Mindanao: the Lumads, the Moros and the descendants of the Christian "settlers" from the North and South of the archipelago who came to settle in the South. It is a great asset to intervene today in the neighbouring provinces of Marawi, in such a confrontational context.

Moreover, the national political situation is very unstable. The Philippine Archipelago is historically stowed in the United States and occupies a key geostrategic position in East Asia. President Duterte seeks to establish privileged ties with China and Russia - which Washington, the Filipino elites and the high command of the army can hardly accept. It is possible that the battle of Marawi, in turn, opens a regime crisis and / or leads to the imposition of martial law throughout the country.

Insecurity is likely to spread to Mindanao, or elsewhere. The responsibilities of the Mihands network, as well as other solidarity movements, are increasing accordingly. They must already take into account a possible worsening of the situation, prepare themselves to help communities in danger while continuously measuring the risks incurred by their militant teams.

It is very important, in such a situation, to help them politically, by starting to understand the gravity of the current crisis - and, of course, to support them financially.

We try to offer, through our site [ESSF](#), ongoing information on the crisis in Marawi, the solidarity actions in progress and the general situation in the archipelago.

We are urgently calling for financial solidarity. The international donations we collect will be forwarded to Mihands.

To Donate

By Paypal - go to ESSF home page [here](#) on right hand side

By Cheque

In euros only and payable in France to the order of ESSF to: ESSF 2, rue Richard-Lenoir 93100 Montreuil la France

By Bank transfer:

Bank: Credit Lyonnais Agency of the Croix-de-Chavaux (00525) 10 boulevard Chanzy 93100 Montreuil la France ESSF Account No. 445757C

National Bank References (NIBs): Bank: 30002 Caller ID: 00525 Account number: 0000445757C Key: 12 Payable to: ESSF

International bank details: IBAN: FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12 BIC / SWIFT: CRLYFRPP Payable to: ESSF

In France, these donations give rise to tax deductions. We need your address to send you a tax receipt (address usually indicated on the cheques).

We will keep you regularly informed about the situation and use of the solidarity fund.

Governing Madrid

22 June 2017, by **Eoghan Gilmartin**

In June 2015, after a historic grassroots campaign, left-wing coalition Ahora Madrid (Now Madrid) was elected to govern in Spain's

capital, Madrid.

Headed by charismatic former judge Manuela Carmena, the minority administration put an end to twenty-

four years of right-wing rule. It was a phenomenon that was replicated in many other cities across the country as a wave of progressive municipal

governments, backed by anti-austerity party Podemos, came to power.

Expectations were high: Ahora Madrid promised a break with the European Union's *pensée unique* of austerity and privatization. Its program included pledges to end housing evictions, create a public investment bank, and remunicipalize privately run public services, as well as increase opportunities for direct democracy in the city.

However, after nearly two years in office, the administration is facing a crossroads, locked in a battle with a national government that aims to force it to abandon its program and impose swinging cuts.

Jacobin contributor Eoghan Gilmartin spoke to Madrid city councilors about the challenges their administration faces, the political differences between its constituent factions, and the path forward for the left government of Spain's capital.

Madrid for the Social Majority

June 2015 saw Spain elect a series of "rebel cities," left-wing urban governments committed to challenging the country's austerity regime. Winning power in some of Spain's biggest cities — from Madrid and Barcelona to Zaragoza, Valencia, and La Coruña — they posed a significant problem for the Partido Popular (PP) national government. Its solution was to impose a set of fiscal rules and legal constraints to crack down on the rebellion.

In recent months tensions have risen sharply between Mariano Rajoy's government and the council in Madrid. The latest confrontation has seen PP finance minister Cristóbal Montoro demand the council cut €238 million (or 7 percent) from this year's expenditure to remain within the limits of the state's spending ceiling. This is despite the council already running a large surplus and being one of the few institutions in Spain to meet their debt reduction targets.

The response from the municipal government has been guarded, indicative of Carmena's [aversion](#) to open political confrontation. Somewhat ambiguously, the council announced it would both meet its requirements under the spending ceiling and ensure there are no cuts to existing expenditure or investment. This will be achieved by disputing the amount to be cut in the courts and various forms of creative accounting, such as reallocation of unspent capital funds from last year.

Opinion is divided among the Left in Madrid about how to evaluate the administration's restrained response to such pressure, as well as their record more generally. The dominant emotion among the activist-led organizations in Ahora Madrid, such as the citizen platform Ganemos and the radical Izquierda Anticapitalista (IA) wing of Podemos, is one of frustration.

For IA councilor Rommy Arce, Carmena's inner circle had repeatedly prioritized respectable technocratic management over implementing the "collectively designed program" of the Left. This was a point echoed by the Ganemos councilor Pablo Carmona who also criticized the unilateral manner in which Carmena discarded key elements of the formation's program without any open debate.

At the other end of the spectrum, Podemos councilor Jorge Garc a Casta o defends the mayor, arguing that the reality of governing in minority had in fact exceeded his own initial expectations. While he believes that the left coalition "had no option" but to make concessions on issues such as remunicipalization and evictions, they have also secured a number of impressive social advances.

The council has increased social spending by over 50 percent since taking office, municipal investment has gone up by 33 percent in the last year, and they are currently implementing an ambitious program of participatory budgets. For Casta o, these advances constitute the potential ground from which progressive forces in Madrid can establish "a cycle of electoral victories" similar in length to the

preceding reign of the PP.

At the start of my interview with Eduardo Garz n, the Marxist economist and adviser to the council's treasury, reminded me that Ahora Madrid is "not organized as a compact and coherent political force." Instead it is a much looser alliance which includes not only parties such as Podemos, Izquierda Unida, and the environmental coalition EQUO but also various other organizations and independent figures. The coalition was quickly assembled in the months prior to municipal elections in 2015 and unlike Ada Colau's Barcelona en Com  , it lacked a clear leadership and decision-making structures.

Yet these diverse groups were united by a number of [shared strategic principles](#), which have informed Ahora Madrid's more ambitious policy initiatives. The first of these was a commitment to take institutional power so as to defend the public sphere from being further dismantled by the Spanish right.

In this respect their ability to redeploy the considerable resources of the council towards bolstering social spending and public investment has been impressive. While the council has very limited powers to increase taxation, reduced interest rate repayments and a series of cost-cutting exercises in other areas have allowed the new municipal government to free up funds to be redirected towards specific objectives that are "beneficial to the social majority."

Garz n highlights in particular their record on social housing. In the wake of the financial crisis, the previous PP administration initiated a fire sale of properties held by the municipal housing body, selling off four thousand homes to investment funds (including 1,800 to Blackstone) and had planned to sell a further two thousand homes prior to the 2015 elections. Ahora Madrid cancelled the latter sale and [have set in motion a plan](#) to restore the public housing stock to pre-crisis levels, promising to build more than four thousand homes by the end of the legislature, while also buying up hundreds of empty apartments around the capital.

He also points to the various vital services that have benefited from the council's large increases in social spending and investment. The budget for home help for the elderly was increased by [25 percent](#), the program of free school meals had its funds increased by 50 percent, while the council have invested heavily in extending the network of public preschools, women's shelters, and municipal sports centers. It has also implemented [a new program](#) ensuring undocumented immigrants have access to public services, such as health care.

Ahora Madrid's second commitment was to build on the legacy of the "indignados" (15-M) movement which had occupied the city's Puerta del Sol in 2011. The group believed that municipal politics could be transformed into a space in which people could become actively involved in the running of their local communities. Here again the new administration has made progress since taking office, instituting a range of participatory channels from a citywide referendum on major urban renewal projects to more decentralized consultations on how to allocate funds in particular neighborhoods.

For both Rommy Arce and Garzón, this had to be a process; Spain's limited tradition of direct citizen participation in institutional politics necessitated slowly building up awareness and encouraging involvement. While small compared to the overall population of the city, the numbers involved in the council's [participatory budget scheme](#), which allocates €100 million of funds, has increased by 68 percent this year, from twenty-two thousand participants in 2016 to thirty-eight thousand.

The final commitment was to systematically transform Madrid's antiquated urban model. After decades of inaction by PP administrations, García Castaño argued, the council's ambitious plans "pollution reduction, widespread pedestrianization, and parking restrictions in the city center" are trying to do in three years what other cities in Europe have set out to achieve in fifteen. The aim is to move

Madrid quickly towards a more sustainable and livable city less dominated by private transport.

Limits to Progress

Their policy advances represent a substantive achievement, but Ahora Madrid has also faced a series of legal and political restrictions that have hindered their pursuit of many of their core electoral promises. This has been a generalized experience for the so-called "rebel city councils" across Spain, with the new municipalista administrations finding themselves constrained by binding contracts with corporate service providers, court rulings on evictions, and strict austerity rules imposed by the PP national government.

Furthermore, the Madrid council have faced massive pressure from a hostile corporate media intent on smearing them as dangerous and too radical to run the city. In this context, the Carmena administration has pursued a guarded strategy, picking their battles carefully and often choosing to yield instead of getting embroiled in open confrontations. This has created tensions within the coalition. Of Ahora Madrid's twenty councilors, a block of between six and eight, including Izquierda Unida's Carlos Sánchez Mato, the administration's head of finance, have repeatedly pushed for it to take a more forceful line, going as far as to vote against their formation on a number of occasions.

For Arce, another of these dissenters, the task for the municipal government is twofold: "You have to manage the institutions, and we are doing that. Everything is functioning. But, on the other hand, we didn't arrive here simply to administer 'the possible'." The Socialist Party (PSOE) already exists for that." Instead, she said, a left coalition also has to be able challenge institutional limits, transforming the apparatus at the same time as administering it.

But this requires a political will that, for Arce, has often been lacking in Ahora Madrid. She points to one of the council's most controversial decisions "not to take back control of the city's waste collection services when

the contracts expired last year. Such public services have become the domain of large construction conglomerates looking to diversify after the property crash and are riven with inefficiency brought about by profiteering.

Breaking with this model of corporate-run public services would have required not only taking on these conglomerates, who were applying massive pressure through the media, but also having to circumvent the limits placed on hiring new public employees. Sánchez Mato's proposal was to incorporate the existing workforce "through the back door" by giving them an "indefinite but not permanent" contract which would have exempted them from the quota. However, this would have required negotiating with the unions while also holding off the PP government's inevitable retaliation.

Arce acknowledges the hazards involved here but argues that "it's our duty." The radical left cannot, she says, give in to established forces threatening chaos but rather "has to incorporate elements of risk in its strategy so as to advance." But, according to Pablo Carmona, such resolve was made more difficult to sustain by the administration's growing distance from its social base. If the administration had been serious about pushing forward, it would have "opened up a debate with civil society" through assemblies, protests, and rallies that could have mobilized public support and social pressure.

Instead the council withdrew behind closed doors to make key programmatic decisions. Carmona contrasts the forms of direct democracy that have been implemented in less politicized areas by the council with its denial of grassroots participation around more fundamental questions.

Choosing to manage more politicized issues from above, according to Arce, has meant retreat on key elements of its program such as their stance on evictions and occupations. The Left requires mass mobilization so as to create a more favorable balance of forces, and serious political confrontations can be the catalyst for

this. It cannot confront the interests of elite sectors, she argued, without the active involvement of popular social forces.

The Responsibilities of Power

But for those who support the mayor's line, such as García Castaño, the governing minority's limited strength negates "such an extreme interpretation of the (formation's) program." He believes it has been more important in the first years in office to generate confidence among those beyond left-wing circles, by delivering tangible change such as the investments in social programs, than trying to impose their program in its entirety.

For him "clearly there was a desire to recover major services" but to risk the credibility of the administration by pursuing such a policy under existing conditions was too much of a gamble. With the set of measures known as the Montoro Laws, the PP government had liquidated much of the economic autonomy of local governments, leaving the council with little room to maneuver. In the case of remunicipalizing waste collection, the threat that either an industrial dispute or legal action taken by Montoro could lead to serious disruptions in services was seen as too great by Carmena. Her predecessor Ana Botella had never recovered after the disastrous street cleaning strike in 2013.

Similarly, on the question of complying with the spending ceiling, for those in Carmena's circle the council is seen as having few cards to play. Montoro has the legal authority not only to impose the cuts unilaterally but also to dismiss Sánchez Mato as the council's head of

finance if the budget is not revised in line with mandated spending limits. To openly defy the law, they say, would embroil the council in fruitless controversy. Instead the aim should be to legally dispute the figure.

Like García Castaño, a number of Carmena's closest allies come from the more moderate Errejonista wing of Podemos. One of the points of contention between Íñigo Errejón and Pablo Iglesias at the party's recent congress was the former's claim that Podemos risked overestimating the level of political rupture acceptable to the majority of the population.

Spain is not Bolivia "the level of polarization and social mobilization required to confront the power of the oligarchy is far less. Or as Errejón wrote recently: "In countries with administrations capable of offering order in citizens' lives" and thus constructing them more as (individual) citizens than as a (collective) people, except perhaps in times of high political intensity, political dispute takes the form more of a war of position in the state."

Here, the political hegemony of an insurgent force has to be built up slowly across the institutions by proving to voters that rather than being a source of instability, it can defend and strengthen the public sphere. The type of political stand-offs that the minority on the council wanted to engage in, from this perspective, risked derailing the administration before it developed.

Instead, the aim should be to accumulate further institutional power by demonstrating to voters the Left's ability to deliver progressive reforms. In this respect, García Castaño sees their record on investment, social spending, and urban renewal as an effective basis from which to fight for

both re-election to the council and Errejón's own candidacy in the regional elections in Madrid in 2019.

This would allow Ahora Madrid and Podemos to reinforce their position in the institutions and to push policy further in a progressive direction. In particular an Errejón-led regional government would give Podemos control over health and education, thus providing them with the opportunity to protect the public provision of these vital services from further attack.

Given the hostility they have faced from the media and business interests, Ahora Madrid's progress has been remarkable. But, halfway through their term, the coalition, like the Left in general in Spain, is at a crossroads. Should it continue along a more institutional, transversal path with the hope of electoral hegemony? Or take a more militant approach which seeks the active involvement of society in the struggle for radical change?

Carmena has made her own preference clear. Vindication for her approach will depend on the potential for the further politicization of Spanish society. As Josep Maria Antentas wrote recently, in the current conjuncture "the decisive variable will be whether or not a new cycle of social struggles begins."

The calculation of the Errejonistas is that after forty years of neoliberalism, it is unrealistic in our atomized societies to expect a high degree of popular mobilization or sustained political commitment. In contrast, the radical municipalistas on the council (and to large extent, the Pablistas at Podemos's national level) are betting on a new wave of social struggle developing durable forms of popular association capable of challenging the power of the Spanish oligarchy.

Jacobin

We need an alternative project of

disobedience to austerity'

20 June 2017, by **Miguel Urbán Crespo**

May 15 was the sixth anniversary of the Indignados mass mobilisations and protests against the brutal austerity unleashed by Spanish government in the wake of the economic crisis. Meanwhile, May 25 marked the third anniversary since the emergence of Podemos as the political voice of the anti-austerity movement with the election of the five Podemos candidates (including key leader Pablo Iglesias) into the European Parliament.

Most recently, the Spanish political space has been dominated by the aftermath of the presidential elections in France, as well as the leadership election of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE).

There is also the push for a censure motion by Podemos against the right-wing Popular Party government of Mariano Rajoy on the grounds of illegal electoral financing, and the historic, although non-binding, proposal by the Spanish Congress to remove the remains of fascist dictator Francisco Franco from the "Valley of the Fallen" burial grounds. Franco's grave effectively operates as a shrine to Spain's fascist past.

Denis Rogatyuk of the Green Left Weekly spoke with Miguel Urban, a member of European Parliament for Podemos, and a leader of the Anti-Capitalist tendency in the party.

DR: Following the results of the French presidential elections, you have pointed to the triumph of the so-called "Extreme Centre" against far-right populism. How do you interpret the victory of Emmanuel Macron?

MU: I believe that the French presidential elections in France have made clear a number of tendencies across all of Europe. First, in France, the exhaustion of the Fifth Republic [the current constitutional order

established in 1958]. It is the first time in more than 40 years that neither the Socialist Party nor the different variants of the Gaullist right have made it through to the second round.

That is unprecedented, but similar to what happened in the Austrian presidential elections and the Dutch parliamentary elections: we've also seen a similar tendency in Greece, Spain and Italy. Most European countries are witnessing an erosion of the main parties of what Tariq Ali has termed "the extreme centre" – two different ballot papers but with the same socio-economic and political program.

The implosion of the Socialist Party in France, which is the big loser in the politics of the extreme centre, could be described as a form of "zombification". That concept, which I like, was coined by the sociologist Ulrich Beck regarding so-called "zombie institutions" like the Socialist Party: they look to be alive, but are in fact politically dead because they have stopped representing the social and class interests for which they were born.

As for the crisis of European social democracy, I believe it is one of the other significant features that we have seen in France, with [former prime minister] Manuel Valls openly offering himself to Macron (a neoliberal centrist) while [official Socialist Party candidate Benoît] Hamon is discussing with the Greens about creating a new political and social movement in France.

Then we have seen another basic element which, differently from Spain, has seen the French Gaullist right pay a high electoral price for its corruption cases. If we had been discussing this six months ago – following the primaries of The Republicans in which a record 4.6 million voters participated – we

would have seen that the entire world was predicting a second-round run-off between the [traditional right candidate] François Fillon and Marine Le Pen.

Despite that, corruption weighed down the candidacy of Fillon. We can see that the Socialists are not alone in having a crisis, the mainstream right is having one too.

The fourth element to highlight in these elections is the strength of the extreme-right National Front candidate Marie Le Pen, with 33.9% of the vote – double the 2002 vote of her father. The participation rate was also lower compared to 2002, which I think is highly worrying.

Those 11 million votes for Le Pen make the National Front the spear head of the European far right. At this moment in Germany, the far right Alternative for Germany is positioning itself as third option in the opinion polls. It is quite probable that it will recover its upward trend once its resolves the internal differences at its [April] congress. That will mark the first time that the extreme right has entered the Bundestag [established in 1949].

Then we have the case of the presidential elections in Austria last year, where the far right could have won. A large part of the protest vote against capitalist globalisation and the inequalities and lack of democracy of the European project got channeled to the extreme right.

Some people claimed that the first option of the working class of France [in the second round of the presidential election] was the National Front, when in fact its first option, unfortunately, was not Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his left-wing France Unbowed movement, but abstention. After abstention came the National Front, which came first among people

with the lowest levels of income and education.

Finally, what was the impact of Macron and Melenchon's France Unbowed? The viruses of the system have a tendency to generate their own fake antibodies, like Macron or Albert Rivera [leader of Citizens, the "Podemos of the right" in Spain]: the former is a banker doing politics, the latter is a financial speculator doing politics, and both of them represent the interests of the "extreme centre".

In the face of the dramatic weakening of the Socialist Party and the Gaullist right, a new political force has emerged that expresses the interests of the French elite in a more complete form: it's Macron, product of banking sector marketing. However, the people at large did not vote for Macron, but rather against Le Pen.

France Unbowed has demonstrated the potential for an alternative left to dispute electoral space among popular layers and young people, which is encouraging. It still has problems of organisation and of a lack of desire to overcome personality politics (due to its link with Podemos). However, the difference is that Podemos has always had an interest in organising the process of change, of stirring along protest, which has not been the case so far with France Unbowed.

Given that we are now living in a phase of political leaps forward and as France Unbowed has more responsibility than other parties on the French left, it needs to be bold and courageous.

The victory of Pedro Sanchez during the recent PSOE primaries clearly signifies a blow against the party's establishment. Do you believe this increases the possibility of a coalition government between PSOE and Podemos in the future?

We can't interpret the crisis of PSOE simply as a crisis within that party but as the crisis of the Party of European Socialism: this is a crisis of the Western project of social democracy, analogous to the crisis within the Democratic Party in the US.

We can see that within these "zombie" institutions there are groups that want to rebel against the logic of self-immolation that has turned them into parties only serving the interests of the elites. These people who rebel normally gain the support of the membership base, such as was the case with Hamon in France and, more significantly, Jeremy Corbyn in the UK and Bernie Sanders in the US. We are seeing the same process taking place in Spain.

This is not because [re-elected leader Pedro] Sánchez is more to the left than [his main opponent] Susanna Dñaz. Rather it is because he represents the feelings and sentiments of the ranks against the slide into social liberalism that has ruled the PSOE for so long: it is a rebellion against the party apparatus and Sanchez is able to express that.

But we have also seen that the social democratic party apparatuses strike back: the knives are already out for Hamon in France, while Corbyn has had to constantly face leadership challenges from within Labour, and there was the dirty campaign that was waged during the primaries against Sanders. The same is bound to happen in Spain, as a victory for Sánchez in the primaries means they will not allow what he represents to express itself politically, they are not going to grant him space in the PSOE, the apparatus will not allow it.

Could you comment on the recent Podemos decision to censure the government of Rajoy on the grounds of illegal financing of the Popular Party?

This is an exceptional measure in an exceptional political moment in our country and in Europe as a whole. In no other country in Europe would it be possible for a governing party to be investigated for illegal financing and for the prime minister to be summoned to explain the illegal financing of his own party.

In no other European country have nearly all the former ministers of a government, in this case that of Aznar (1996-2004) been indicted or already been sent to jail. These are not isolated cases because corruption has

become a form of governance for the right-wing in Spain. We see a general pillaging of people's rights and of resources

Faced with all that, declarations and parliamentary motions that are never acted on are pointless. The only way out is to remove PP from power and the only way to do it in a democratic way is to move a motion of censure. What is the problem? That they protect each other: the regime is not only comprised of the PP but also has PSOE as one of its main accomplices. Yesterday, for example, the PSOE agreed that the chair of the commission of investigation into illegal party financing was to be someone put forward by the PP!

Anywhere else in Europe this would seem like a bad joke. The censure motion cannot simply be a measure confined within the walls of the parliament: we need it to be a social mobilisation that goes beyond parliamentarians and parties and involves citizens across Spain because we need a censure motion that effectively throws out the regime of 1978 [based on the present Spanish constitution] so as move towards a new constituent process.

It's not a few apples that are rotten, it's the whole basket. We have to change the laws and that is why we need a constituent process where we can decide to change everything that has been working so badly.

Recently, the Spanish Congress has approved a proposal supported by Podemos to remove the remains of fascist dictator Francisco Franco from the "Valley of the Fallen". Do you believe this signifies a new stage in the fulfilment of the "Law of Historic Memory"?

Unfortunately, the vote was a non-binding resolution, which did not oblige the government to remove the remains of the criminal and fascist dictator from his mausoleum.

It was the umpteenth whitewash by the PSOE on this issue, just like the law of historic memory, which is both insufficient and still not being implemented. The stance of the

parties for change and the associations of victims of Francoism is that the time is up for parliamentary resolutions that are never carried out.

Spain is the exception in Europe in that we are the only ones who have not been able to bring the criminals and the dictatorship to justice. There will not be a true democracy in Spain until there is a process of democratic breakthrough that allows justice and compensation for the crimes of Francoism.

The working of justice is blocked in Spain: so before we start changing street names, let's start charging criminals. Yes, we want to remove Franco and eliminate the Valley of the Fallen "that permanent tribute to fascist barbarism" but the most important thing is to put Francoism on trial.

To this end we have started a network of cities to bring legal action against Francoism. First were Pamplona, Cadiz, Zaragoza, Barcelona, the "cities for change", but now cities that are governed by the PNV [Basque Nationalist Party] and the PSOE and are beginning to show interest in bringing lawsuits. We also want parliament to repeal the Law of Amnesty that continues to protect criminals in the country.

What do you see as the strategy of Podemos and other anti-austerity and left-wing pan-European political movements in removing the far-right from its position as an "anti-establishment force"?

The problem for the left "I believe it was [English Marxist] Perry Anderson who said this - is that the far right is seen as much more credible as an anti-establishment option because

a part of the left is seen by the popular classes as forming part of the system. We have to break with the logic of occupying the centre, with a Europeanism bereft of ideas that manages misery and austerity.

We need to have clear positions on the part of the left that do not simply appeal to left sentiments, but to the material realities that cut across and are shared by the popular classes of Europe.

We also always say that we cannot advance by just holding up the banner "Welcome Refugees" without also holding up that of "Troika [European Union, European Central Bank, International Monetary Fund] Go Home".

Austerity policies have generated a sensation of scarcity within the European population, which leads to calls for expulsions "if there's not enough for everyone, some have to be thrown out.

This the political fuel of the extreme right and the politics of xenophobia. The extreme right gives a straightforward answer - if there's not enough for everyone, somebody has to be expelled. So "The French First" is a simple slogan. To fight this slogan we have to show how irrational economic distribution is.

The key problem here is how this distribution has come about, and how inequality has increased: every moment there are not only more poor but also more rich. Like the slogan of Occupy Wall St: the 1% against the 99% is already reality! Indeed the wealth of the 1% now exceeds that of the 99%. So the war is no longer over resources but over their distribution.

Why don't we have an extreme right in Spain? Because Podemos has occupied

the political space of anti-establishmentism, but before that there were mass mobilisations that changed the common sentiment of social majorities, criticising the model of wealth distribution and not singling out immigrants and blaming them for the crisis, but instead targeting those at the top.

When those at the bottom begin to move, those above begin to fall. This is fundamental. Here the left must be clear in breaking with those elements that would absorb us into the status quo, into being one bit more of the same.

There is an urgent need to stand outside the system rather than within it. A large part of the left continues to be within the system and that is a serious problem.

We shouldn't fetishise about a concrete organisational model: the important thing is to rebuild a certain internationalism for the 21st Century, a European and international project which tackles a false dichotomy: either remaining in the European Union (which means defending neoliberalism and austerity) or attacking the European Union, its liberalism and austerity (which has been the main posture taken by the extreme right).

We need to embrace an alternative project to both, an internationalist project that embodies disobedience towards austerity and the democratic anti-fascist spirit that was there as a foundation for the projects of a socialist Europe. That's the basic, the strategic stance independent of any conjunctural situation.

June 7

[Green Left Weekly](#)

Campaign Against Qatar is Latest in Series of Attacks by the Region's Old Establishment

19 June 2017, by **Gilbert Achcar**

To understand the significance of the violent campaign launched by the Saudi, Emirati, Bahraini, and Egyptian governments against Qatar, we must look beyond the vagaries of the Qatari ransom money allegedly held by Iraq and the charges leveled against Qatar of supporting terrorism. Such charges lose all credibility when they come from actors that have for decades engaged in just that, we must return to the scene before “Arab Spring” to see how it was affected by the Great Uprising.

During the reign of Emir Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, the Emirate of Qatar took an approach to regional affairs not unlike Kuwait’s after it declared independence from Britain in 1961. The announcement outraged the Republic of Iraq, which demanded the emirate be restored as part of its territory. But Kuwait benefited from the tension that existed between Iraq, under the leadership of Abdel Karim Qassim, and Gamal Abdel Nasser’s Egypt, which advocated acceptance of Kuwait’s Arab independence over its status as a British protectorate. And in order to deter its Iraqi neighbor from ambitions of annexation, Kuwait pursued a policy of Arab neutrality, maintaining good relations with the two poles of the so-called “Arab Cold War,” Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

The similarity is that Qatar, as is well-known, has a historically strained relationship with its neighbor, Saudi Arabia, particularly since declaring independence from Britain in 1971. After seizing power in 1995, Emir Hamad pursued a policy that sought to make up for the emirate’s small size by reinforcing ties with the two main axes of regional conflict, as evident by extensive deployments of US troops throughout the Gulf: the United States and the Republic of Iran. Qatar’s success is most obvious in its ability to simultaneously host the United States’ most important regional airbase and cultivate its relationship with Iran and Hezbollah. The policy of good relations with opposing forces also manifests itself in Qatar successfully

establishing diplomatic relations with Israel, while also supporting Hamas.

Qatar’s role during the reign of Emir Hamad was not limited to cultivating good relationships with different parties in the Kuwaiti sense, which is neutral and negative, but it also used its substantial wealth to play an active role in regional politics by supporting the Muslim Brotherhood. When Saudi Arabia renounced the Brotherhood, after sponsoring it since its inception in 1928, due to its opposition to American intervention in Kuwait in 1990, the weight of Qatar’s political role greatly increased with the establishment of Al-Jazeera, which resonated with Arab society by welcoming Arab voices of opposition, in particular the Muslim Brotherhood.

So when the volcano of the Great Arab Uprising erupted in 2011, Qatar was able to play a significant role through its sponsorship of both the Muslim Brotherhood and Al-Jazeera. As a result, the two axes of conflict that had dominated the Arab world – the old establishment and the fundamentalist opposition led by the Muslim Brotherhood – found support in the Gulf Cooperation Council. But while Saudi Arabia supported the old establishment throughout the region – with the exception of Libya where it remained neutral and Syria where sectarianism produced an alliance (between the Assad regime and) Iran – Qatar supported the uprisings, especially where the Brotherhood was involved, with the exception of Bahrain for obvious reasons. The conflict between the Emirate and the Kingdom since the onset of the “Arab Spring” was evident by Qatar’s support for the Tunisian uprising, while Saudi Arabia granted asylum to deposed Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

Moreover, the Obama administration saw Qatar as a means to ward off the danger of Arab uprisings that might take root in a way that would threaten US interests. So it played both sides, at times supporting the old establishment with Saudi Arabia (as in

Bahrain), and at others, trying to contain the uprisings with Qatar through the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliates (like in Tunisia and Egypt). But Qatar’s role urging Washington to adopt a policy of keeping pace with the uprisings was a cause of Saudi indignation, and outraged the United Arab Emirates, which had designated the Muslim Brotherhood public enemy number one. The pressure the two Gulf countries placed on Qatar continued to build after Qatari bets on the Muslim Brotherhood failed to pay out when the Egyptian army overthrew President Mohammed Morsi and violently suppressed the Brotherhood. That was followed by Emir Hamad’s decision to step down in place of his son, the current Emir, Tamim, only to see Gulf pressure reach its first peak in 2014, forcing the new emir to change course. [3]

After the peak, it seemed that the Gulf conflict had come to an end. Through the consensus of the three aforementioned gulf states to support the Syrian opposition against the Assad Regime, which strained relations between Qatar (and with it, the Muslim Brotherhood) and Iran, and, later, Qatar’s participation in the military campaign against Ali Abdullah Saleh and the Houthis in Yemen – all against the backdrop of a new king ascending to the Saudi throne – it seemed as if peace between GCC members was possible. This trend has been supported by Saudi Arabia’s longtime pursuit of a Sunni consensus against Iran that includes the Muslim Brotherhood and coincides with tension between Riyadh and Cairo. The trend also aligned perfectly with the politics of the Obama administration.

However, Donald Trump’s election as president of the United States changed the equation. The new president is a supporter of a policy of confrontation in the face of change and revolution in the Arab world. He is also extremely hostile to Iran and has an intimate friendship with Israel.

Some of his closest advisors have classified the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group, concurring in this with the UAE (as evidenced by recently uncovered correspondence of its ambassador to Washington). This fundamental change in the equation led Saudi Arabia to reconcile with al-Sisi's Egypt, who together, accompanied by the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, launched the current frenzied attack on Qatar in

order to impose a radical change on its policy.

Thus, the latest episode reversing the Great Arab Uprising and the counterattack launched by the ancien regime all across the region, supported in most arenas by the Gulf axis and by Iran in Syria and Yemen, is almost complete. But a new uncontrollable wave of revolution is coming sooner or later (indeed, its

harbingers are already visible in Morocco and Tunisia). [4] If this day comes and there is no one to contain it, then Riyadh and Abu Dhabi may well regret eliminating Qatar's role within this space.

Source : [*al-Quds al-Arabi*](#), 7 June 2017.

English Translation **The Arabist** "In Translation: And if Qatar folds?".

The Marawi Siege and Martial Law in Mindanao

18 June 2017, by **Raymund de Silva**

The AFP has already utilized and put into action all its major branches (Army, Air force and the Navy - Marines) which comprise more than half of the human, logistical and armored assets of the Western Mindanao Command (WestMinCom). It has also put into action (for the first time) the FA-50 fighter jets which were just purchased from South Korea. This is in addition to the use of the OV-10 bombers and the MG 520 attack helicopters. The AFP with the assistance of the US technicians has utilized the use of unmanned drones (for the first time in combat zones) and the US Navy P3 Orion surveillance plane to guide the Air force bombers for the so-called surgical bombings.

All these combat mobilizations and manoeuvres are directed against those with inferior military training but highly determined fanatical groups which according to the AFP source, number around 400 to 500 radical jihadists. It has been known that there is no substantial support from the city residents which means that the radical Islamists are mainly coming from the outside in terms of human resources and these fanatics are just helping themselves in terms of logistical and material needs from those left behind by the Marawi residents.

Meanwhile, the number of deaths and wounded have been increasing by the hour and they are coming mostly from the civilians. There are still scores of dead bodies of not only Christians but also of AFP soldiers (which could not be retrieved due to the snipers' fires) and from the radical Islamists which are left unattended on the streets in the central part of Marawi.

There are more than two thousand civilians who are still trapped inside the hotly contested buildings, streets and areas in the City.

As seen today, almost all the buildings including the commercial center as well as residential in the central trading center of Marawi have been destroyed and literally flattened to the ground as a result of artillery fires and direct hits of air strikes and surgical bombings done by the AFP in spite of the well-known fact that civilians are still trapped in many of these buildings.

The Marawi Siege is very unprecedented and the boldest armed attacks by the Islamist radicals since their founding in the early 90s in the case of Abu Sayyaf and five years ago in the case of the Maute group. The nearest comparison one can make in terms of style and intensity is the Ipil massacre in April 3, 1995. The Abu

Sayyaf then led by its founding head Abdulrajak Janjalani attacked the unsuspecting commercial and bustling municipality of Ipil. They had occupied the center of the town, blocked the national highways, robbed 8 commercial banks, killed several dozens of civilians and burnt the City before successfully made their escape after three days of the siege.

But one has to take note that the Marawi attack by the Islamic extremists is a reaction to a botched operation to capture Isnilon Hapilon the self-proclaimed emir of the ISIS inspired radical extremists by the AFP and PNP operatives.

In short the AFP has initiated the armed hostilities and the Abu Sayyaf and Maute group have just reacted and executed their seemingly pre-planned siege of the Islamic City of Marawi. They have burnt the City jail, occupied the medical center, burnt a college and the St Mary Cathedral. They had robbed all the banks, occupied strategic buildings and blocked highways.

It has been more than two weeks now since the start of the armed hostilities between the AFP and the radical extremists but there have been no sign of these abating. In fact, it has already surpassed two deadlines, one

made by the National Defense Secretary and the Mindanao Martial Law administrator – Secretary Delfin Lorenzana (June 2, 2017) and the other deadline by the country's President himself which was June 5, 2017.

But twice the ground commanders of the AFP have to apologize for not fulfilling the deadlines because they could not predict what will become of the dynamics on the ground with the close-quarter combat. The deadlines set by their leaders had pressured them to unleash more bombs which could mean more destroyed buildings and more loss of lives from both sides but most especially for the civilians who are still trapped in the City.

Meanwhile, sources on the ground are saying that the leadership of both the Abu Sayyaf and Maute group – Isnlon Hapilon and the Maute brothers Omarkhayam and Abdullah respectively – are still in the city leading their Islamic fanatics in fighting the AFP and sparing no one especially the Christian civilians in their deadly occupation of the only Islamic Ccty in the country.

And just like in Ipil massacre twenty-two years ago they (Maute and Abu Sayyaf) have held more than two hundred hostages (mostly Christian including a priest) to shield them away from the bombs and will also possibly make their successful escape.

I - The Abu Sayyaf, Maute Group and Others

There are four identified groups which claim to be inspired by the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS) or Daesh in Mindanao, Philippines. The oldest among these four (in terms of its founding or formation) is the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) which started in early 90's (between 1991 and 1993). The ASG had earlier called itself as AL Harakatul AL Islamiyyah (AHAI) and its armed component was called Mujahideen AL Sharifullah but later it has become known as Abu Sayyaf which literally means father of the swordsman. Its founding leader –

Abdul Rajak Abubakar Janjalani had been educated in the Middle East but got international contact with other mujahideens when he participated in the Afghanistan war. He had maintained his network with global Jihadists and other Islamic movements which helped ASG to be part of global movement of self-radicalized and still be effective in decentralized cells.

The ASG became globally known when they attacked and burnt the municipality of Ipil (the Ipil massacre) on April 3, 1995. Their founding leader was killed in December 1998 and replaced by his brother Khadafi Janjalani but later split into different groups, one led by Isnlon Tonton Hapilon. The ASG has survived and flourished through different criminal acts like kidnapping, extortions and outright robbery. They are mostly supported by their relatives and impoverished people in rural areas who got their shares in the looting and ransom money.

In 2001, the ASG under the leadership of Isnlon Hapilon made its link to the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and Al Qaeda regional network in South East Asia and 13 years later, the ASG through the leadership of Isnlon Hapilon, took bayah (pledge of allegiance) to the Islamic State Group (ISG). The bayah is made between the central Daesh and the purported caliphate and there should be a clear manifestation of reciprocation between the two. Seemingly, there is no (to date) outright reciprocation. This fact has pushed the ASG to highlight its presentation of ideological façade (the formation of caliphate and strict application of Shariah Law among its people) to cover their criminal acts. [In spite of] the absence of operational links from Central Daesh, the act of bayah has one useful role for the ASG; to create an image of ferocity for their criminal activities to instil fear and get the attention of the center.

At this point, it will be very important to note that the ASG has been infiltrated by both the Philippines and the US intelligent operators since its formative years. The former case of Edwin Angeles who himself admitted to being a Philippine agent tasked to infiltrate the ASG is a good example. It is also a well-known knowledge that

Abdulrajak Janjalani had made some connection with US covert operators during the Afghanistan war. Another is the case of Abu Sabaya, the once famous ASG spokesperson who was one of the leaders of ASG in the Sipadan kidnapping. He simply disappeared in the US-Philippine anti-terrorism operations.

The second Jihadist Group is the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) which was formed in 2010. Basically the BIFF came from the MILF 105th base command. The separation of the BIFF from the MILF was the former's reaction to endless negotiations and the indefinite ceasefires with the government. This was clearly expressed by their founding chairman Ustadz Ameril Umbra Kato the former head of the MILF's 105th base command. He died years later but was able to establish and maintain links with the Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) through Zulkifli bin Hir alias Marwan who was later killed in January 2015 during the famous botched Mamasapano Operation of the Philippine National Police (PNP) [5]. The BIFF later pledged allegiance to the ISIS and its leader – Abu Bak'r al Baghdadi.

The BIFF made its first appearance when they massacred several Christian civilians between the boundary of Maguindanao and Sultan Kudarat province especially after the non-approval of the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD) between the MILF and the Government of the Philippines. Since then, they have been known to be involved in various criminal activities along the boundaries of Maguindanao, Sultan Kudarat and North Cotabato.

The third group is the Maute Group which was formed in 2012 by the brothers Abdullah and Omarkhayan Romato Maute. At first, they called themselves as Daulat UL Islamiyah but later they regard themselves as Islamic State-Ranao or IS-Ranao. Before they formed their group, they were identified with the MILF with Aziza Romato who was their aunt but was also the second wife of the late MILF Vice Chairperson, Alim AbdulAziz Mimbantao. The Romato clan owned the land occupied by the MILF's famous Camp Bushra.

Currently, the Maute Group had occupied the MILF Camp but made it off limits for the latter (MILF).

The Maute Group became famous for their spectacular bombings in night markets of urban centers that cost many lives such as in 2013 in Cagayan de Oro City and 2016 in Davao City. They were also suspected of attempted bombing of US Embassy last November 2016. During the same year, they fought to be recognized as the ISIS or IS Lanao. Its ferocity was shown when they beheaded two Christian workers in a small sawmill in Lanao del Sur when the relatives of the workers could not raise the P5 million ransom. The beheading was shown in a video so the world could witness its barbarous act.

The fourth group is the AL Khalifah-Philippines (AKP) which was formed in August 2014. It was founded by Jaafar Maguid alias Tokboy who used to be part of MILF just like BIFF and the Maute group. It sought allegiance to the ISIS and just like the other Jihadist groups mentioned above, it did not get reciprocal action from the Daesh Center. They (AKP) have their criminal activities in the provinces of South Cotabato, Sarangani, and Sultan Kudarat. A year after it was founded, its leader, Maguid was killed in the government operation. The next batch of leadership of the AKP was also captured by the government agents in a municipality of Sarangani province. Among the four groups, AKP was the closest to the International mujahideens because of its link to the other ISIS inspired groups in Malaysia and Indonesia. This connection was through the Indonesian Saifullah Ibrahim alias Ibrahim Ali and Sucipto who was the mastermind in the bombings of Fitmark in Tacurong City, Sultan Kudarat and in General Santos and Sarangani Provinces.

Aside from glaring commonalities among the four jihadists in the country they have also particularities in terms of the historical stages that they were founded as well as their ways of identification to the ISIS and the particular Islamic traditions (development of Wahabism among the leadership and its members) and the idea of the building the wilayat (province) in their day to day

activities.

All of them had once belonged and identified themselves to a moro revolutionary group either MNLF in the case of ASG and the MILF in other three jihadist groups. They all came out of the revolutionary fronts and formed their separate groups during the lull periods of the peace talks of the Moro fronts and the government. All of the founding leaders of the four groups got their leadership and military skills from the Moro fronts. They had also brought with them their weapons from the fronts on their initial days of filling up the gaps during their formative years.

All the jihadists have been based in the rural areas where the socio economic-conditions are always ripe for recruitment and the poor rural people can easily be swayed by religious preaching for an alternative society. The unsuccessful or protracted peace negotiations have also helped in creating desperate conditions for the rural people who have been frustrated with the protracted processes of the peace negotiations between the Moro fronts and the government.

Aside from attracting most of their followers from the rural areas, the four groups are mostly family-based jihadists. This means that their followers and even those in the leadership mainly come from their own families and relatives. The clannish nature and dynamism of the Moro society has something to do with this characteristic. In the case of the Maute group, they are known lately to attract young followers, especially the students aside from their own family including the extended ones.

All the leaders of the Islamist groups in one way or the other were scholars and had studied in the Islamic institutions in the Middle East. They became well versed in Islam and became effective and charismatic preachers in their own areas. Their understanding of Islam had been mostly influenced by their contact with the International movements and Jihadists. In the case of the Maute brothers they went to the Middle East as migrant workers which gave them the opportunity to meet people in the

Jihadist movement.

Almost all of them became critique and felt frustration with the mainstream religion and its practices especially as seen in their traditional leaders as well as the leadership of the moro fronts.

The four Islamic Jihadists have all pledged allegiance to the ISIS and to AL Baghdadi and made their bayah to build a wilayat (province) in their own respective areas but notable there have been no expressed reciprocity from the center (Daesh) and the purported caliphate/province. Lately it has been announced that the four groups have merged as one and recognized Isnilon Hapilon as their Emir.

It is very difficult to find reason(s) behind the absence of clear manifestation of recognition from the center (ISIS/Daesh) to their pledges from the groups which have wanted to become part of the Global Islamist Network. But what had happened to the earlier experience of the Al Qaeda and the infiltration of both Philippine and US intelligence operators to neutralize if not paralyze the Regional AL Qaeda or the Jemaah Islamiyah from the Philippines could have not been easily forgotten by the Daesh. The latter has considered the Philippines as the weakest link in their global network and therefore should be subjected to extraordinary screening in terms of membership acceptance. However, one thing such condition has impacted to the four ISIS inspired groups. They all want to create an image of ferocity of their criminal activities and almost mimicking the worst that the ISIS has been doing to their kidnap victims like beheading and always making stress that non-believers (kafirs) do not have right to share the world with them.

In the siege of Marawi, there are only two groups (Maute and Abu Sayyaf) which are known to be involved. But surely they could have maintained their communication and their coordination with the other two jihadists which could be expressed in different forms like diversionary activities or help in the evacuation of the leadership as well as the wounded.

This context can help us understand the reasons behind the siege and the burning of the Islamic City of Marawi. The non-monolithic characteristic of Islam and our profound understanding to this dynamic should help us comprehend the reason(s) behind the decision of the Maute and Abusayyaf to choose the Islamic City of Marawi to start their Jihadist war. The timing of the siege – during the month of Ramadhan is another consideration.

II. The Islamic City of Marawi

The mosque studded heartland of Islamic faith in the southern part of the predominantly Roman Catholic nation and the political capital of Lanao Del Sur where the pristine Lake Lanao is located has become a full-battle field after more than two weeks of a very violent battle between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Abu Sayyaf-Maute extremists. The city has been burning and in complete ruin. For the first time, the only predominantly Muslim City has been emptied by its more than two hundred thousand population. Its people have hurriedly left their residences and businesses (leaving behind everything) on the first day of the siege firmly believing that it would be very brief evacuation. But that was the last time they saw their home intact and their properties and their wealth safely hidden in their residences. Their lives and dreams have been burnt together with their city. Islamic extremists well-orchestrated siege of the city and the declaration of Martial Law in Mindanao by President Rodrigo Duterte have both made the people of Marawi transcending all the social divide instant Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) or Instant Displaced Persons (IDP). The latest figure (June 9, 2017) has reached 252,638 individuals or 52,460 families. Their situation has been made worst since it happened when the people have to observe fasting during the holy month of Ramadan.

What are the Whys and How's of all these developments? Who started what? Who are the targets of whom? Who reacted to which?

Whatever the answers to all these questions should be relevant for the understanding of fast unfolding situation in the city. Further, whatever these will be, they cannot change the fact that the once proud culture of the Maranaw has been ruined and it will take a long time to rebuild and heal and much less comprehend its complexities.

Before the actual siege of Marawi, there have been clear signs that the Maute group with the Abu Sayyaf were preparing for something big. As early as the late 2014, the Maute brothers had sent their people to be trained by Marwan and Basit Usman to make bombs in Pidsandawan, Mamasapano (just before the famous January 25, 2015 Mamasapano massacre). Since then they have been initiating bombing activities elsewhere in Mindanao (bombing in Davao, attempt bombing in US embassy in Manila). The famous armed activities of the Maute group was the siege of their own town – Butig in the last quarter of 2016. The municipality of Butig is one of the 39 towns of Lanao del Sur with 17,000 population. During the Butig siege, 16,000 out of its total population were displaced. For the first time during the siege the Maute had made a chilling show of power when black-clad members of their group raised the ISIS flag in the old municipal building which they had controlled along with a high school building and a madrasah. This event has clearly shown that the Maute from family-based has metamorphosed into a force which could create havoc even in their own municipality and dislocating their own people including their own relatives.

In the first quarter of 2016, it has been known that there was merging of Isnilon's Abu Sayyaf and the Maute's group which was known to happen in Butig and which means that Isnilon Hapilon had to make long and very risky travel from his home base Basilan to a strange area with very peculiar tradition and culture of the Maranaos.

The AFP through its 103rd Brigade of the First Infantry Division had launched intense operations against Abu Sayyaf and Maute group during and after the Butig siege (November

26, 2016). According to mainstream media reports, the AFP was able to inflict heavy damage and casualties and pushed the radical Jihadists to the mountains.

But in the first quarter of this year (2017) everybody was surprised because there was a big armed encounter in Butig's neighboring town of Piagapo (nearer to Marawi). Again the AFP claimed to inflict heavy casualties to the Jihadists. According to the AFP reports, thirty (30) jihadists were killed and allegedly Isnilon Hapilon was seriously wounded in the encounters and the air strikes.

And just before the Marawi siege, there was a big International assembly of Tableeghi Jemaat which is held yearly. Islamic believers from different countries are attending this month long activities. For this year, the assembly was held in Abubak'r Markas Mosque which has assembly complex in the place near the apartment where accordingly the group of Isnilon Hapilon was using. It was also in this place where the combined forces of the AFP and the PNP would serve the Warrant of Arrest for Isnilon Hapilon in the fateful day of May 23, 2017.

The subsequent events would show that the Abu Sayyaf and the Maute group were more prepared than the AFP and PNP. It was like Mamasapano of 2015 all-over again. The targets of the military operations were more prepared than the ones who were supposed to know the surroundings of the area or place where the target persons are hiding. The shoot outs which followed and which later made Marawi under heavy attacks have distracted the Tableeghi Jemaat and made those foreign missionaries and believers scattered and running for their lives. Others would have a strong belief that these foreigners are those who have joined the Jihadists in their fight against the government forces. This belief is backed up by the knowledge that no foreigners could be found in all evacuation centers unless they have hidden in the private houses in the City or in the neighboring municipalities.

III - The Besieged City of Marawi

The events that followed after the botched operation to arrest the so-called Emir of the Daesh in the country have resulted to simultaneous but coordinated attacks in the central and commercial areas in Marawi. The City jail was attacked, burnt and all its prisoners were set free. Many of these freed prisoners had joined the Islamic Jihadists in fighting the government and burning the City. The Dansalan College (an oldest Christian institution in the island - founded by Protestant missionaries in 1908) was burned down and the teachers were either held hostages or had hidden themselves in some buildings in the neighboring areas. The Saint Mary Cathedral was also burnt down but not before destroying the religious images and statues which Catholic believers considered sacred in their faith. The parish priest and the concurrent Vicar general of the Prelature of Marawi together with some of his parishioners are held hostages and they are made human shields of the Jihadists against the bombings of the AFP. They (Islamists) have tried to attack the City executive building as well as the PNP provincial camp but they are not successful but up to now more than three dozen of the PNP personnel and officers are still missing. The provincial hospital and the medical center of Amai Pakpak was also attacked and has been closed since then.

The manner of the attack and scale of its destruction showed that it was pre-planned and coordinated which in effect made the Islamists control all the bridges going to the City center and is also aimed to surround the Camp Ranao or the base of the 103rd Brigade of the 1st Infantry Division. It was also aimed to isolate the Main Center of the Mindanao State University (MSU) where more than twenty two thousand students coming from different provinces and cities in Mindanao are studying and residing. There were attempts to isolate the Provincial Capitol building of the province of Lanao del Sur but was not also successful.

The scale of the attacks and the various strategic areas covered by the Islamists operations would surely need intense and elaborate level of preparation by the extremists and it would be impossible that these activities did not reach and get the attention of the Philippine authority - especially its intelligence community. According to sources from the ground people in the City had alerted the AFP and the PNP about the alarming Islamists activities before 23rd of May 2017. They were told that the data would be checked and validated.

The people of Marawi in general did not support the Maute and the Abu Sayyaf groups nor their plan to seize Marawi. According to the residents they could not imagine themselves being the followers of an Islamic caliphate where strict adherence to Sharia is paramount. The Maranaos are mainly Sunnis [but] not Wahhabists. The Marawi residents could not imagine even in their wildest dream that they would participate in burning and ruining their own homes and City. At best, the Jihadists were able to get the support of their relatives in the City and the few students they were able to recruit in the late 2016 and early 2017.

Accordingly, the AFP and the PNP were surprised to find so many high-powered firearms including the 50 caliber sniper rifle-barrel and so much ammunition which made the radical Islamists last this far. The reality is that the residents of Marawi including people in the province of Lanao del Sur have been buying and collecting arms. In fact, the common understanding is that the higher you are in the social ladder the higher caliber and more sophisticated arms you should have. This fact is both deterrent to avoid clan wars (rido) and at the same time a sure defense in times of clan wars.

It should be remembered that people of all walks of life leaving behind their money and their arms behind believing that the situation would be brief and very temporary.

Again, this explains further two points, one is that, as AFP would claim later, the Maute and ASG have prepared for this battle because they have built

solid and fortified houses and kept big amount of money. Anybody who knows Marawi and the Maranaws would know well that the people would usually build their houses solidly precisely because of rido. In fact, one can easily find snipers' holes and bunkers in the houses. One just has to travel from Marawi to Malabang to see these types of houses along the highway. But anybody can also observe these realities even in the rural and interior areas in the province. It simply explains that the western type of justice system and governance is not really strictly followed in these areas. Rido is still substantially use to settle or resolve family feuds.

And with regards to the large amount of money found in houses in the city. Not a few families in Marawi or even in the province are used to deposit such amount money to the banks. But again, few weeks before the Marawi siege, there were noticeable big withdrawals from the big banks. Accordingly, the average monthly withdrawal from the banks in Marawi would average between P100-P150 million but during those pre Marawi siege days and weeks, more than P200 millions were withdrawn in a month.

Some explanations can be possible like the month of Ramadhan is fast approaching so people with money in the banks had started to withdraw for the preparation of the month-long religious activities. The money lenders have also withdrawn big amounts of money to make a big hit in terms of high interest rate (5/6) for the politicians who have not yet received their Internal Revenue Allocations (IRAs) and also for those people who have to get easy cash for fasting celebrations and for the parents who will go to the money lenders for the school enrolment of their children.

Lastly, but not definitely the least, the Maute and the ASG had robbed all the banks in the city so that explained the presence of lots of cash in the besieged city.

The total failure of the intelligence works of AFP and PNP should be given due considerations. As mentioned earlier, people had been giving information to the AFP and PNP in the

pre-Marawi siege but no concrete actions had been done. The fact that the city jail of Marawi where several Maute operatives had been imprisoned was raided and attacked before, no action had been done to correct these security lapses and to secure the jail either by reinforcing the personnel and guards or transferring the Maute prisoners to other jails (such as in CDO or in Manila).

But none of these were done and worst the President of the country has been blaming the people of Marawi of not informing the authorities before the Marawi siege. The President has been insinuating that the people of Marawi have welcomed the Islamic extremists.

The above-mentioned events would led to the declaration of Martial Law by President Duterte not only to Marawi but to all 27 provinces and 33 cities in Mindanao.

IV - Declaration of Martial Law in Mindanao

President Rodrigo R. Duterte has declared Martial Law in Mindanao through Presidential Decree (PD) 216 which takes effect starting 10pm of the 23rd of May 2017.

The President made the proclamation when he together with his top military and security advisers were starting with his State visit to Moscow. The PD 216 declaration was made a few hours after the botched AFP/PNP operation to serve the warrant of arrest for Jihadist leader Isnilon Hapilon and the early hours of rampage by extremist followers of Marawi City.

Accordingly, the President made the declaration of Martial Law based on reports of these early clashes unfolding in the Islamic City. But earlier on he has previously expressed that he would not hesitate to declare martial law to preserve the nation.

It should be noted that martial law (based on the 1987 Philippine Constitution) can only be legally declared when there is a rebellion or

invasion and when public safety requires it. There should be sufficient in the factual basis for the declaration of martial law or for the suspension of the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus. It cannot be definitely use preemptively.

Surely one cannot simply determine that there is a rebellion or invasion and that the public safety is requiring it a few hours when the Maute and the Abu Sayyaf have started to create havoc in the City. More so if the operation to serve the warrant of arrest even to the most wanted terrorist in the world has failed.

Unless there are other bases that only the President and his inner circle of his trust know that indeed Martial Law should be declared.

If one should consider that there might be other information from the intelligence community that the President and his security advisers knew and therefore the failed arrest mission and the early phase of the siege of Marawi have just served only to trigger for the declaration of martial law because public safety is requiring it then it could not be corroborated by facts on the ground. The security sectors which include the 103rd Brigade of the 1st Tabak Infantry Division and the PNP provincial command were totally caught by surprise by the Marawi take over. Not a few personnel of the Army Brigade were on leave/vacation during the actual attack which means that they were not advised to stay put because of the intelligence information of the impending attack. The PNP should not be in total disarray when the siege of the city started. Most important of all, at least the civilian authority should have had a minimum of modicum preparation to at least reduce the risk for the safety of the public or the civilians which means they should be informed earlier even excluding the details. The disorganized evacuation of the City's population and the thousands who are left behind to absorb all the artillery and aerial bombings should not have happened.

The government spokespersons have been trying to tell the country that there is an invasion because there are

foreign nationals fighting alongside with the Maute and Abu Sayyaf Jihadists. The proof or such claim is definitely the foreign passports found on the battle field. Serious consideration should be given to the foreigners who attended the Jamaat of the Tableegh at the time. And with regards to the raising of the ISIS flags they could not be the basis of the invasion before and after the siege. The Moro revolutionary groups have been raising their own flags since time immemorial. The fact that these fanatical jihadists want to make Marawi a caliphate of ISIS this cannot simply form an invasion became how can 400 fanatics declared an empty city of Marawi as a wilayat of Daesh.

Another reason that the central authority of the country is claiming is that the Maute and Abusayyaf is waging a rebellion. A rebellion should at least have a political objective and this objective should be at least supported by a portion of the population of the place /city where they have the rebellion. In the case of Marawi city, it is only the Maute and the Abusayyaf extremists who are involved in the rampage of the City. The terroristic activities and the havoc that the fanatics have inflicted in the city have made the population abandoned the city.

At best, the Islamic Extremists have inflicted terror on the population and their terroristic activities have alienated them from the people. One cannot have a wilayat without a people and one cannot have a successful invasion without the support of the people. These fanatics are called terrorists.

The Philippines has adequate laws to take care of this problem. The R.A. 9372 or the Human Security Act of the 2007 can be an effective tool to face the threats of terrorists. But what might be the basis of the President's declaration of Martial Law in Mindanao? For one the President knows that there are destabilization moves against his regime. These moves have been expressed covertly because the President is still very popular. But it is well known that the US has been worried by the president's pivot to China at Russia. In fact it is not coincident that the siege

of Marawi started when the President, defense and security advisers were in Moscow and about to sign military and defense agreements with President Vladimir Putin when the Marawi siege happens. The US and the State Department will surely not want the Philippines to become part of China and Russia circle. It will definitely do anything to stop the President's pivots away from them.

The appropriate time to prevent President Duterte's direction away from the US circle should be now. The current crop of leaders from both the AFP and the PNP is still pro US because they have been educated and trained by the US. There is still the positive influence of the military doctrine in and among all levels of the security sector of the country as President Duterte himself has admitted.

The Marawi siege and the possible outcome of the takeover by the extremists and the counter siege by the security can create destabilization effects among the young corps of officers. A purely military approach to a religious, political and military problems like the jihadists have been advocating would truly fail. Marawi city have been sieged by fanatics mainly coming from outside Marawi and cannot and will not be solved by purely security sector also coming from the outside. The people of the city and of the province should have been involved in the defense and protection of their respective places and not only in performing humanitarian actions. The declaration of Martial Law will cause another level of problems like repression and abuses mainly because the security sector has not been fully cleansed and reformed. Abuses and violations of Human Rights have been already reported during this stage of the siege.

Another danger sign as shown by the Marawi siege is the linking of problems of terrorism to the drug problem. The President himself has already MENTIONED that drug money has bankrolled the takeover of Marawi. It is simplifying the root causes of terrorism and just point out to an easy culprit like drugs and drug

lords. This line of thinking will surely lead to Martial Law as an answer to the drug problem in the country. This is simply promoting a purely military approach in solving a complex problem like illegal drugs and terrorism.

V - The US and the Declaration of Martial Law in Mindanao

When President Ferdinand E. Marcos had declared Martial Law in the Philippines in 1972, he did so after duly consulting and getting the advice of the US. The dictator knew very well that if he would want to be successful in his absolute governance of the country, he would need the support of the US. Indeed all throughout his dictatorial regime the US had not abandoned him until that time when the people had to oust him from the Malacañang and the US had to assist the dictator to be safely flown out the country before the people could have skinned him and his family alive.

It is not definitely the case when President Rodrigo R. Duterte declared Martial Law in Mindanao which he promised to be harsher than Marcos's. Anyway he did not only consult the US for any advice but in fact he has openly declared that he wanted all the agreements with the US be abrogated. But everybody knows that this is not because he wants that his administration will adopt an independent and nationalist foreign policy direction but he wants the US out because he has established and strengthen his relationship with China and Russia. President Duterte is very much aware though that the security sector of the country is still very US dependent and oriented. His frequent visits to military camps and talk to military officers men and women should be understood in this context.

So if the US would want to make a timely action it should be now that those relationships and agreements with China and Russia have yet to be consummated.

One has to be critical here of the role of the Abusayyaf and Isnilon Hapilon in all these developments. The US covert operations have not abandoned its link with the local and reliable agents not excluding those from the extremist groups like the Abusayyaf. Isnilon Hapilon arrival in Butig last year is very strange. It has been reported that his Lanao del Sur basing due to extreme pressure of the military operations by the Philippines security sector and the US Special covert operators. Considering the ethno-linguistic group dynamics like Yakans and Maranaos it should have greater reason that the high-valued person like Isnilon (with 5million USD price on his head) could be secured in a setting like Butig and Lanao del Sur and starting to fight another battle not necessarily their own. Anyway, this fact should be given enough consideration as well.

Currently the US special operatives are back right at the heart of the operation to monitor and help the Philippine security sector fight and end the siege of Marawi. They (US) have been highly projected in active circulation once again within the Philippine security sector and allegedly helping the latter to end the rampage of the extremists. They did it just on time when their Chinese and Russian counterparts have not yet put their feet on the Philippine ground. Meanwhile, President Duterte has to eat his own words and his pride in not so silent manner.

What will be the end scenario? Nobody can tell, except that one will not be surprised to witness another Abu Sabaya scenario - that is Isnilon Hapilon will successfully disappear in Marawi and will be somewhere else where he will be again needed. Meanwhile the gallant and courageous soldiers of the Republic are losing lives and Marawi city has continued to burn. Properties and lives of Muslim (Maranaos) and Christians alike have been destroyed and ruined. The rebuilding of the city can only be better and stronger if it be outside the framework of Martial Law or its shadow.

June 9, 2017

Why is the DUP so reactionary?

17 June 2017, by **Andy Stowe**

The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) has attracted a lot of opprobrium for its reactionary positions on every subject you can think of and for their ongoing links with loyalist terrorists writes Andy Stowe.

"There can be no viler act, apart from homosexuality and sodomy, than sexually abusing innocent children.

I cannot think of anything more sickening than a child being abused. It is comparable to the act of homosexuality. I think they are all comparable. I feel totally repulsed by both." Iris Robinson, a DUP MP speaking in Westminster in 2008

What might surprise many people who don't follow politics in the north of Ireland is that every July 12th its members and voters take to the streets with the Orange Order in commemoration of an alcoholic, bisexual 17th century Dutch king, William of Orange. They make a point of going into streets where they aren't welcome because what they are really doing is asserting their belief that the north of Ireland should be a Protestant state for a Protestant people.

It's rather like dogs pissing on lampposts to mark their territory, except that the Orange marches, named in honour of William, piss in people's gardens and play deliberately offensive songs outside Catholic churches or at sites where Catholics have been murdered by loyalist terrorists.

The marches are central understanding what the DUP really is. The Orange Order says of itself:

"Today defending Protestantism is not so literal as it was in 1795 (the year of its foundation - AS), but it requires us to take a stand for truth in an age of secularism and in order to defend our culture and traditions."

The DUP is an unapologetically Protestant party. It was established in 1971 as split within northern unionism and its founder Ian Paisley was a fundamentalist Christian demagogue who was always willing to deploy the threat of violence. Paisley boasted that he had not read any book published after the year of his birth, 1926, and his intellectual reference points were Luther, Knox and Calvin, figures from the Protestant Reformation.

Who votes for the DUP and why?

The party now has ten MPs in Westminster. This represents 36% of the vote in the north of Ireland and all those votes will be Protestants who identify as loyalist much more than they identify as workers.

So why did 292,316 people vote for the DUP?

The Protestant population in Ireland mainly arrived as part of the British colonisation of the island. Ulster, the nine counties in the north, was the most remote and rebellious. The counter-insurgency strategy was to settle the area with Protestant English and Scottish settlers who were given the land seized from the native Catholic population. This is still a raw issue in rural Ulster.

Skip forward to the late 18th century and religious rivalries over land tenancies meant that in rural areas there was bitter conflict between Protestants and Catholics. These became violent and in 1795 the Orange Order was set up as a militant organisation to defend Protestant supremacy.

At the same time a linen industry had developed in Ulster, centred on Belfast. In 1798 a rebellion, mostly led by Protestants influenced by the

French Revolution, demanded an independent democratic Republic in which the majority Catholic population would have full equality. The Presbyterian revolutionaries resented the privileges of the Anglican Church which was the aristocracy at prayer.

However, they did not win over a majority of northern Protestants, promised French military support was ineffectual and the rebellion was crushed. The Orange Order's members joined the British forces which crushed the rebellion. Its first major political intervention was to crush a radical democratic revolutionary movement and its core purpose remains unchanged. That's what its parades celebrate.

Through the 19th and 20th centuries the Orange Order developed a hegemonic influence in much of Protestant rural Ulster and the expanding industrial working class in Belfast. In 1912 Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald described the situation and explained why workers in Belfast factories and shipyards were paid less than people doing the same job in Glasgow or Liverpool:

"In Belfast you get labour conditions the like of which you see in no other town, no other city of equal prosperity from John O'Groats to Land's End...It is maintained by an exceedingly simple device...whenever there is an attempt to root out sweating in Belfast the big Orange drum is beaten."

Belfast's industrialists and unionist politicians had learned that they could prevent any meaningful trade union or working class movement developing in Ulster by appealing to religious sectarianism and Protestant privilege. In 2017 that's still the situation.

In the early 20th century, Orangeism and its political organisation, the Unionist Party organised Europe's first proto-fascist mass movement to

oppose Home Rule for Ireland. Months before the First World War it smuggled guns from Germany in April 1914. In 1921, its opposition to Irish freedom resulted into the partition of the country and the creation of the northern state out of the six Ulster counties which could secure a Protestant majority for the new entity. Again, its role in Irish and British politics was to be reactionary and anti-democratic and the state they created secured the loyalty of its Protestant

citizens by election rigging and giving them marginal privileges over Catholics.

While the organisational forms have changed; the plebeian, fundamentalist Christian DUP has wiped out the older Official Unionist Party, the strategy remains the same. The Good Friday Agreement has made sectarian division of spoils the political basis of the northern state. Sinn Fein dispenses jobs, money and patronage

to Catholics. The DUP retains the support of the loyalist murder gangs turned drug dealers by doing the same for Protestants.

So, the DUP's views on women, sexuality, climate change, evolution have deep roots in everything backward and reactionary in Irish society. Voters in Britain shouldn't be at all surprised that Theresa May turned to them to keep the Tories in office for a little while longer.

Mindano: state of war and martial law in the Philippine south

16 June 2017, by Pierre Rousset, Reymund de Amore

Since June 4, the situation has worsened. Until now, the government has been unable to reconquer the whole of Marawi City. Nearly all of its population has fled and the town itself is partially destroyed. The militarisation of the province has become tighter and the political situation in the country is getting more and more unstable.

How did the fighting begin?

On May 23, 2017, a joint army-police operation was undertaken in the city of Marawi to capture Isnilon Hapilon, considered as the agent of Islamic State in Mindanao (the USA has put a price of five million dollars on his head). The response of the Maute group was very strong and totally unexpected. The government had to send emergency reinforcements. The fighting hasn't stopped since then.

Can you enlighten us about the situation?

We are well established in the two provinces of Mindanao most affected by the crisis. Lanao del Sur, where Marawi is located and where the fighting has taken place; and Lanao del Norte, where the city of Iligan is located and where many refugees have fled. It is however difficult to

give a precise picture of the situation. The violence of the conflict has led to massive population displacements.

Marawi city has more than 200,000 inhabitants, about 94% of them Muslim and about 6% Christian. According to a United Nations body, OCHA, on June 1st there were more than 100,000 "displaced persons", 14% of them in 24 evacuation centres and 86% outside of them in makeshift camps, or with relatives.

Movement is complicated with the imposition of curfews and the multiplication of military checkpoints on the roads. Finally, we are under martial law, the army blocks access to numerous zones to prevent journalists or independent observers finding out what is going on.

We can however say that the picture presented by the government is very far from the reality. The press has repeated the official figures (nearly a hundred Maute fighters killed, along with 30 government soldiers and 19 civilians). The presidency has rapidly announced the reconquest of 90% of Marawi. Indeed several days after this declaration, we saw significant reinforcements continuing to enter the city, including 21 tanks, which means in fact that the fighting is intensifying.

There were units of Marines, land, sea and air troops and the national, police (PNP). It's war, and it has been going on for 13 days now.

The civilian victims are certainly numerous. On the one hand the Maute group has committed massacres. We have received testimonies from soldiers who have seen a number of decapitated corpses in the streets of Marawi (mainly Christians). On the other hand, the army has had massive recourse to aerial or artillery bombardments. There is no "surgical precision". The military top brass have even been forced to acknowledge a sizeable blunder: one of their units was bombed by error, leading to ten deaths in their ranks! The city is largely destroyed.

Where does the Maute group come from?

Maute is the name of a family originally from the town of Butig, influential in the municipalities of the province of Lanao del Sur. Two sons of Cayamora Maute - Abdullah Maute, Mohammad and Omar, pursued Islamic studies in the Middle East. They gained a status as intellectuals and wished to promote a Salafists/Jihadists, an extremist version of Islam, whereas Filipino

Muslims (the Moros) are mainly Sunni (an Orthodox version of Islam) – this is notably the case with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

The MILF set up some of its main camps in Lanao del Sur. The famous one is in Butig (Camp Busra) which was led by Aleem Abdulaziz Mimbatas (now dead), who became Vice-Chair of Internal Affairs for the Islamic Front and was one of the most trusted advisors of its founder, Salamat Hashim. Cayamora, the father of the Maute brothers, was for a time a member of the leadership of the MILF in the area and was just recently captured in checkpoint. The MILF closed its camp in Butig because of the hostility expressed by Maute, notably in relation to their differing religious choices.

The Maute family influence local political life. It possesses high calibre weaponry (which must come from the MILF) and has involved in criminal activities. This group really emerged in a big way on the political scene when Isnilon Hapilon came to propose to it that it identify itself with Islamic State, in concert with Abu Sayyaf, an organization known for its kidnapping activities. Being actively sought, we think that it wanted to find allies with a view to destabilizing Duterte under the cover of religious radicalism. Hence their occupation of Marawi and the massacres of Christians.

Abu Sayyaf and Maute have recruited youth, trained in their version of Islam. They represent an attractive pole, because they possess significant weaponry, affirm their radicalism and offer an alternative whereas the peace negotiations with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Islamic Front (MILF) have not reached resolution of the question of the right of self-determination of the Moros on their territory (Bangsamoro) by the Philippine government.

The MNLF and the MILF have both offered to help the government in the conflict in Marawi. An irony of history, since a few years ago (September 9, 2013), it was the MNLF which attacked another city (Zamboanga) in order to have itself recognized. In fact Abu Sayyaf is very active in the province of Nur Misuari, the historic

leader of MNLF, and also in his home town. They attack civilians and kidnap for ransom.

The MILF is especially worried about the consequences of this conflict for the peace process which it has undertaken with the government. Hence its current position. Duterte and the leadership of the Islamic Front have agreed to propose to Maute/Abu Sayyaf the creation of a humanitarian corridor (Peace Corridor) open for two hours a day to bring aid to the people and care for the injured. The MILF will for this end use its own armed wing, the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF). An agreement in principle has been obtained, even if its implementation is not obvious. That could be the point of departure for broader negotiations, towards a way out of the crisis.

It seems, however, that the MILF does not have good relations with the local population. Also it has in its ranks many who are related to Maute and Abu Sayyaf. Indeed, in Moro culture, family, clan and blood links are thicker than ideology or religion. We have to take account of this factor and not interpret everything in political-religious terms.

The humanitarian situation is grave...

Very grave. The Maute group have executed civilians, set fire to the prison and buildings linked to the Church, including the Catholic cathedral of Saint Mary and the Dansalan college, managed by Protestants, and then they have taken hostages, including a priest and some teachers. Maute and the groups allied to them are extending their field of action and sowing terror around them, adopting a policy in the style of Islamic State.

The imposition of martial law by Duterte has aggravated the situation by creating a state of generalised arbitrariness, at least in the conception that the president has of it. The Philippine Constitution sets the framework for the conditions of declaration of martial law and the extraordinary powers conferred on the army or government. Indeed, it was

proclaimed in 1987, after the overthrow of the Marcos dictatorship and its regime of martial law. It is much more democratic than many Constitutions in the Western world.

Duterte has swept away the constitutional constraints with a wave of the hand. He has said that martial law will be “like under Marcos” – in fact, he observes less formalities than Ferdinand Marcos in 1972. He has “covered” for violations of human rights in advanced by saying that he will assume himself the responsibility for “blunders” committed by government forces and drove home the point – in the form of a “joke” – by telling soldiers that they can with impunity rape up to three women, but no more than that.

The military leadership has taken its distances in relation to Duterte on this question, assuring that it will operate within the constitutional framework. This “dissonance” expresses very real political tensions between the army and the presidency.

Duterte wages the “war on terror” like his “war on drugs” without any concern for law and human rights.

How is solidarity organised?

There are many spontaneous demonstrations of solidarity, for example, by Philippines working abroad who have sent money to their relatives. Various humanitarian organisations are helping to manage the evacuation centres or makeshift camps. It is important to us that the associative and social movements “on the ground” coordinate their own efforts, giving a popular and collective dimension to this solidarity, allowing the populations concerned to themselves defend their rights.

This is in particular what is done by MiHANDs, a coalition of around fifty organisations in Mindanao who coordinate their actions during situations of humanitarian crisis, whatever the origin: the Haiyan (Yolanda) super typhoon in the Visayas, or the military conflict in Marawi. It has acquired a precious experience in this area. However today it has to intervene in dangerous conditions. It has activated its activist

network up to the conflict zones, but it has to permanently evaluate what is and isn't possible.

In the Philippines, MiHANDs collects donations in kind (for all the needs of everyday life) as well as financial contributions. At the international level, it is obviously about financial support. For us it seems important to make the situation in Mindanao as widely known as possible so as to better respond to their appeal for solidarity.

The state of war continues, and any possible return to normal will take a lot of time. Marawi city has been partly destroyed by fire and bombs. Solidarity is thus both urgent and necessary. That is one of the reasons we have the policy of aiding self-organisation of the populations and communities affected, so that they regain control of their destiny. Punctual aid is always insufficient.

Why do you speak of a “possible” return to normal?

Because it's possible that the conflict gets worse and even spreads beyond Mindanao, to the region of the capital notably, or to Cebu. A casino very near the international airport in Manila has already been attacked, although the circumstances remain a little hazy. President Duterte envisages imposing martial law across the whole country. The repercussions of the war in Marawi are and will be profound. All the more so since, generally, the political situation remains very uncertain.

The influence of the USA in the Philippines is very profound. The archipelago was one of their few colonies and independence (1946) was prepared in such a way as to maintain very close links between the former metropolis and the local élites. The armed forces are trained in US military academies.

Since his election nearly a year ago, president Duterte has sought to play Beijing and Moscow off against Washington, without actually breaking links. It's a dangerous game. Duterte's popularity certainly remains very high (80%), although it has fallen a little. However, Washington cannot allow

the loss of the Philippines and doesn't want to react too late. We think that the CIA is working underhand in Mindanao to destabilise the presidency, taking advantage of Abu Sayyaf for this purpose to sharpen religious conflicts via the Maute group.

I note that in late May Congress refused to confirm environment minister Gina Lopez in her post. The mining industry had her scalp. How is that some members of a government formed in June 2016 are not yet confirmed?

The process of ratification by the Congress of members of the Cabinet is (by choice) very slow so as to take account of the evolution of the relationship of forces. The government includes leftist elements alongside direct representatives of the élites. When the popularity of Duterte was at its zenith (more than 90%), its choices could not be challenged. It has become possible to get rid of an activist opposed to the mining lobby.

The (Maoist) Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) has four representatives in the government at ministerial or equivalent level. They have not been ratified. Their fate is in the balance with the evolution of the peace negotiations between the Maoist guerrillas and the regime – the talks are currently at a standstill.

In fact, many other things remain in the balance, including the Duterte presidency.

All the peace processes seem to be at a standstill currently.

Yes, for now the talks between the CPP and the government are deadlocked. The Maoist guerrillas are calling for the intensification of their military operations, Duterte is threatening to jail the party's negotiators.

In June 2016 Duterte hoped that by including in the government leaders of the legal movements identified with the pro-CPP “bloc” and by opening a new cycle of talks he could convince at least some of the Maoist regional leaderships to enter into substantial peace negotiations. On this question

he was jeopardising his credibility with the army. For now, nothing has happened. For the first time since its foundation in 1968 (!), the CPP has held a congress, thanks to an Internet link between one of its zones in Mindanao and Holland, where a part of the leadership lives in exile. This congress, whose conditions of preparation aren't known, has reaffirmed the previous line, including the primacy of rural armed struggle.

One of the mechanisms which has led to the repeated breakdown of the peace talks between the presidency and the PCP is the fact that the two unilateral ceasefire declarations have been announced independently of each other, by the NPA and by the government. There was no joint, bilateral ceasefire declaration which would have allowed the establishment of a common mechanism of monitoring and implementation, allowing rapid reaction in the event of incidents. More profoundly, the PCP is demanding socio-political commitments from the government prior to negotiations, whereas the government thinks these matters should be the subject of the negotiations.

So far as the negotiations with the Muslim movements in Mindanao are concerned, an agreement had been signed by the previous Aquino administration and the MILF for the creation of new entity under the governance of the latter. This agreement required a constitutional reform and was unable to find a majority in Congress before the presidential election which brought Duterte to power.

Many established interests have undermined the agreement with the MILF; but the MILF itself has neither wished nor been able to give guarantees on the rights which would be enjoyed by the Lumads (mountain tribes), villages and Christian populations, and the other Muslim organisations, starting with the MNLF (Misuari group).

In the leadership of the MILF and MNLF today we find powerful political clans, very rich businessmen. They are notably linked to the mining and forestry groups which exploit the

wealth of Mindanao, often to the detriment of the local populations. The current developments also show that the two big Muslim fronts have not even been able to block the affirmation of a very aggressive Islamic fundamentalist group.

One of the most important issues from the election of Duterte was precisely the question of the peace negotiations. He resumed the process with the PCP and initiated a new framework for talks in Mindanao, opened this time with all the actors concerned: the MILF obviously but also the MNLF, representatives of the Lumads and other communities. This process could now be at risk.

The failure of the past negotiations (with the PCP or the armed Muslim organisations) was notably related to a key democratic question: they were

carried out at the top, in secret, without popular involvement. The people were invited to approve *a posteriori* an agreement which had been drawn up without their participation.

We - the RPM-M and the Revolutionary Peoples' Army (RPA) - are also involved in a peace process in Mindanao. We have involved the local people in the talks, when they have taken place, and we let them judge any possible intermediary agreements which concern them primarily. We do not carry out any offensive operation against the government; our posture is defensive, to ensure our protection and those of the communities where we are established. Unhappily we are faced with the militarisation of society, the war in Marawi, with martial law. One of our cadres, comrade Ruben,

was killed last March by government forces in the province of Lanao del Norte. We are calling for international solidarity to bring pressure on the Philippine government to immediately lift martial law in Mindanao and to not extend it to the other regions of the country.

In these conditions, how can we disarm? But we support the combat waged by civil society to create conditions for a lasting peace in Mindanao, where the people have suffered harshly under decades of conflict. The war in Marawi can generate a movement of rejection which gives new life to this struggle, bringing together the three peoples of our island: Moros, Lumads and the Christian descendants of the Philippine colonists who initially came from the north and centre of the archipelago.

Trump goes for bust on the national-populist trail. What did you expect?

15 June 2017, by **Daniel Tanuro**

These decisions are in line with the promises made by the new President during his election campaign. In the past few months, some observers had wanted to believe that Trump would change his tune, but he did no such thing. On the contrary, the speech he delivered in the Rose Garden of the White House flowed from a disturbing nationalist and populist demagoguery. What did you expect? - as the advertisers say...

Victimization and nationalism

For Trump, the Paris agreement was nothing but a scandalous piece of trickery imposed on the USA. "The Paris agreement is not about the climate," he said, "it's about the financial advantage that other countries get compared to the United

States. The rest of the world applauded when we signed the agreement. They were happy, for the simple reason that we suffer from a very great economic disadvantage."

Drawing an apocalyptic picture of the implications of the agreement, the president said it would lead to the loss of 2.7 million jobs, cost the US \$3 trillion and would result in a loss of purchasing power for US citizens of up to \$7,000 a year. He listed the figures of the reductions in economic activity that would affect the industrial sectors: "86 per cent in the coal sector", he said... omitting of course to mention that solar energy already gives employment to 800,000 US workers (against 67,000 in coal) and creates more jobs than the coal industry loses. [6]

For Trump, it is simple, there is a conspiracy: the poor Americans, who

are too honest, are victims of an enormous injustice hatched by an evil machination of all the other countries. The denunciation of the agreement is therefore an elementary reaction of sovereignty and national dignity: "The heads of state of Europe and China should not have more to say about the policy of the United States than American citizens do. We do not want to be the laughing stock of the world. We will not be."

Populist and security demagoguery

Rediscovering the tone of his electoral meetings, throughout his speech Trump staked everything on social demagoguery. As if the goal of his billionaire government was to give decent employment and a decent income to workers in Detroit and

Pittsburgh, as if the Paris agreement was taking the money and the jobs of American workers in order to distribute them to others.

"The Paris agreement is unfair to the US. It blocks the development of clean coal [in the United States]. China can build hundreds of coal-fired power plants, India can double its coal production, even Europe can build coal-fired power plants." "We have sufficient energy reserves to get all US citizens out of poverty, a mine is going to reopen in Pennsylvania," he said; but because of the Paris agreement, "millions of American families will remain in poverty".

The axis of this propaganda is employment. For Trump, as a good capitalist, employment obviously depends on growth: renewables could suffice for soft growth, he says, but not with the assumption of 3 to 4 per cent growth. And this is what Trump is dangling before people with his slogan "Make America great again": an America that creates jobs by building walls and making weapons. "For that, we need all kinds of energy, not just renewables," he said. "Otherwise, there will be a huge risk of power cuts for millions of families."

When you stick to populist demagoguery, you might as well go the whole hog by invoking the fight against terrorism. Trump did not fail to do so: "A billion dollars has already been paid to the Green Fund for the Climate by the US, including money that was destined for the fight against terrorism - not by me, by my predecessor," he said.

Not far from a call to hatred

Trump has no time for the principle of differentiated responsibilities - which is at the heart of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change - and the fact that the United States remains in the lead of the countries that emit the most greenhouse gas emissions per capita - far ahead of China, India and Brazil. In the Paris agreement, "China can continue to do what it wants for 13 years, (while) India is taking part in the agreement on condition of receiving billions of

aid".

Speaking of the Green Fund for the Climate (decided at the Cancun COP to help southern countries to make the transition and to adapt), the President was not afraid to say that the Fund was aimed at "seizing the wealth of the USA to redistribute it to the developing countries". "We have \$20,000 billion of debts, millions of unemployed workers, cities that have no money to hire police. This money should be invested here, not sent to countries that have seized our factories and our jobs." Here, we are not far from a call to hate. An imperialist hatred, to divert the anger of US workers from US employers who have relocated their production to low-wage countries... and from the policies of Trump's himself, whose tax reform will bring billions of dollars to rich people like him!

A difference of 0.2°C?

On the climate itself, the occupant of the White House did not say much. Let us note however this extraordinary peremptory affirmation: "the Paris agreement would only make a difference of 0.2°C". By what date? Compared to what baseline? It's a mystery.

We have repeated here often enough that the Paris Agreement is only a declaration of intent. But it is a declaration of intent which at least has the advantage - it is the only one it has - of setting a goal: "stay well below 2°C, and continue efforts not to go beyond 1.5°C". National contributions to this goal put us on the path of a 3 to 4°C warming by the end of the century. But doing nothing could push the temperature up by 6°C. Now, doing nothing is precisely what the United States has just decided. Trump is trying to make Americans believe that his decision has no ecological consequences for them, but it implies a difference well over 0.2°C!

Renegotiate? My

eye...

At the same time that he repeated tirelessly his denunciation of the agreement reached at COP21, Trump declared that he was ready to negotiate the re-accession of the United States to this document, or to negotiate an "entirely new" agreement provided that it does not harm America and its citizens. He does not believe what he says. What is the consistency of this proposal, coming from an individual who claims that climate change is a hoax created by the Chinese to harm the US economy?

In any case, the violence of Trump's words leaves little credibility to this idea of renegotiating. In addition to the "emerging" and "developing" countries, the White House troll has gone on the offensive against his European partners: "Those who ask the US to remain in the agreement are countries which cost the US a lot by their commercial practices and do not contribute to the military alliance." Merkel is the target. The quarrel is hotting up between Washington and Berlin. In any case, let us remember that, for Trump, the profits of the US bosses and the militaristic policy of defending their interests are more important than rescuing the Earth's climate.

How should we interpret all that? It needs to be analyzed on several levels, and it will be necessary to return to this: this is only a first reaction.

The forward flight of an injured troll

In terms of US domestic policy, the denunciation of the agreement gives the impression of Trump careering ahead to try to get out of an increasingly precarious situation, where more and more voices are being raised in favour of an impeachment procedure.

Trump was faced with a difficult choice. If he remained in the agreement, he "normalized" himself (a little) as a "responsible" President, responded positively to the majority wishes of the business community

(including ExxonMobil and other energy groups!) and reassured US public opinion" (which is mostly convinced and concerned about the reality of climate change). But if he "normalized", himself he would turn his back on his militant, populist and reactionary base, and lose an important asset among the Republican Party's elected representatives, who are far from supporting him unanimously, but of whom the majority are climate negationists. Precisely because he is weakened, Trump chose to satisfy his base - represented in his team by Bannon, Pence, Pruitt, Sessions and some others. Mike Pence - who introduced his speech - and Scott Pruitt who commented on it - both insisted heavily on this aspect: the President was doing what he said. (Pruitt, who really looks like a master-polisher of his master's shoes) added an extra dose of populism, speaking of the "working class", and greeting Trump as "the champion of the forgotten of this country").

This choice in favour of his base was probably the least bad possible for Trump, in the short term. But in the medium term, by refocusing on his national-populist core business, the President could bring closer the moment when the dominant circles of big capital and their political representatives decide to get rid of him and Bannon, his Alt -right evil genius. We will know more in the coming days, including the hearing of former FBI chairman Comey at the Senate Intelligence Commission.

Measuring climate impact

In terms of its climate impact, US withdrawal is serious, but should not be dramatized. The substance of the matter, in fact, is that the Paris agreement absolutely does not enable us to avoid the catastrophe. This does not mean that its denunciation by Trump is unimportant, it means that the damage caused by Trump must be appreciated at its proper extent... It is not a question of becoming supporters of the Paris agreement, nor of its European, Chinese or other supporters for whom it costs nothing

to strike a progressive pose while contributing to the climate catastrophe.



Infographic showing the impact of the fact that the US is joining Nicaragua and Syria, the only two countries that have not ratified the Paris agreement

US emissions account for 15% per cent of global emissions. Decided under Obama, the United States' national contribution (NDC) aimed to reduce them by 26 to 28 per cent in 2025, compared to 2005. This represents an effort hardly greater than what the USA should have achieved at the latest in 2012 (compared to 1990), had they ratified Kyoto. Moreover, the measures taken by Obama covered only 83 per cent of the target.

That is not all. This effort was in fact not an effort at all: it corresponded almost entirely to the "spontaneous" reduction of emissions stemming from the fact that American energy groups are disinvesting in coal to the benefit of shale gas - which is at the same time less polluting and cheaper - and renewable. The removal by Trump of the Clean Power Plan and other Obama measures is more serious than his denunciation of the agreement, but it will not stop the movement of capital.

Danger of geostrategic skidding out of control

It is at the geostrategic level that what is essential seems to be playing out. Trump's climate communication confirms that a disturbing process is underway. The crisis between the European Union and the US is sharpening, and the tone is rising between the competitors. A vast realignment of imperialist forces, including the break-up of NATO, EU reform/militarization, and China-EU rapprochement is no longer quite a science fiction scenario.

The dominant circles of big international capital do not want this scenario but, as we noted in our article on "The Place of Trumpism in History", certain elements are making the situation escape the control of the protagonists. One of these elements is obviously constituted by Trump's own policies.

Here, it must be stressed that these policies are not simply and mechanically dictated by the bourgeoisie (hundreds of executives of major US companies have urged Trump to remain in the agreement, including leaders in the energy sector) or even by any sector of the capitalist class. On the contrary, there is a dual relative autonomy, which is particularly evident in the context of political crisis: the autonomy of the political sphere in relation to the economic sphere, and the individual (Trump and his close circle) in relation to the bourgeois political sphere as a whole.

In other words, Trump's forward flight on the climate - because he is weakened by the investigation of his ties with Russia - could extend into other areas, including military. This could then have the most serious consequences... and reduce ipso facto the fight for the climate to the nth rank of his preoccupations. That goes or all the protagonists, even when the emergency is really maximum.

What to do? What to say?

This is not the time to get our objective wrong...

Obviously, it is necessary to denounce Trump's policies, but to demand that the USA remain in the Paris agreement makes little sense. Negotiating concessions for it to stay there would be unacceptable. Rather, let it leave: that will lead to the maximum isolation of Trump; it will encourage the struggles of social movements in the United States against his policies and prevent him from spreading his climate-negationist nonsense in the course of climate negotiations.

The emission reduction targets of the

governments that are indignant at the US withdrawal must be drastically increased to fill this gap, but also to close the gap between the target of 1.5°C maximum on the one hand and the contributions of those states on the other. They must be so increased from the point of both social justice and North-South justice, which implies radical anti-capitalist measures instead of "polluting rights" and other "market mechanisms".

So we should give no support to the Paris agreement, no support to the China-European Union axis. What the Trump affair ultimately proves is that

a response to the climatic challenge is not possible by respecting the laws of a capitalism that is thirsty for growth/profit and neo-liberal policies that produce unemployment, poverty and inequality. The defence of the climate requires the struggle of social movements and the convergence of struggles. We need to revive a global movement for climate justice, in solidarity with the social movements in the United States.

Enough of sleight-of-hand and half measures: unconditional respect for the commitments of the Green Fund for the Climate; a halt to major fossil infrastructure works; suppression of

unnecessary, harmful (weapons!) production and programmed obsolescence; socialization of energy, credit and water; support for local ecological agriculture and food sovereignty; a drastic reduction of working time without loss of pay; development of the public sector under the control of users in the areas of transport and insulation-renovation... Only demands of this kind open the way to a solution that corresponds to the urgency and gravity of the double social and ecological crisis.

June 1, 2017

Trump, the Paris Agreement and the breakdown of multilateralism

14 June 2017, by Dorothy Grace Guerrero

Withdrawing from the UN Paris Climate Accord is one of more than a hundred electoral campaign promises that Donald Trump made. By delivering on that promise, the US now joined Nicaragua and Syria, the only countries that did not sign the agreement. Nicaragua did not sign due to indifference or denialism of climate change, it's reason was the contrary. Nicaragua's decision was based on its view that it is not enough to address the climate crisis. Syria is in the middle of civil war and under US and European sanctions.

Trump's decision to pull out of the Paris Agreement is undeniably wrong, narrow-minded, irresponsible, and destructive. It is right that concerned people all over the world are appalled and world leaders are condemning the normalization of climate denialism by the current United States administration. But, let us also be reminded of the important facts about the UN Paris Agreement and look at how this affects the status of the US as a world leader.

Climate justice campaigners in the

global south, alongside many in the US, know that the US, even before Trump's election, is quite far from being a 'climate leader'. The US is the biggest historical greenhouse gas emitter and source of almost a third of the global carbon emissions. Despite that, it has weakened the Kyoto Protocol and has consistently used its power in the climate negotiation, together with other rich countries, to water-down or reduce the ambitions of the process. The market mechanisms and the overall climate politics of the process favoured climate profiteers or global corporations and the interests of rich countries.

The Paris Agreement is non-binding and falls far short of what must be done to even reach the already-weak target of keeping global average temperature increase to under 2 degrees or even the more ambitious 1.5 degrees in the preamble of the agreement. The international climate regime perpetuates the subordination of the global south and many solutions that comes out of it at best, do not match the scale of the problem or at worst, are false solutions. Telling the

rest of the world that the US will no longer do what it intended to do as its contribution in the 2015 accord is the height of irresponsibility and arrogance.

The UN climate process has been frustrating for many developing countries who attend it in the hope of pushing for globally-binding and appropriate solutions to climate change. Poor and vulnerable countries that have contributed very little to the current level of greenhouse gasses are already experiencing tremendous climate-related catastrophe. The people of Carteret Islands of Papua New Guinea have already been dislocated and have become the first climate refugees, while farmers in many countries in sub-saharan Africa are already finding it difficult to farm and are losing their livelihoods. Archipelagic countries like the Philippines are increasingly visited by severe storms. Many cities are facing the possibilities of sinking under the increasing sea level rise. Even the US is not spared from flooding.

Trump's action on the climate front

definitely disturbs the climate regime, however, the ecological equilibrium of the planet does not rest on the current process as it is now, nor on the success of the Paris Agreement. The bigger implication of Trump's action is on how the world should now see the US. For better or worse, the world looks up to America's leadership in problem solving. It is the cornerstone of current global economic, political, financial, and climate regimes. Trump's short-sighted and ill-informed reasons for walking away from the climate accord is an aggressive act of shattering the very world order that it has painstakingly built. In its anxiety of losing its status as the world's richest economic superpower, it is retreating to insularity.

An insecure superpower Is a dangerous superpower. Diplomacy is about harmoniously using power and ethical credibility. Under the Trump presidency, the US is fast losing its credibility to lead. Trump's action reveals his total disregard for the fate of humanity. His refusal to understand facts and accept scientific findings about climate change expose his limitations and weakness.

Theresa May has been strongly criticized for her earlier refusal to join European leaders in a chorus of condemnation of the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement on climate change while the leaders of Germany, France and Italy jointly expressed

their stronger views.

For social movements and climate justice campaigners, the US abandonment of the agreement is disappointing, but there is also a unity in understanding that the future of humanity on this planet does not rest on leaders alone. In the US, big protests are already happening and the scientific community has already collectively criticised their president's lack of regard to science. It is expected that massive protests in different countries will continue to express opposition against Trump, as well as the more important efforts to propose alternatives.

[Global Justice Now](#)

Portland's MAX Murders, the Alt-Right, and the Left's Response

13 June 2017, by **Johanna Brenner**

Shortly after he boarded the train, Christian, who was shirtless and drinking from a wine bag, began spewing racist and Islamophobic slurs. The two young women moved from their seats to stand near the train doors so they could exit at the next station. Micah Fletcher, sitting nearby, rose to confront Christian who shoved him. Taliesin Myrddin Namkai-Meche came to Fletcher's aid. At that moment, Christian pulled a knife from his pocket and attacked the two men. A third man, Ricky John Best leapt to their defense and was also stabbed. The train pulled into the next station and Christian left, followed by two riders who told the police of his location. Best died at the scene and Namkai-Meche at the hospital. A fourth man, Marcus Knipe, came to Fletcher's aid, staunching the wound and helping him to calm down to reduce blood loss. Following an operation that included removing jaw bone fragments from his throat, Fletcher survived.

The police arrived and surrounded

Christian who was ranting and drinking on a street corner. They waited behind their cars, talking him down until they were able to take him into custody. The two young women left the train at the station and remained unidentified until the next day, when one of them, Destinee Mangum, publicly thanked the heroes who had defended her. The Muslim woman and her family are understandably very reluctant go public, given the string of attacks on Muslim individuals and mosques that have taken place since Trump's election, not to mention the nationally coordinated June 10 [rallies against Sharia Law](#) scheduled for cities across the US, including Portland. (Organizers subsequently cancelled the Portland event.)

The contrast between the way the police handled Christian, a white man holding a 4 inch knife after just assaulting three people, and their trigger-happy responses toward Black suspects, two of three men shot by police just since the beginning of

2017, reveals much about racism in the Portland police force.

Portland Police: A Dark History

On May 10, Transit Police shot and killed Terrell Johnson, a Black man with a box cutter, [as he fled across the MAX tracks](#) and non-fatally shot a suicidal white man with two replica guns. In February, 17 year old Quanice Hayes, on his knees after being apprehended as a robbery suspect, was [gunned down and killed](#) by officer Andrew Hearst. Activists have dubbed Hearst a "serial killer"—in 2013 he fatally shot a mentally ill man who charged officers with a broken phone—two killings in the course of a seven year career. He has been cleared in both killings and remains on the force.

Portland's Black community has long struggled with a police force that harbors white supremacists. In 1981,

two officers tossed [four dead opossums](#) in front of the Burger Barn, a black-owned restaurant in Northeast Portland. They were fired, sparking an angry counter-demonstration as hundreds of cops marched on City Hall. An arbitrator reinstated them, reducing their penalty to a 30 day suspension.

Four years later, in 1985, and in an eerie precursor of the killing of Eric Garner, Lloyd "Tony" Stevenson died after Officer Gary Barbour subdued him with [a choke hold](#) in a parking lot, following an altercation. Barbour refused to give Stevenson CPR and he died later at the hospital.

After the community mobilized in protest, the Police Chief suspended use of what was then called a "sleeper hold" and set up an advisory committee to review the Police Bureau's use of all forms of force. In opposition to the Chief, two officers created T-shirts with the slogan, "Don't Choke 'Em, Smoke 'Em" and sold at least 30 at the bureau's East Precinct. Mayor Bud Clark immediately fired the two officers, but both were later reinstated by an arbitrator. A grand jury refused to indict Officer Barbour.

Officer Mark Kruger, known in the Portland anti-war movement for his brutality at demonstrations, was also [a Nazi admirer](#). Sometime between 1999 and 2001 he nailed "memorial plaques" of five Nazi soldiers to a tree in Rocky Butte Park as a shrine he called "Ehrenbaum" or "Honor Tree." Faced by federal lawsuits alleging excessive force during downtown anti-war protests, he took down the plaques which were sequestered in the office of the City Attorney who vigorously fought against producing them. They were finally found by a police internal affairs investigator. Kruger remains on the police force.

The People Respond

A spontaneous outpouring of sorrow and support for the survivors and for the families of the murdered men brought more than a thousand people to gather the following day at the MAX

station which has been turned into an informal memorial, honoring the heroism of the three men and filled with flowers, candles, and testimonials such as "you are heroes for fighting against hate," "love conquers hate," and "black lives matter."

On line fundraising campaigns have been established: Two for the families of the heroes: one organized by [the Muslim Education Trust](#) and the other organized by a local restaurateur. In addition there are campaigns to help the [surviving hero](#) with medical costs and a campaign for the [two young women](#).

Who Is Jeremy Christian?

Many of the news headlines about the murders initially identified Christian as a "neo-Nazi" based on his participation in an April 29 "Free Speech" rally and march organized by the pro-Trump group, Patriots Prayer. Christian came to the event draped in an American flag and carrying a baseball bat, which the police took from him. Screaming "sig heil," "Die Muslims!" and giving the Nazi salute, he was a disruptive presence and a political embarrassment to the Patriots Prayer organizers who deny any connection to neo-Nazis and other white supremacist groups, although observers of their events have identified [known members](#) of right-wing militia and white nationalist groups among the participants. Jake Von Ott, local coordinator for the neo-Nazi group, Identity Evropa, went out of his way to [shake Christian's hand](#). Others attempted unsuccessfully to force Christian out of the rally and march. Once Christian's participation in the Patriots Prayer event came to light, they moved to defend themselves from association with him, pointing out that he was a fervent supporter of Bernie Sanders.

They neglected to also point out that he proclaimed, addressing himself to his imaginary audience on Facebook, that he would do as he had threatened: if the Democrats nominated Hilary, he would punish them by voting for Trump. Christian's Facebook posts reveal political

incoherence, a grandiose self image, and an increasing pivot toward the white supremacist themes of the Trump campaign and presidency. According to friends, it was during the campaign that Christian moved from being an apolitical, "anarcho-nihilist" fan of metal bands to adopting anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, racist ideas, including the dream of a white nation in "Cascadia." And he seems to have become increasingly unstable. Following his arrest, Christian was [identified](#) as the individual who two days before threw a plastic bottle at a Black woman waiting at a MAX station (she pepper-sprayed him and he fled) and a day before was videotaped by a MAX rider as he ranted at the driver of the train and talked about stabbing people. (He had left the train by the time police arrived.)

Rising Tide of White Supremacy

Although the Portland murders got the most press, the Memorial Day weekend saw several incidents of racially motivated assaults. At a Washington state campground, a white man drove his truck onto a campsite where a group of ten or so, including citizens of the Quinalt nation, were celebrating a birthday. He began doing "doughnuts" and when two of the Quinalt campers tried to make him stop, [he ran them over](#), while screaming racial slurs and war whoops. James "Jimmy" Kramer, was killed and Harvey Anderson, injured in the rampage.

In Clearlake, California, a white man yelling racial slurs [used a machete](#) to seriously injure a Black neighbor in the parking lot of their apartment complex.

These are part of a much broader pattern of increasing hate crimes across the US and in the Portland metro area, which, according to the Mayor, has led all major metropolitan areas in reported hate crimes since Trump's campaign and election.

The home of an Iranian refugee was [vandalized](#), painted with racist graffiti and death threats. Two banners claiming, "[Jews Did 911](#)" appeared

recently on a freeway overpass. And an identified member of a white supremacist prison gang, European Kindred, has been charged with a hate crime and held without bail after he [ran down and killed](#)

Ties between the Alt-Right and the Republican Party

The Southern Poverty Law Center reports that the radical right and hate groups were [more successful in entering the mainstream](#) in 2016 than over the last half century. This is certainly true in Portland. Pro-Trump organizations that arose during the campaign or since his inauguration closely cooperate with Republican politicians while creating a protective cover for both traditional and new white supremacist organizations.

Patriot Prayer, based in Vancouver, WA, has been responsible for six different pro-Trump “free-speech” rallies and marches so far this year. Although Joey Gibson, leader of the group, denies connection to white supremacist organizations or politics, these rallies and marches have included: [Proud Boys](#), who name themselves “a fraternal organization of Western Chauvinists who will no longer apologize for creating the modern world,” [Identity Evropa](#), which emerged from the National Youth Front, the youth wing of the Neo-Nazi American Freedom Party, [Steven Shane Howard](#), a Klan leader from Mississippi, [Tim “Baked Alaska” Gionet](#) known for anti-Semitic remarks and Nazi salutes and armed militia groups, [The Oath Keepers and Oregon III%](#). Patriot Prayer’s “free speech” rally held in downtown Portland June 4, also featured alt right celebrities from California.

[Kyle “Based Stickman” Chapman](#) attacked a Berkeley protestor with a large stick while wearing a bizarre outfit including baseball batting helmet, gas mask, shin guards and a shield made from a table top. Charged with assault, he was bailed out using some of the \$50,000 for his legal defense raised by WeSearchr, a far-right crowdfunding site. [Pat “Based](#)

[Trojan” Washington](#) became an on-line celebrity after appearing at a Berkeley rally “bare-chested and wearing a Trojan helmet—more than enough to tickle the alt-right’s [“Larp-y” sensibilities.](#)”

James Buchal, Chairman of the Multnomah County Republican Party (the county within which Portland is located) joined these speakers on the stage where he urged the crowd to become members of the Party. Previously he had announced that because Republicans were under assault by anti-Trump forces attempting to deny their free speech rights, the party was considering asking [the Oath Keepers and Oregon III%](#) to provide security.

In April, John Beavers, a member of Warriors for Freedom LLC (an organization tied to Patriot Prayer) who lives in Washington state had his nose broken in one of the Berkeley altercations. Three days after that event, he was presented with a framed replica of a Trump portrait by a [Washington State Republican party campaign operative](#) whose father is a close ally of Trump. Last January, Joseph Rice, the founder of Josephine County Oath Keepers, and Tim Harris, a leader in Oregon III%, announced [they would run](#) for Chair and Vice Chair of the Oregon Republican Party.

Oregon’s White Nationalist History

The current flourishing of the Alt-Right in the city and the state is the most recent of several waves of White Nationalism in Oregon. In 1857, when a constitution was written in anticipation of statehood, an [exclusion clause](#) was inserted, prohibiting new in-migration of African Americans, as well as making illegal their ownership of real estate and entering into contracts. They were also denied the right to sue in court.

In the 1920’s the Klu Klux Klan was very active in the state and in the city. Holding large public meetings at Portland’s Civic Auditorium, hooded parades on foot and in cars, and burning crosses at Mt. Tabor and Mt. Scott parks, the Klan inducted as many as 1100 members at a time. Klan-backed candidates from Portland

were elected to the State Senate and the Multnomah County Commission.

Although the Klan had diminished by the 1930’s, Jim Crow laws and practices remained [firmly in place](#) into the 1960’s. Portland restaurants displayed “whites only” signs, black people weren’t allowed in the city’s swimming pools, and the local skating rink set aside a day for black people.

The 1980’s and 1990’s saw another wave of white nationalist organizing with the rise of skinhead gangs in the city. In 1988, three members of the East Side White Pride skinhead group, affiliated with the White Aryan Resistance, [beat to death](#), Mulugeta Seraw, an Ethiopian college student. In a controversial case, the Southern Poverty Law Center brought a successful civil action against the White Aryan Resistance and the group’s leaders, Tom Metzger and his son John, arguing that they incited the murder.

With the rise of the Silicon Forest and related economic expansion, the Portland metro area has grown rapidly over the last two decades, including as a home for refugees, immigrants, and the hip urbanites of the TV show, Portlandia. But beyond the urban core, as in the rustbelt areas of the US, prosperity has by-passed the white working class men whose access to living wage jobs disappeared with the demise of the logging, wood products, fishing and light manufacturing industries. And, as elsewhere, they have been attracted to the alt-right’s assertion of their victimization and the righteousness of their struggle to restore patriarchal masculinity and white dominance.

In the 1980’s and 1990’s, the Republican Party in Oregon avoided association with groups like the White Aryan Resistance. In those decades, the Party was building its base through Christian fundamentalist organizations, like the Oregon Citizens Alliance, that organized Republican voters in opposition to abortion and homosexuality. Both those battles have now been substantially lost in this state. As an alternative, the Party has pivoted toward the new wave of white nationalism.

A Law and Order Response

In the aftermath of the MAX murders, the Mayor and Tri-Met, the transit authority, sounded the “law and order” alarm. Just days prior to the murders, the Tri-Met Board, at the behest of Tri-Met director, Neil Macfarlane, had approved spending \$11 Million for a Transit Police station despite strenuous opposition from both the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757 and Opal: Environmental Justice Oregon, which organizes low-income transit riders. The MAX murders provided a rationale for Macfarlane to propose spending even more money to expand the number of armed police officers on the trains. Both ATU 757 and OPAL issued [statements](#) condemning [this response](#), arguing that further militarization of the Transit system was ineffective and costly. They proposed instead a community-defined, transit ambassador model which de-escalates crises, protects safety without deadly weapons, and provides resources for riders in need.

Mayor Ted Wheeler appealed to Patriot Prayer to cancel their pro-Trump “free speech” rally, scheduled to take place the weekend after Memorial Day. When they refused, Wheeler wrote a letter to the federal government requesting that they rescind the permit that had been issued for the rally which would take place in Terry Schrunk Plaza across the street from the downtown federal building. He argued that his responsibility for civic order and respect for a grieving city made this request necessary. The ACLU responded with a letter criticizing the Mayor for what was clearly an

intrusion on the right of free speech. This sparked an interesting debate across social media between those who applauded the Mayor’s move to stifle “hate speech” and those, many socialists and anarchists, who argued that we had to rely on our own power of mobilization and should never accept state suppression of speech.

The Left Organizes

Forced to accept that the pro-Trump event would proceed and that a mobilization in opposition would also take place, the Mayor, along with the Department of Homeland Security, organized a massive police presence for the day of the rallies.

Rose City Antifa and allied organizations, had already organized a “No Nazis on our Streets Rally,” in Chapman Square just north of the Plaza.

A hastily-formed, fairly broad coalition of 70 groups, organized a rally, “Portland Stands United Against Hate,” that would take place in front of City Hall across the street from the Plaza to the west.

Additionally, a number of rank and file trade unionists who had been organizing within their locals to pass [resolutions](#) committing their unions to challenge “hate groups,” called for a “Labor Against Fascism” rally on the steps of the federal building, just to the east of the Plaza.

The opposition rallies were scheduled to begin at 12:30 pm and the pro-Trump rally at 2:00. By the time the Trump attendees began arriving, there were large crowds surrounding the Plaza. It was estimated that with the three different rallies combined, we outnumbered them by something like eight or ten to one—with [an](#)

[estimated](#) 2,000 people chanting and beating drums while 200 to 300 rallied for Trump.

Portland Police and DHS officers in full riot gear lined the streets around the Plaza to keep our side and their side separate.

The day ended, predictably, with [the police using](#) flash-bang grenades, pepper spray, and rubber bullets against the Antifa protestors gathered in Chapman Square. At some point the Police Bureau began [tweeting accusations](#) that demonstrators were taking bricks from a restroom structure and throwing them at the police (later proved to be entirely false) and lobbing balloons filled with a foul-smelling substance. This was no doubt to establish “probable cause” for later arrests. About a half-hour before the pro-Trump rally was scheduled to end, the police moved into the Square to push people further north, away from the Plaza. Resistance ensued. About 200 of the people who were pushed out of the Square, including reporters and photographers, marched down the street for a few blocks until they were [kettled by police](#) who allowed them to leave in groups of three after their ID’s were recorded. Ultimately the police made 14 arrests.

Despite this depressingly familiar police over-reaction, the mobilization was an outstanding success. Although many people were afraid to come down to the rallies, we nonetheless organized a very credible and visual opposition that, if it did not demoralize the alt-right (who probably considered us all fake news), certainly moralized our forces.

June 9, 2017

[Against the Current](#)

Baba Jan and his comrades: a look back over five years of an international campaign

12 June 2017

Baba Jan was a leader of the Labour Party Pakistan (LPP) and after a merger he became one of the members of the AWP leadership. His unpardonable crime is to be a very popular figure in Gilgit-Baltistan, a semi-autonomous Himalayan state under Pakistani rule. He must be put out of circulation, for good.

We have more than once feared for his life. Baba Jan was imprisoned for supporting the demands of the people of Ali Abad in the Hunza Valley, after the disaster caused by the formation of an artificial lake due to a landslide. The secret services put pressure on him to join a bourgeois party. When he refused, they picked him up. This was one of the few cases in which the solidarity movement rejoiced at the return to prison (alive) of an activist! A victory - one-off.

In detention, Baba Jan was tortured and his life was in danger. It is easy to have someone murdered in jail. The mobilization in Pakistan and the international campaign got him released on bail, nearly a year after his imprisonment. Another victory - temporary.

When the court ordered him to be detained, Baba Jan had the choice: to go into exile or to obey. He did not want to leave his comrades, prosecuted on the same charge as him, and he rejoined them... Along with them, he was sentenced to life imprisonment.

He remained, in prison, a widely-respected activist. By succeeding, in 2014, in uniting the Shia and Sunnite prisoners in a joint strike for the respect of the regulations (the quality of the food, medical check-ups), without any violence. In 2015, although he was in jail, he came second in his constituency in an election to the state assembly, far ahead of the third candidate.

These two victories came at a price. The government knows that if Baba Jan stands for election again, he will win. So for them there is no question of letting that happen. The role he played in the prisoners' movement earned him a second sentence equivalent to life imprisonment!

In the course of the defence campaign, "lasting" victories have been won. Prisoners other than Baba Jan have been released - this was the case for six of them in 2015.

The figure of Baba Jan has a thousand facets. That of the climate activist, for his commitment after the disaster of Ali Abad. That of a defender of human rights. That of a national personality who fights the oppression exercised by the Pakistani government and the Chinese hold over Gilgit-Baltistan. That of a political activist who follows his path in all circumstances. So many reasons why we are defending him - and why the authorities do not want to release him. All appeals against his conviction have been dismissed.

As a last resort, the Supreme Court

must rule on the question of procedure. There is no lack of procedural irregularities! The international campaign has been relaunched, with unprecedented success. In record time, more than 500 signatures have been gathered, coming from 45 countries, including many members of parliament, mayors and other elected officials; intellectuals and academics; cadres of trade union, social and associative and feminist movements; organizations for the defence of human rights, ordinary citizens...

A further (temporary) victory has been won: the suspension of the sentence of two of the 14 who had been convicted, who jointly won their appeal, and the postponement of judgment for the others (including Baba Jan). The defence demanded this postponement so that prominent lawyers could come forward. The Court will therefore sit just after the present period of Ramadan - which leaves us some time to broaden the campaign further.

Let us add this postscript: the international campaign could not have taken place without an intense and persistent mobilization of Baba Jan's comrades - and the support of important personalities, lawyers and human rights organizations - in Pakistan itself.

Send signatures via [Essf](#).

This article was written for the June 2017 issue of l'Anticapitaliste.

Turkey, post-referendum

11 June 2017, by **Dario Navaro**

Journalist Amberin Zaman in one of her articles prior to the referendum vote had posed the rhetorical

question: was there any likelihood of the No vote winning? She believed it would be naive to expect such an

outcome and added "would Erdogan have gone to a referendum if there was any risk of losing it?"

Nonetheless, the narrow majority by which the amendments went through, given the exceedingly uneven playing field during the referendum campaign, revealed that Erdogan's hold on the country was not unassailable. In the period leading to the referendum, the state of emergency declared in the wake of the attempted coup was used to impede the meetings of the No-camp, while the JDP had state institutions and the state media at its disposal, which it used unreservedly to prop up its campaign. The pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) was additionally disadvantaged by the fact that its leaders, as well as many of the party's elected assembly members and councillors, were imprisoned and the party given scant air time on state media.

Despite the obstacles facing the No-camp, if not a united-front, an informal electoral common front developed which included the main opposition party, the Republican Peoples' Party (RPP), the PDP, and members of the ultra-nationalist party who were not impressed with their leadership's sudden turn to support of the JDP. Possibly some traditional JDP voters, who may have read in the silence of some of their party's founding members a disapproval of the proposed constitutional changes, may even not have voted in favour.

The changes to the constitution will concentrate all state powers in the hands of the Presidency. The Prime Minister function will not exist; executive powers will be in the hand of the President. The President will appoint most the Supreme Constitutional Court judges and other high judges in the Judiciary. As the President can also be the leader of a party this means that he or she can heavily affect the composition of the legislature.

These changes however must be viewed in the proper perspective. Erdogan was already exercising these powers to a considerable degree. Not only the Western press, but also the opposition in Turkey view him as an "autocrat," "sultan," "dictator," etc. The cleansing of the state apparatus of non-partisan civil servants, the control of the universities, the judiciary and the executive had been taking place

even before the establishment of the state of emergency.

What Erdogan could previously do with Presidential directives is now done by decrees. The new constitution legitimises the powers which Erdogan previously used despite the constitution, and it gives him the opportunity to stay as President until 2029. The one thing the new constitution does not attempt to do is address the regime crisis - but then this was not the objective of the referendum.

The Regime Crisis

The crisis of the regime can be seen in the consistent failure of the JDP and Erdogan to govern the country through the rule of law. This crisis has been intensifying in recent years as seen in the totally disproportionate violent response by the police to the 2013 Gezi protests and by the corruption and bribery allegations scandal that same year that resulted in the resignation of four ministers - and was stopped in its tracks by the removal of the police chief and arrest warrants raised against the prosecutors of the case. In 2014, there was the unearthing of clandestine heavy weapons munitions being transported to organisations in Syria. The prosecution of the case was again halted by the arrest of the Chief Prosecutor and the regional military officers that had intercepted the trucks. Many of the journalists from the newspaper Cumhuriyet (Republic) that reported the event have since been arrested and are facing trial.

In 2015, the peace process with the Kurdish freedom movement was scuppered by Erdogan although he was the one that initiated this process himself. Subsequent military operations to silence the demands for local autonomy in Kurdish towns since have taken a very high toll on the civilian population, with forced large scale migrations of residents and the demolition of their homes. The acrimonious break with the Gülen movement that had been the strongest ally of the JDP during its rise to power also pointed to a crisis within the power block.

But the event that overshadowed all these incidents was the failed military coup of July 2016. The coup attempt was overpowered, but the draconian measures the government has resorted to since then have led to the cleansing of the state apparatus and state institutions on a scale never seen before in the history of the Republic, with tens of thousands of employees arbitrarily dismissed, labelled as terrorists and often arrested.

Political crises rarely have a clearly defined beginning or an end, just cycles that are of shorter or longer durations, but if one was pressed to distinguish the current regime crisis in Turkey, its beginnings can be traced to the military coup of 1980.

This coup differed from previous ones in three key aspects. Firstly, when the military junta took power it already had a clearly outlined neoliberal economic program to implement - this had been announced in January of the same year. Secondly, measures were taken to initiate an ideological shift from the traditional Kemalist state ideology to a blend of Turkish Nationalism with political Islam, the so-called Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, a political doctrine that some analysts trace back to Sultan Abdulhamit, but which was cultivated mainly during the 1970s. Thirdly, the outlawing of the two traditional parties of the ruling class - who had governed Turkey since it moved to a two-party political system in 1946 - resulted in recurrent governmental crises; allowing political Islam to become a major political player.

The economic and banking crisis of 2001-2 caused a major currency devaluation, sharp fall in the GNP and incomes per capita and set the scene for the JDP, led by Erdogan, to take the leading role on the political stage, which it has maintained in an uninterrupted fashion since.

Erdoganism

There is today, broadly speaking, a high degree of agreement about how to characterise the regime. Typical descriptions one can read in the British press as well as the limited Turkish opposition media (mainly

social media) refer to it as tyranny, authoritarianism, autocracy, plebiscitary despotism, one-man rule, dictatorship, neo-fascism, etc., etc. Most of these terms are relevant, but they tend to portray the regime as an entrenched totalitarian state, which may be crediting Erdogan and the JDP with a high degree of invulnerability which is not necessarily the case.

We considered the Kemalist regime of the 1920s and 30s as Bonapartist, balancing as it was between the military-bureaucratic elites and the newly aspiring bourgeoisie on the one hand, and the provincial notables, large landowners and feudal landlords on the other. Today the regime stands firmly on both sections of big capital: the established western facing comprador capitalists and the emergent conservative "Anatolian Tigers." That is its strength.

Its popular base is the Anatolian new lower-middle- and middle-classes that have grown steadily since the 1980s, the conservative small and large landowners and the peasantry. At the same time, the class composition of Turkey has changed in line with those of modern economies. According to a recent census, 61% of the population are recognised as labourers, concentrated mainly in large cities. They represent a potential source of political instability for political Islam as its popularity could rapidly erode under conditions of an economic crisis that impacts the working class.

If building a one-man rule based on the support of half of the voting population is already a problem for the regime, the prospect of losing support in the metropolises is doubly so. The loss of the largest city Istanbul and the capital Ankara to the No-camp will have raised alarm bells for the JDP. If all the patriotic ranting against the West, the military offensive against the Kurds of Syria, the national flag waving policy accompanied with the slogan of "one-nation, one motherland, one flag", not to mention the threats to one's existence in this life as well as the afterlife, could barely maintain the

regime's electoral base, what else can the regime do to prop up its support, and win the forthcoming elections of 2019?

Here a distinguishing aspect of Erdogan's Bonapartist regime must be borne in mind; its ability to use the religious card, to appeal to the pious, with legends of the Ottomans and the grandeur of the Empire that is now once again within the reach of Turkey. I think this factor, the constant references to a glorious era lost because of the Republic's secularism but which may be regained under Erdogan's personal leadership, warrants that the regime be labelled Erdoganism.

We have mentioned some of the inherent difficulties the regime faces, due partly to the evolving class structure of the country and partly to the extended duration of the crisis. This however does not imply in any way that No-block is in a strong position to challenge the regime. On the contrary, the weakness of the opposition and its inability (even unwillingness) to construct a credible alternative to the current regime is possibly the regime's major strength. Most of the No voters are represented by the RPP which appears to be quite content with its role as the main opposition party. The RPP colluded with the JDP in the removal of parliamentary immunity for assembly members which was clearly aimed at the HDP, and its leadership avoids the HDP like the plague, petrified of being associated with the Kurdish cause. The dissenters from the ultra-nationalist party, whether they decide to split or return to the fold, are unlikely to become part of a democratic opposition. As for the HDP, its electoral capacity reached its zenith during the general elections of 2015 when it polled just over 10%, mainly based on its strength in Kurdish constituencies. The Turkish left, although it worked hard for a no vote, remains marginal as a social force and divided on the Kurdish question.

The ideas put forward by the left after the referendum are mainly for extra-parliamentary forms of organisations,

such as the continuation of the "no-assemblies" formed in the metropolises, the creation of local and national "constitutional assemblies", or the creation of an "action programme" to extend the No-block. The weakness of the trade-union movement, which only represents a small percentage of the active work force but is also split in three separate confederations, not to mention fault lines based on ethnic, nationalist and religious differences, is another barrier to creating a mass democratic opposition today.

How the crisis will be resolved remains an open question. Will the JDP splinter as the crisis becomes intolerable for larger and larger sections of the population, or will it attempt to pre-empt such a development by taking the country further in the direction of Islamisation, perhaps to an Islamic republic? It is argued that, in line with its early declarations prior to gaining power, the JDP will carry their supremacy to its logical conclusion by dispensing with secularism altogether and adopt sharia law. Those who dispute this reasoning contend that such a step would prove unattractive and unwarranted to the ruling classes and elites of Turkey given the significant economic and military ties with the West. What is quite clear though is that the regime's declared policy to create a pious youth, the curtailment of academic and press freedoms, the de-secularisation of security forces, are all factors that bode ill for a secular democratic republic. They point to the prospect that it will be the Islamic pole of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis that is set to dominate the decade ahead.

This eventuality gives urgency to the need for the opposition to find effective ways to organise across a broad front, and indicates that secularism could be an important unifying thread, together with the demand for democracy, for tomorrow's No-camp.

12 May 2017

Source: [Socialist Resistance](#).

A stunning result for Corbyn and Labour

9 June 2017, by **Alan Davies**

With all 652 seats declared, the final count is Conservatives 318 seats, down 13; Labour 262, up 32; 35 seats for the SNP, down 21, the Lib Dems up 3 to 12, Plaid Cymru up 1 to 4; the Greens remain on one and UKIP is wiped out. [7]

The turnout is up by 2% to the highest since 1997. The turnout amongst young people was unprecedented in modern times - estimated at 72%. [8] The UKIP vote collapsed, the party leader Paul Nuttall, who has resigned, came a distant third in Boston and Skegness.

Labour made significant gains in both Scotland and Wales. The SNP remain the largest party in Scotland but the Conservatives won 12 seats from them, Labour won six and the Lib Dems four. In Wales Labour took back Gower, Cardiff North, and Vale of Clwyd from the Conservatives.

Jeremy Corbyn and John MacDonnell are right to say that they are ready to form a minority government but it is clear that May will attempt to do so. The result, therefore, is not just a hung parliament, but the slimmest and most precarious of hung parliaments with effectively a coalition between a crisis ridden Tory Party and the ultra-conservative Democratic Unionist Party from Northern Ireland - one of the most socially conservative political parties in Europe. [9]

DUP members deny climate change, oppose abortion and marriage equality and are mostly Biblical creationists. Its candidates were endorsed by the Ulster Defence Association, a sectarian murder gang which is now involved in racketeering and drug dealing. This lash up gives the Tories a majority of two. Even if this gets off the ground it is likely to be extremely unstable and we should prepare for another election before the end of the year.

Labour's election campaign was spectacular and had a huge impact. The outcome is a personal triumph for Jeremy Corbyn, who was vilified in the most brutal way from the start of the campaign until the end. The Tories weren't even able to use the two horrendous terror attacks to their advantage.

The manifesto changed the politics of the election campaign the moment it hit the streets. [10] It mobilised hundreds of thousands of young people to register to vote, join the campaign and vote in, what for many, the first election in which they had participated. Young people who have been abused and used by successive governments have struck back with a vengeance.

We are seeing tectonic shifts taking place at several levels in British

politics. Labour's anti-austerity election platform has appealed to many of the same marginalised people who were drawn towards a Brexit vote. The vote is a massive rejection of austerity - bringing about a fundamental change in British politics. There is a new generation on the scene for the first time, completely open to the kind of radical alternative Labour is putting forward. For example, it was the student vote which took Canterbury for Labour which has been Tory for 170 years.

Corbyn is now in a powerful position inside the party. The Labour rightwingers who have campaigned for two years to discredit and get rid of him have been politically defeated and have some decisions to make. Every one of the predictions they made about Corbynism have been proven wrong. It is time now to back Corbyn or stand aside.

In this situation the job of the radical left is clear. Join the Corbyn movement if you have not done so yet, help him to change and democratise the Labour Party. Deepen the political trajectory that he has initiated, and stand ready to fight the next election as and when it comes.

Source: **Socialist Resistance**. The results have been updated, the article was originally published when only 649 seats had been declared.

Jammu Kashmir Awami Workers Party launched

9 June 2017, by **JKAWP**

On the occasion of the announcement of the new Party, Transitional Chairman of JKAWP Nisar Shah Advocate demanded that Pakistan should accept Azad Kashmir as an independent, autonomous region of state of Jammu Kashmir.

To promote the Kashmir cause independently by kashmiri leadership as the Pakistan has failed to convince the international community on Kashmir issue. It is not the proxy war of Pakistan, in fact it is the issue of the future of 15 million people of Jammu and Kashmir.

The seventy years diplomacy of Pakistan on Kashmir issue has been proved failed. The serious violation of the human rights are being committed in different parts of divided state of Jammu Kashmir but there is no effective voice of international community on this issue.

The United Nation and other international forums pressed this issue only in the framework of India Pakistan dispute. These forums continuously avoiding and close their eyes regarding the seriousness of this issue. No one is ready to criticize India on the human rights violation in Jammu Kashmir. From the first day of this dispute Pakistan did not allow the Kashmiri leadership to present their case before international community.

Actually there is not a single country of the world which is agreed to support Pakistan's stand on Kashmir issue against India. This situation can be improved if let the leadership of Kashmir present their case before international community. JKAWP leaders said that a fruitful result oriented dialogues will be possible only when the disputed parts of Jammu Kashmir be accepted as fully autonomous region and leadership from these areas will be part of this dialogue process.

The issue of Kashmir should not be treated as per the lines of two nation religious theory of the partition of Sub continent. It should be discussed under the definition of Princely national state of Jammu Kashmir which had the right to decide about their future according to the formula was established for the future of Princely state under the partition plan of Sub continent

The India Pakistan dialogue should be re initiated according to Track 2 diplomacy as due to the deadlock in the dialogue process, the situation of Kashmir is getting worse day by day, JKAWP leadership said. Countless innocent people of Kashmir are being killed due to the cross border firing from both sides. However not only the kashmiri people are being effecting but also the people of from Pakistan and India are facing poverty,

unemployment, illetracy and health issues as well.

Around 40 percent of the total population is living below the poverty line. The ruling class of both countries is not ready to provide the bread, peace and prosperity to their masses. They are busy to make weapons, increasing nuclearization and continue militancy and extremism. As a result the extremist forces are being flourished up. The masses are being divided on the bases of religion, sectarianism, and racism to achieve the target of extremism.

JKAWP has firm believe to promote the progressive movement for peace, prosperity and true workers and people democracy. Party will extend its relations with progressive, democratic and peaceful forces to push back the ruling classes, civil and military beaurocracy of india and Pakistan to withdrawal their forces from devided Jammu Kashmir. If both countries will not address seriously this issue and other internal issues to protect the rights of their people, the whole region will not be able to get the eternal peace and prosperity.

Furthermore JKAWP formed a 23 members committee and will form organization structure in three months and will organize national congress.

?JKAWP, May 21, 2017

Back to the Streets

7 June 2017, by **Brais Fernandez, Jaime Pastor**

Eoghan Gilmartin: Can you explain Podemos' decision to bring a motion of censure against the PP government in terms of the party's wider strategy post-Vistalegre II? In particular how it relates to Podemos' turn towards civil society and its attempt to become a more activist-based formation.

Brais Fernández First, the question of the motion of censure. Corruption within the Spanish state and political

class is out of control. In terms of its breadth and the elite's sense of impunity it is incomparable to any other European country. There is a new case almost every day and it is impossible to keep track of all the names and cases.

These scandals have taken their toll on the parties of the political regime but without generating much active social contestation. Within Podemos we have tried to respond to the

struggle against corruption not simply through the mechanisms of the state but also by reaching out to other "disruptive forces" in the social field (such as movements and unions). In this sense the initiative is positive and tactically very bold. It is true that it has no chance of winning in the parliament but it opens up a new line of conflict that is quite interesting.

Then there is the debate over how to view this motion strategically. We tend

to be good at audacious tactical manoeuvres. In this case, we have positioned ourselves in an antagonistic manner to the regime, but strategically we tend to fall back on “democratic regeneration”. We don’t question the institutions — Podemos’ line is that we have to sanitize and renew them. In contrast, 15M proposed a constituent strategy — new institutions for new times and the need for deeper social transformations.

And so we have at the same time both the positive strengths and limitations of the Podemos’ leadership. Both capable of launching good communicative attacks at a tactical level, positioning themselves effectively in public debates, but with a rather limited strategy.

Jaime Pastor We are being confronted with systemic corruption that has primarily effected the PP but Rajoy has taken advantage of previous scandals involving PSOE to say “you are implicated too!” The tactical line of Pablo Iglesias works well here, offering Podemos as the only alternative and displacing the PSOE who have found themselves stranded in the current debate.

It has also been effective because Rajoy’s discourse is centred around growth and exiting the crisis. Iglesias is insisting on the direct relationship between this structural corruption and the policies of austerity and privatization. The case of Madrid is exemplary, the privatization of (water utility company) Canal Isabel II led to widespread abuses.

Eoghan Gilmartin: Has there been a genuine turn towards the social field in Podemos?

Jaime Pastor The chance of Podemos being in government hasn’t passed but it has been pushed back. In this sense the turn to the social is about converting a weakness into a virtue. We need to return to the street so as to recover our strength and to build new alliances with other forces. Those holding institutional positions have to be at the service of social movements, continuing to put themselves forward as an alternative government but also combining this with social activism.

There is a debate about how Podemos should position itself in relation to the movements. The idea is to find a way of coming together with other organizations to keep this window of opportunity for a political alternative open.

Brais Fernández Since the Congress, Podemos’ discourse is more left-wing. There was a period, during which Áigo Errejón held greater internal weight, when the party’s discourse was totally centred on the question of governing and institutional regeneration. This has changed. For us, and Pablo himself recognizes this, Podemos is now organized in terms of a strategy, which you could call eurocommunist, that combines being a party of struggle and protest with being a party of government. And this involves dealing with the tension between these two elements.

One important thing for understanding where Podemos is right now is its relations with the social movements. The post-15M (indignados) activist culture, which is very extensive in large cities such as Madrid, has lacked channels of communication with the party. Podemos has confined itself to the sphere of representation with its own initiatives. Parallel to that the movements such as (the anti-eviction) PAH has sometimes been in clear conflict with the party. There is a tension here, which has yet to be constituted as a creative tension. The question now is how to combine the institutional struggle with struggles of the movements to create a synthesis.

Eoghan Gilmartin: An example of the limits to Errejón’s strategy can be seen in the Madrid municipal government where Ahora Madrid (the Podemos-led coalition) has struggled to implement its program without mobilized support from civil society. But is the kind of sustained popular mobilization you envisage possible in today’s atomized societies?

Jaime Pastor The problem is that Podemos emerged when 15-M protest wave was exhausted, so the interest in an institutional route came to the fore. At Vistalegre I (the party’s founding congress) Podemos bet on electoral

politics leaving aside key dilemmas which would later re-emerge.

But when the party fell short of winning the last elections, those in the Errejonista camp claimed that the crisis in the Spanish political regime had come to an end, that all that was needed was to challenge Rajoy’s government, while aiding the rehabilitation of the PSOE. We (the Anticapitalistas) accept that the rhythm has slowed but see it more in terms of an opportunity: before we advanced rapidly from above, now the opportunity is to concentrate on a war of position from below so as to reconstruct the network of social platforms and counter-powers.

In the case of Pablo Iglesias, he tries to strike a balance between the previous institutional strategy and what we demand. The great challenge for Podemos is thus on the one hand to return to the social, while avoiding the cooption of our forces in the municipal institutions. All this depends on conflict, on the capacity to generate social conflict to create a more favorable balance of forces. Being in government is very difficult when you don’t possess hegemony in the socio-political field.

Brais Fernández Clearly mobilization is important but it is not sufficient. Instead, the question of organization is key: how do we organize more permanent structures in the neighborhoods, rather than intermittent surges.

Eoghan Gilmartin: Errejón is a student of Chantal Mouffe, who talks a lot about “agonism,” a political theory that sees conflict as so fundamental to politics that it breaks from the idea of a material basis to the superstructure. Is this not at odds with Errejón’s present trajectory?

Jaime Pastor Yes, Áigo’s most recent article is worrying because it implicitly criticizes Pablo Iglesias for pursuing a more polarizing line.

Brais Fernández Looking at this in terms of consensus or rupture, Áigo is much more inclined towards seeking consensus with particular sectors of the regime so as to advance

his positions. Clearly, hegemony always involves being able to integrate the other. But the integration means that there is a revolutionary and class core that is capable of articulating a series of alliances with other sectors and classes. The key, and this is the difference between a constituent rupture and a regeneration (of the existing order), is not yielding on what is fundamental.

In order to continue being flexible while not yielding on the essentials of the project, you have to extend the experiences of struggle and conflict. This is what allows you to win over sectors tied to the regime. One positive example, still incipient, is how the motion of censure has allowed the CCOO union to side with Podemos and not their traditional allies in the PSOE. This does not mean it has become revolutionary overnight but it does show how through conflict you can reach people that would traditionally position themselves with the Socialists.

Eoghan Gilmartin: Podemos' discourse has articulated the crisis in the Spanish political regime in terms that highlight the role of corruption. Before they spoke of "la casta" and now of "la trama" (most commonly translated as "the plot" but here more specifically the dominant network of influence and power). By identifying their enemy in this way, they tried to link the social crisis and the injustice of austerity to the corruption scandals and the popular anger they generated. But is there a risk here? And what do you see as the difference between the idea of la casta and la trama.

Jaime Pastor Ultimately la trama refers to the financial-real-estate oligarchy but in the end it is Blackrock and the American investment funds that have the most weight. I would prefer to speak about a bloc of power, an oligarchic bloc because the word trama gives the idea of a conspiracy. However la trama goes further than la casta because it speaks of the corrupters, not just the corrupted and gestures to the relations between finance and politics.

Brais Fernández Since 15-M we have

approached the theme of oligarchies in a similar way to that of political Marxism over the past 150 years, by emphasizing the relationship between political power and the economy. There is nothing new in this, to say there is a network of power connecting capital and the state. The term casta was very useful for articulating an antagonistic vision of Spanish politics divided into two camps. There is always a risk that we read it in terms of bad politicians and businessmen, which allows us also to see other honest CEOs who can form part of the new historic bloc aiming to renew Spain.

Eoghan Gilmartin: How do you view the role of the PSOE in the regime crisis?

Jaime Pastor PSOE is the weakest pillar of the regime.

Brais Fernández The PSOE have completely lost their youth vote. They are now the party of the passive classes. They win votes in the south, primarily in Andalucía and then amongst older people who still see PSOE as the party which after the (post-Franco) transition had slightly improved their living conditions.

Throughout the crisis the Socialists have lost the capacity to integrate large sections of the subaltern classes. In my opinion they are not going to recover this capacity. As Perry Anderson explained about the collapse in Communist support in southern Europe in the 1980s, what you have is a new generation seeking out new political representation. Young people have no link whatsoever with the PSOE, no sense of identification with it.

Eoghan Gilmartin: A few days ago there was an article in El País with the headline: "Corbyn, Hamon and Sanchez: The Abyss" about the threat of the radicalization in the PSOE. What do you think of the reinvention of Pedro Sánchez as a radical?

Brais Fernández Pedro Sánchez is a direct creation of the PSOE machine and so in this sense is more similar to Hamon than Corbyn. He has no links to the labour movement or the anti-

war movement. I don't believe there has been any such transformation, maybe he has changed his tactical orientation.

In the end the crisis within the party is down to the fact that the PSOE finds itself at a juncture in which it has to choose. Does it want to return to government? If so, it has to reach an agreement with Podemos. Or does it want to defend the immediate interests of the regime? Then it has to support the tripartite alliance with Ciudadanos and the Popular Party.

If Sanchez wins, it could create the opportunity for an alternative government to the PP, not in the short term but in the medium term. This would be a new challenge for Podemos. Strategically, it would be a bad deal, particularly if the government is led by PSOE. However, in historic terms it could produce a new situation with a new balance forces as you can see in Portugal.

Jaime Pastor Portugal is somewhat different from Spain. As there is enough of a gap (in terms of votes) between the Socialists and the (left-wing) Bloco and Communists, the Socialists don't fear them as rivals. PSOE is in a state of denial, it refuses to recognize the new scenario and still thinks it can be hegemonic on the left.

But if it wants to be a party of government again, it has no other path than to seek an alliance with Podemos. However, it will be pressured by the corporate media and others to moderate Podemos and to displace Pablo Iglesias. The object is to destroy Pablo. For the elites he is the main enemy. In contrast, Ñ Ñ±igo has a more moderate image.

With a Sánchez victory, a more firmly anti-Rajoy PSOE would be more credible. But with what policies? In terms of the type of program he would defend, he is nothing like Corbyn. He is much more moderate and represents more a return to third-way social-liberalism with some more investment and easing of austerity.

Brais Fernández If Sánchez wins, the policies of the PSOE are not going to change radically in the short term but hopefully in the next elections it will

allow them to have a more open perspective towards governing than would be offered under Susana D  az. She has talked time and again about recuperating the PSOE's former electoral strength, but this is just a crass illusion. The PSOE has been completely fractured by tactical disputes and which are going to be difficult to heal. In practice under D  az they would face the same dilemma as under S  nchez.

I consider myself a Marxist revolutionary but I have to hope she loses. Even though I reject what S  nchez stands for politically, the coup against him was a disgrace in which all the economic and mediatic powers conspired.

Eoghan Gilmartin: How do you see the situation in Catalonia?

Jaime Pastor Since 2010 there has

been a scenario of two trains heading towards an inevitable collision. It's another point in the political system where there is the potential for a catastrophic impasse as there is a build up of frustration over the denial of the referendum. The political elites of Catalonia have pushed so far with their demand for a referendum the risk is they won't be able to retreat. Rajoy's strategy is to avoid an open confrontation while putting off dealing with the issue.

The nationalists have never focused on the social question and so have never been able to extend their bloc, which mainly comes from the urban and rural middle-classes. There is more support for independence outside of Barcelona than in the city. This is the problem for En Comu Podem (Podemos' affiliate in Catalonia) â   given the type of support, it does not want to take a firmer stand against

the central government.

Brais Fern  ndez There is a big difference here from the case of Scotland. The Spanish political elites are never going to bet on a democratic defeat of the independence movement (via a referendum). It goes against their political DNA. The constitution guarantees the unity of Spain by the army. The other main difference is the social base of the independence movement, which is the middle classes. The only way for them to resolve the issue would be through disobedience and ultimately open confrontation with the Spanish state. This is not going happen. Esquerra Republicana and the Democratic Party (the main independence parties, centre-left and right) are not going to organize a social insurrection against the Spanish state.

Source : [Jacobin](#).

The Other Iran's Views on the May 2017 Presidential Election

6 June 2017, by **Frieda Afary'**

Although the media coverage of the May 19, 2017 Iranian presidential election has focused on the high voter turnout for Hassan Rouhani, it is important to emphasize that many Iranians voted for Rouhani because they saw him as the only alternative to the "principalists" who are on the far right of the religious fundamentalist spectrum. Furthermore, many chose not to vote. The reasons which this part of the Iranian population gave for its decision included the following: 1. All the candidates had to be approved by the Islamic Republic's Council of Guardians. 2. Many of those who challenged the fraudulent election results in 2009 were imprisoned and killed. 3. The number of executions and political prisoners had increased under Hassan Rouhani's administration 4. Although Rouhani's being in favor of the July 2015 nuclear agreement with the world powers was

positive, he could not get credit for the agreement because that decision had been made by the Supreme Leader Khamenei, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the regime as a whole. 5. The main difference between Rouhani and his leading opponent Ebrahim Raisi, was that Rouhani was more open to investments by businesses from the West. While Raisi called for increasing state subsidies for his electoral base, and Rouhani supported more neoliberal reforms, both were equally involved in corruption. Neither really cared about the increasing impoverishment of the majority of Iranians. 6. Both Rouhani and Raisi strongly support Iran's military intervention in Syria to preserve Bashar al-Assad and his regime.

Furthermore, let us also not forget that there are still hundreds of

political prisoners in Iran who include student youth, women's rights activists, labor activists, teachers, Kurdish, Azari, and Arab activists who demand self-determination for Iran's national minorities, Baha'i activists whose religion is banned in Iran. Currently, Hengameh Shahidi, a journalist and women's rights activist, Athena Daemi, a feminist and human rights activist, and Esmail Abdi, a leader of the Iranian Teacher's Union are on hunger strike at the notorious Evin prison in Tehran. Labor activists, Jafar Azimzadeh and Shapur Ehsani Rad from the Free Union of Workers [formerly Unemployed Workers' Union] are involved in court proceedings to fight eleven-year prison sentences issued against them on charges of "sedition and anti-regime propaganda."

Mineworkers in Yurt

Let us not forget that following a mine explosion that killed more than 40 workers and injured tens of others on May 3, mineworkers protested against Rouhani's campaign appearance outside the Yurt mine in Golestan province on May 7, 2017. They prevented him from giving his campaign speech, banged on and jumped on his car and expressed their anger and frustration with unbearable working conditions, the lack of the most basic workplace health and safety standards, and the nonpayment of their wages and benefits.

One worker said: "Mr. President, none of you knows what it means to be a mineworker. You only remember us now that we have lost 40 miners, 170 children have lost their fathers and 40 women are widowed. Why don't we have safe working conditions?" Another mineworker said: "I swear to the Holy Koran that we don't have bread to eat. I am in pain. . . Do you even know what a mineworker is? We work but we don't have any insurance." [11]

Iranian Feminist Political Prisoner

On May 15, Golrokh Ebrahimi-Iraee who has been sentenced to six years in prison for writing an unpublished story about the barbaric practice of stoning women, issued a letter from the Evin prison. She wrote: *Isn't it true that Rouhani had promised the release of political prisoners but his minister of foreign affairs at the United Nations denied the existence of*

political prisoners? Isn't it true that the number of executions under the Rouhani administration have doubled in comparison to Ahmadinejad's administration? . . . The arrests, heavy sentences and frightful detention centers of the ministry of intelligence under the reformists' administration are not any better than the detention centers of the principalists' administration . . . What about the safe houses of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps? In what administration have we not had arrests, humiliation and executions?

Ebrahimi-Iraee concluded: *The vortex that we are immersed in has been brought about by our own imprudence. The only way to free ourselves from it is to open our eyes and review the history which we have not been determined to read.* [12]

Iranian Journalist in Exile

In a recent issue of *Manjanigh*, an Iranian leftist magazine published in Europe, Hamid Mafi, an experienced journalist now in exile challenges Iranians not to believe the regime's lies about the nature of its military intervention in Syria. He emphasizes that Rouhani's rise to presidency in 2013 was simultaneous with the increased military presence of Iran in Syria in support of Basahr al-Assad. In criticizing those Iranian opposition activists who have now become supporters of Rouhani, he writes: *A group of those who protested against the results of the 2009 presidential election, considered Ahmadinejad's victory to be a coup, and hoped that the regional developments would force the Iranian regime to yield. Now they point to the fate of Syria and Libya*

without paying attention to Iran's role in the war in Syria. They have adopted the path of "reconciliation with the system" in order to avert "the danger of war and partition" of Iran.

Instead, he argues that the danger of war and partition of Iran can only be averted if Iranian progressives simultaneously oppose any military intervention in Iran by any state, oppose any military intervention by Iran anywhere in the region, and oppose the "alliance of Iranian nationalism and Shi'ism" which is promoting the repression of progressive dissidents and oppressed minorities.

[13]

Young socialist activist

Majid Arianne, a young socialist activist and intellectual calls on workers to not separate their struggle from those of women fighting for full human rights, or the struggles of Iran's oppressed national minorities, such as the Kurds, Arabs and Lurs. He writes: "It is crude and mechanistic to define the working class simply as those from whom surplus value is extracted, and without considering the subjective factor, the world view, the perspective concerning the aesthetics of work and life." [14]

In an upcoming article, I will further examine the discussions among Iranian progressives concerning alternatives, and will critically analyze the views of some Iranian economists.

May 27, 2017

Source Alliance of Middles East Socialists [blog](#).

China is great again, but how is Britain dealing with globalisation's new champion in

the age of Brexit?

5 June 2017, by **Dorothy Grace Guerrero**

That message was repeated last Sunday in Beijing when Xi addressed a host of heads of states and high profile delegates at the high-profile Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. China, which will celebrate the Communist Party's 100th year anniversary in 2020, is fast earning the recognition of being the new champion of globalisation. [15]

When China joined the World Trade Organisation in December 1991, there were many predictions that it would be the number one economy in the world in the 21st Century. What it achieved during this early stage as the second biggest economy is staggering. The weekend summit was the global unveiling of Xi Jinping's multibillion dollar Belt and Road Initiative.

The hugely ambitious foreign policy initiative and infrastructure enterprise will connect Asia to Europe and beyond. It consists of two main components: first is the land-based "Silk Road Economic Belt" (SREB) and, second, the oceangoing "Maritime Silk Road" (MSR). The 'belt' includes countries situated on the original Silk Road through Central Asia, West Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. The Maritime Silk Road, as a complementary initiative, is aimed at investing and fostering collaboration in Southeast Asia, Oceania, and North Africa, through projects around the South China Sea, the South Pacific Ocean, and the wider Indian Ocean area.

UK Chancellor Philip Hammond represented the UK at the summit and the UK have already upped the ante to cement the "golden age" of UK-China relations by launching the first direct cargo train laden with British goods bound for China last April. The train, which regally departed from just outside of London, traveled over 12,000 kilometers and nine countries to Yiwu with 32 matching royal blue China Railway Express shipping

containers.

A New Global Order?

First proposed in 2013 by Xi, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an estimated \$3 trillion infrastructure project that spans more than 65 countries covering 70% of the world's population. It will build massive roads, bridges, gas pipelines, ports, railways, and power plants, as well as involve trade agreements and investments. There is no doubt that it is changing the contours of international development cooperation and affecting the geopolitics of energy as well.

The BRI is expected to create a vast Eurasian area of economic union and boost trade between China and participating countries. Press releases from Beijing announced that this mega-project is about connectivity and integrated open markets. There are criticisms from developing countries in Asia and Africa that it will increase indebtedness of poor countries as the financial agreements are mostly in the form of debt rather than development aid. The most vocal criticism came from India, which boycotted the forum due to the China-Pakistan corridor of the project, which will run through disputed territory in Kashmir.

In early 2016, Chinese financial institutions and companies have already announced over USD 1.1 trillion of funding for the BRI. This is in addition to the authorised capital of USD 100 billion for the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and another USD 100 billion authorised capital for the BRICS New Development Bank. Today, the EU is China's biggest trading partner, while China is the EU's second largest trading partner after the United States. Trade in goods between the

EU and China is worth well over \$1.5 billion a day, with EU exports amounting to \$170 billion and imports to \$350 billion in 2015.

China also joined the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in January 2016. Its membership facilitates the EBRD's investments to the BRI in member countries, many of which will be on the construction of network of transport links between Asia and Europe that will also cross many of the countries where the EBRD invests in.

China and UK's Golden Age of Partnership: How to Ensure that People Matter?

Chancellor Hammond said that the UK will be a natural partner for China's new Silk Road programme and Theresa May's government is obviously keen to sign a free trade deal with China after Brexit. Since the influx of Chinese capital to Europe, the sectors that most attracted Chinese investors have been energy, automotive, food and real estate. The UK is the biggest recipient of overseas direct investment in Europe. Chinese investors have poured \$38bn (£29bn) into a broad range of assets ranging from prime London real estate to banks, energy projects and football clubs since 2005.

UK real estate is particularly attractive as Chinese investors see it as being stable and the legal system makes it accessible to them. Chinese investors have put more than \$12 billion into UK property - nearly a third of China's overall investment in Britain. The purchase of London's "Cheesegrater" skyscraper by China's

CC Land for £1.15bn last March was one of the prominent deals in 2017.

In the same year Chinese companies invested £4 billion in London properties, which is 30 percent higher than the 2015 record. [16] Although the U.K.'s vote to leave the European Union lowered prices for Chinese buyers by the depression of the pound against the yuan, any longer-term profits depends partly on whether Brexit will drive down rents and

property values.

Many studies are asking whether China is exporting its investment model to economic partners and if that will be to the advantage of the economy of trade and investment partners. The bigger question is whether the future UK government after the June election and after Brexit is ensuring that new trade and investment treaties will be oriented

towards equitable, democratic, inclusive and sustainable development for UK citizens.

Is the new economic relation with superpower China leading to a UK that is more responsible for human rights and environmental equilibrium globally? Are human rights principles part of the future character of the UK foreign and trade policies? In the age of Brexit, our foreign policy is as important as domestic policies.

The FBI Takes Charge: The Establishment May be Done with Trump

4 June 2017, by **Dan La Botz**

Mueller's appointment suggests that the American corporate, political, and military elite may have had enough of Trump's unstable, unproductive, and dangerous behavior and are prepared to drive him from office. Trump's thoughtless tweets, his off-had remarks on the most important domestic and foreign policy questions, and his erratic political behavior, all of which have led to the paralysis of the Republican congressional agenda, stand in the way both of the dominant neoliberal political establishment supported by many Republican and Democratic politicians, and of the far-right Freedom Caucus, which is anxious to destroy last remnants of the New Deal and the Great Society social welfare programs of the Golden Years of 1939 to 1979.

Republicans were delighted with Mueller's appointment, since they have no desire to deal with Trump. The appointment of Mueller as special counsel means that the five Congressional committees looking into the Trump-Russia connections will be asked to narrow their investigations, which allows Republicans to evade the issue while keeping Democrats from pursuing it. [17]

The Republicans, who are well aware that things have been swirling out of

control, have been unwilling to challenge the president because many of them face election in 2018. In the face of the possibility of Trump's vengeance and also fearing the anger of rightwing populist voters, the Republicans have revealed themselves to be the most cowardly group of legislators in recent memory.

The Democrats are not much better, with a few exceptions. While they want investigations, they have been opposed to calling for impeachment. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi warned her colleagues and the public that the Democrats should not call for impeachment because there were insufficient facts on which to base such a charge. But Congressman Al Green, of Texas, told fellow representatives in Congress: "The President must be impeached." He went on, "It's not the politically expedient thing to do. This is what we must do to maintain our democracy."

Pelosi and the Democratic Party leadership may fear that Vice-President Mike Pence would be a more effective leader in the fight for the far right agenda. But they may also fear that a campaign for impeachment would stir up social forces right and left that they could not manage, and management of the

establishment's affairs is their first concern.

And the Resistance?

These developments taking place in the cupola of the edifice of the American establishment, arranged by consultations among handfuls of the most elite members of the society, have happened without much impact from what has been called the Resistance. The marches by women and environmentalists, immigrants' protests and small-scale strikes, and the outpourings at town hall meetings have given expression to widespread fear and anger from below and on the left, but they have had little direct political impact.

The Democrats, working through Indivisible, have attempted to place themselves at the head of the Resistance, while progressives in Bernie Sanders' OurRevolution"also committed to work in the Democratic Party"have done the same. Many of those in the movement have their own views and are not committed to the Democratic Party. A good many are radical activists. Yet, without a movement with an independent

political identity, we have had no impact on the most important high-level developments.

The other major problem of the Resistance is that the labor movementâ€”the only group with the size and social power to push the Democrats and moderate Republicans to fight against Trump, and not only

get rid of Trump but also fight for reforms and for a change in the systemâ€”has been deeply divided and largely absent from the fight so far.

The FBI plays the role at this moment of savior of the political establishment and the corporate political agenda that it represents. It is not our savior. We need to increase the pressure from below, to build a larger, more unruly,

and more confrontational movement. We need to go beyond protest to disruption if we are to have any impact on events. Otherwise we go from the more unpredictable Trump, to something which is predictably bad for the American people and the world.

Source: [New Politics](#).

Labour's giant step forward on health

3 June 2017, by **John Lister**

The huge demonstration #ourNHS demonstration through London on March 4, called by Health Campaigns Together (HCT) [18], was estimated by police and the media at upwards of 200,000 strong.

It was backed by over a dozen national trade unions, but also brought large contingents of people from rural areas and other parts of the country where the Tories have just strengthened their political grip in local elections.

Now HCT, facing the new challenge of responding to the sudden election, is backing an ambitious @NHS_Roadshow that will tour the country, mobilising 250 or more junior doctors and health professionals determined to help bring an end to the Tory onslaughts on the NHS, and persuade people in all parts of the country to #voteNHS, backing only candidates committed to fighting for local health services and opposing cuts and privatisation.

HCT is campaigning on facts, not ideology, collecting, organising and publishing the hard truth of what governments have done to our NHS since 2010 - most notably the 7 years so far of near-frozen real terms funding intended to follow Labour's decade of growth with a decade of unprecedented decline in health spending as a share of GDP.

Current plans would drop UK health spending back to bottom of the league

of comparable countries.

The cuts in real terms spending (while the population and cost pressures increase) have already led to cuts of 9,000 acute hospital beds (treating emergencies and waiting list patients) and 20% of mental health beds since 2010.

The shortage of beds plus brutal outright cuts in social care spending were key factors in last winter's meltdown - with thousands of patients left waiting hours on trolleys for emergency admissions, a collapse against performance targets for waiting times in A&E, cancer treatment, and patients waiting more than 18 weeks for operations.

Even the loyal Tory Daily Telegraph has published leaked official NHS figures warning of a huge increase in the numbers waiting for treatment - from the current record 3.7 million to 5.5 million by 2019 - with numbers waiting over 18 weeks expected to double to 800,000, unless extra resources are released.

The Royal College of Surgeons says the growing waiting times are "unacceptably high" and warns that major brain and heart operations are among those likely to be affected by this worsening performance.

But it's set to get worse still. At the end of last year mainstream media belatedly noticed that many of the 44

"Sustainability and Transformation Plans" (STPs) signed off by NHS England seek to downgrade hospitals or A&E units, cut bed numbers and reduce numbers of patients treated - as each of them seeks drastic "savings" to bridge an expected Â£22 billion gap between resources and needs by 2020. In many rural areas the planned "reconfiguration" of hospital care could mean journeys of up to 50 miles to access "local" hospital care.

All of these hard facts are potential dynamite for Tory Prime Minister Theresa May, since many of the people most seriously affected by the NHS and social care cutbacks will inevitably be Tory voters.

But there's more: the hidden Tory agenda since 2010 has been kept out of the public eye because it is divisive among their own ranks:

- most Tories value and use their local NHS services, and are angered by suggestions that local A&E units should close. Nonetheless if they vote for Theresa May's "strong and stable" government, it will be taken as a green light to press ahead with even more controversial cuts

and closures.

- most Tories are against privatisation of the NHS. But they had as little say as the rest of the country over Andrew Lansley's Health and Social Care Act, which was not in the manifesto, and only unveiled after David Cameron fought the election pledging no more top-down reorganisation of the NHS.

The Act has brought even more fragmentation, bureaucracy and chaos to the NHS, and was designed to open up more possibilities of handing contracts to private sector providers.

Indeed even during the pre-election "purdah" period management at the Royal Liverpool Hospital have been emailing consultants to announce plans to increase the income from private patients, and inviting consultants to help this along: this will not be a unique example.

Behind the scenes, while ministers proclaim their love of the NHS, the private sector has been growing on the strength of public funds. The proportion of NHS spending on clinical care from private providers has risen steadily since 2010, while the finances of the NHS providers have been undermined.

Across England on average £1 in every £8 of local commissioners' budgets is now spent on care provided by non-NHS organisations, and almost half of the additional £2bn of funding for the NHS commissioning budget in England in 2015/16 was spent on care provided by non-NHS providers.

Private hospital chains have been the big winners from this, coining in increased profits from treating NHS patients for whom there is no longer enough bed space as hospitals are reduced to an emergencies and chronic care service, allowing the private sector to cherry-pick the

potentially profitable contracts for the least complex elective care.

As delays in treatment increase and the waiting list lengthens, more impatient patients can also be expected to dig into savings or borrow money to pay for quicker private treatment, while cash-saving plans in many CCGs now look to restricting the range of treatments that are available as elective care – forcing more people to go private or go without.

Servile support from pliable right wing news media have helped Cameron and May to keep their real NHS policy so well concealed behind a bland rhetoric and cynical assurances.

Labour from 2010 has to take much of the blame – for lacklustre, belated and limited opposition to the spending freeze and even the Health & Social Care Act under the coalition from 2010, partly because of a refusal of the Blairite wing of the party to allow a critical view of the party's own record in government.

It was after all Blair's government which chose to waste billions of the extra funding it pumped in to the NHS on deepening what Blair himself had called the "costly and wasteful" purchaser-provider split of Margaret Thatcher's "internal market", and making it a real market by opening up contracts for clinical services to private providers for the first time.

It was Blair's government which signed the first extravagant and increasingly unaffordable PFI contracts to finance new hospitals through annually increasing payments over 30 years, pumping a growing profit stream into the coffers of banks and finance houses, many of them now offshore.

The grim legacy of these historic blunders is now visible in many areas: and even after Jeremy Corbyn took over from Miliband in the autumn of 2015 it has taken too long for Labour to get to grips with these issues and develop a more credible policy.

But at last there are signs that it is being done. The manifesto promises to axe the Health and Social Care legislation and end privatisation of the

NHS. Labour will reinstate the Secretary of State's responsibilities and invest in the NHS to hit A&E targets and deliver long overdue improvements to underfunded, understaffed mental health services.

Labour is also now pledged to remove the cap limiting NHS pay increases, reinstate NHS bursaries, guarantee the security of EU and other staff working in the NHS after Brexit, and to bring in a new law to enforce safe staffing levels.

And Labour has promised an extra £7.4bn per year investment in the NHS, including 10 billion capital funding.

There's plenty of room still for improvement but at last the Labour leadership has established a clear alternative and set themselves out as the only party committed to hold moves to repair and improve our damaged NHS.

Theresa May has made clear she does not want the NHS to be central to debates running up to the election: but her whole stance since becoming Prime Minister makes clear that a vote for "strong and stable" leadership would be taken as endorsement for five more years of cuts, closures and privatisation – regardless of local views.

The polls look grim [19]: but if Labour can keep on the pressure, this still could be an election where people wake up to the need to vote for the NHS.

[Health Campaigns Together](#) has published a fact-filled election special broadsheet that backs no party, but makes clear the view that voters should only support candidates committed to fighting on after June 8 to defend local access to services, against cuts and privatisation.

Don't take any chances with your health: #voteNHS. This might be the last chance to stop the rot before our NHS declines into persistent crisis and chaos, with the private sector waiting in the wings.

[Socialist Resistance](#)

Southern Tunisia reaches boiling point

2 June 2017, by **Dominique Lerouge, Fathi Chamkhi**

A brief chronology

March 16 Faced with this pressure, which is especially intense in this region, the UGTT union federation in Tataouine called for a general strike in the oil sector where numerous conflicts have taken place in recent years. This strike came after the dismissal of 24 employees by the Canadian company Winstar which refuses to participate in the social and economic development of the region.

April 8 Unemployed youth demanding massive job creation measures occupied the roads used by the oil trucks. They called for a general strike by the whole population for April 11.

April 11 All activities came to a halt in Tataouine, with the exception of some bakeries, pharmacies and the regional hospital. The demonstrators allowed traffic to circulate again, except for the oil trucks.

April 23 Thousands of young people organised an unlimited sit-in near the oil protected by the armed forces.

April 27 The Prime Minister during a visit to Tataouine proposed the creation of 2,500 precarious and poorly paid jobs, 500 of them immediately. He was met with cries of "work, freedom and dignity" and had to be rushed away.

May 7 The people demonstrated massively in support of the sit-ins.

May 16 A new proposal from the government included the hiring of 1,500 workers by the oil companies and the creation of 2,000 precarious jobs in other activities. Some of the mobilised youth deemed this

compromise acceptable, while others rejected it and continued to blockade the oil operations.

May 20 Despite warning fire from the army, demonstrators succeeded in halting operations at the main gas pumping station in the Tunisian south! Something never seen in more than half a century since the beginning of the exploitation of hydrocarbons in the country.

May 21 The security forces receive orders to prevent the blockade of hydrocarbon extraction sites by all means.

May 22 The security forces intervene against youths wishing to blockade a production site: one youth was killed and fifty others wounded. In the neighbouring town to Tataouine, where a general strike had been called on this day, violent confrontations took place. Mobilisations also took place in numerous other towns around the country.

The main demands

In addition to the immediate creation of jobs, the demonstrators wished to force the oil and gas companies to pay 20% of their profits to a fund for the economic development of the region. This has been categorically rejected by the neoliberal coalition government made up essentially of the Islamists of Ennahdha and certain notables from the old regime.

A desire for self-organisation

For some years, the government has made promises or signed agreements which it does not respect. This time, the unemployed youth decided not to let them get away with it.

One of them said "In 2013, after months of occupation of the central square in the town, we were bought off with a dozen jobs in a worksite belonging to the president of the employers' union. The contracts, without any social security coverage, ended after six months". This time, "neither civil society, nor the political parties, nor the UGTT will negotiate in our place."

For this reason, each decision is taken after a vote taken first on each sit-in, then at the level of their coordination. One of the members said: "We try to remain transparent and respect the wishes of everybody participating in the sit-in. This is possible through votes and consultations among ourselves. We spend all our time discussing all the details of our demands and the solutions which we propose to the government".

Nationalisation of natural resources on the agenda

Even if it does not form part of the platform of demands, this question is posed by numerous demonstrators: "Of the thousands of posts created to exploit hydrocarbons, only a few hundred have been attributed to the youth of Tataouine". "The foreign companies act as if Tunisia was still colonised". Despite its radicalism, the movement enjoys fairly broad popular support across the whole country.

Marea Socialista calls Constituent Assembly "false" and demands consultative referendum

1 June 2017, by **Marea Socialista**

Venezuela: Marea Socialista calls Constituent Assembly "false" and demands consultative referendum

In its editorial 21, issued on Sunday May 7, 2017, the revolutionary organization Marea Socialista ("Socialist Tide"), which is identified with what is known in Venezuela as "critical Chavismo", evaluates the situation of the country in the last few days, highlighting the occurrence of deaths and looting in the midst of violent protests, with a violent response from the security forces employed by the government. In response to the announcement of the governmental call for a Constituent Assembly, this movement expresses its disagreement, considering that this is not called with a clear universal civic participation and because it appeals to the consultative referendum provided for in Article 71 that distinguished the Constituent Assembly of 1999. Here is the full editorial:

Editorial #21 of Marea Socialista: Faced with the false Constituent Assembly: consultative referendum and attachment to the Constitution of 1999

More than 30 dead; the beginning and the extension of widespread looting; the word "peace" in the mouth of the rifles, and the rapid growth of a dynamic of lawlessness and hunger. And in the midst of this scenario, the announcement of a Constituent Assembly without parties, or clear universal participation, without respect for the consultation of the people in a referendum.

This government initiative is contrary to the constitutional process which led to the development, discussion and adoption of the constitution of 1999, with the active participation of a sovereign majority, a process that we in Marea Socialista claim as a

democratic method. The Official Gazette with the announcement made by Maduro, as well as the declaration of the member of the Presidential Commission for the Constituent Assembly, Aristóbulo Istúriz, that "there is no need to ask anything from the people because today the constitution provides for the Constituent Assembly", indicate a proposal of corporate and anti-democratic characteristics, with an arbitrary 50% participation of bodies co-opted to the State and without consultation, only serving to add more fuel to the fire started by the political leaders, which faces us with a much more threatening horizon.

On the one hand this Constituent Assembly is neither necessary nor helpful in coping with the most urgent and immediate problems suffered by our people. The emergency in food and medicine demands concrete measures, contrary to those being implemented by the government, such as the suspension of payments on the foreign debt so as to meet the needs of the people. This "Constituent Assembly" is intended to fit with the model of the Congreso de la Patria, a Congress made in the image and likeness of the leadership of the PSUV, where nobody knows what measures are taken or if the government is applying them. This excludes a large part of the Venezuelan people.

As indicated by the Attorney General Luisa Ortega, you cannot ask for legality from the people if it is the state that violates the law. On this point we must be absolute: the current dynamics of violent repression, of excessive and in some cases brutal character, by the state forces recklessly accompanied by armed civilians, go far beyond any control or supervision of social protest, to become an open violation of essential

human rights. Among other things, it is good to remember that the crimes caused by this violation do not prescribe in time.

Of course we reject the action of *foquista* groups, or possible trained snipers, which are covered up for by the MUD leadership. But, without having anything in common with the politics of that leadership and its demands, it should be noted that most of the deaths of unarmed civilians, young people and women, have been in the context of demonstrations in exercise of the legitimate right to protest. The same goes for the more than 700 injured and the hundreds of detainees. In this case: we undoubtedly recognize that the right to legitimate defence is exercised by demonstrators when the state violates the exercise of citizens' rights. This constant violation is the main characteristic of authoritarian regimes that lead to totalitarianism, and is one of the main factors that incite violence.

It should also be remembered that the immediate origin of the present situation is part of a chain of indisputable events in the context of a prolonged political, economic and social crisis: the repeal of the right to vote, the breaking of the constitutional thread, produced by judgments 155 and 156 of the Supreme Court. The indefinite suspension of the regional elections and the violation of the rights of citizens who signed to enable the Recall Referendum are sufficient evidence for denouncing the manipulation by the executive of institutions and rights of the people and the submission to the government of both the Supreme Court and the National Electoral Council.

In this context of constant ignoring of Chávez's Constitution and growing

violation of human rights, the government has opened a suspicious "constituent process" since its very anti-democratic announcement. It calls for a "Constituent National Assembly", with corporate characteristics, with the division into two types of the constituents that would form it and little or no transparency in its objectives. These are the elements that provoke distrust and rejection of the manoeuvre, the purpose of which can be guessed at as a preparation for a retrograde counter-reform in violation of the Constitution of 1999.

In addition there is a new violation of popular sovereignty: the failure to convene a consultative referendum to validate the realization of the Constituent Assembly, so that after the end, whether the people approve or reject it, thus the manoeuvre becomes clear and transparent. Since, as is stated in article 71 of the same, consultation must be made for the big decisions in this so-called "constituent process", and the government says that it is big decisions that must be taken. Thus, the experience and tradition of the process of convening the Constituent Assembly of 1999 is completely ignored.

In case there is any doubt about the way in which articles 347, 348 and 349 of the Constitution are manipulated by the regime, it is useful to review comparatively, as an example, article 71 with the constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador, inspired by ours:

Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela: Article 71

"Subjects of special national significance may be submitted to a consultative referendum on the initiative of the President of the Republic in the Council of Ministers; by agreement of the National Assembly, approved by a vote of the majority of its members; or at the

request of not less than ten percent of the voters registered in the civil and electoral registry.

Consultative referendums may also apply to matters of special parish, municipal and state importance. The initiative corresponds to the Parish Board, the Municipal Council or the Legislative Council, by agreement of two-thirds of their members; to the Mayor or state Governor, or to a number not less than ten percent of the total enrolled in the corresponding district, upon request".

Constitution of Bolivia: article 411

"I. The total reform of the Constitution, or anything affecting its fundamental bases, rights, duties and guarantees, or the primacy and reform of the Constitution, will take place through a plenipotentiary original Constituent Assembly, activated by popular will by referendum. The convocation of the referendum will be carried out by citizens' initiative, with the signature of at least twenty percent of the electorate; by absolute majority of the members of the Plurinational Legislative Assembly; or by the President of the State. The Constituent Assembly will self-regulate to all effects, having to approve the constitutional text by two thirds of the total of its present members. The validity of the reform will require a constitutional referendum".

Constitution of Ecuador: Article 444

"The constituent assembly can only be convened through popular consultation. This consultation may be requested by the President of the Republic, by two-thirds of the National Assembly, or by twelve percent of the persons registered in the electoral registry. The consultation should include the form of election of representatives and the rules of the electoral process. The new Constitution, for its entry into force,

will require approval by referendum with half plus one of the valid votes".

In the current situation of crisis and growing violence, it is essential to assert the voice of the people, that the call is approved in sovereign referendum and that the results of the Constituent Assembly, if it happens, must be approved in the same way. That is why we call for the formation of a broad front to demand and activate these consultative referendums. And that meanwhile we demand from this space the full validity of the Constitution of 1999.

The seriousness of the current situation obliges us to warn that if, on the contrary, the government continues to ignore the claim of a part of society, a claim that begins to appear from the ranks of Chavismo itself; if the repressive level continues to increase and the constitutional mandates are ignored, and all the roads to the democratic participation of the people continue to be closed, the government will be proceeding with the assassination of the Chávez Constitution.

The immediate result of the call made by Maduro, in addition to the confusion generated in the majority of the population, contrasts with the increase of the repressive violence of the state towards demonstrations. An example of this is the activation of the Zamora Plan in the state of Carabobo, which should be understood as a pilot experience with the intention of being extended to the whole country, with the activation of military tribunals for detained demonstrators who are denied ordinary justice, and the de facto installation of detention camps in military units, which is alarming and can lead to a crossing of the thin line to an openly repressive and totalitarian government.

This single example should be sufficient for all those who reject the spiral of increasing violence initiated by the state power, to together demand that the Electoral Council restores the functioning of the 1999 Constitution to assume its historic responsibility, activates the suspended regional elections for governors and mayors and ensures the presidential election next year, installing a

timetable for all of them. All this with ample guarantees of democratic participation of all the political expressions of the country.

The struggle we are proposing is far-reaching and requires the

construction of a social and political force of unity of action which will build itself on the march on the basis of the defence of democratic rights.

LUCHAS activists on the call for a Constituent Assembly

1 June 2017, by **LUCHAS**

They hope that comrades from other revolutionary organizations and political personalities, with whom they have been sharing some orientations and positions about what has been happening in Venezuela and in our continent for some months now, decide to adhere to the present declaration. They consider this a document that they make available for discussion, to the various revolutionary political organizations that exist and to the vanguard that has made it possible to move through this Bolivarian and Chavista process.

In order to argue their position on their participation in the call for an ANC, they have considered it essential to refer to historical elements which lie at the origin of this unresolved dispute which in 2017 has taken on dangerous dimensions of violence that seem to grow ever wider.

1. Origins of this dispute

Venezuela at the beginning of the 20th century was a country with a pre-capitalist agricultural mode of production. The impulse of the oil exploitation from the 1930s onwards made possible the incorporation of the country into the capitalist world. But the local money powers decided to do it through the back door. Since the exploitation of wage labour for production on the land was the original mechanism for the accumulation of capital, its evolution is fundamental to understanding the emergence of a late, dependent and

parasitic capitalism in Venezuela and the rise of the national lumpen bourgeoisie. The rise of the Venezuelan lumpen bourgeoisie is not the result of the development of a powerful industrial production complex, but is characterized by:

(A) a thoroughgoing appropriation of oil revenues, not to promote the emergence of an important productive infrastructure, but to create a machinery to import food, goods and services that would generate enormous profits, with foreign exchange coming from the marketing of oil, without risking its own capital and freeing itself from dangerous relationships with workers in factories. The few industries that were installed were for assembly or in order to capture a significant portion of the oil revenue, through the import demands for inputs for the production of their merchandise;

(B) the development of a financial banking infrastructure that would enable this dynamic;

(C) the formation of cross-class parties for the establishment of a model of representative democracy, which served to mediate and avoid social unrest, implying a special level of articulation between the political class and the lumpen bourgeoisie, whose borders were often confused, through the creation of familiar and economic ties and a communion of interests;

(D) the emergence of modern Venezuelan parties (AD, COPEI, URD, PCV) in the context of the global dispute between fascism and

Stalinism, impelled the construction of imaginaries of freedom, progressivism and change, mediated by oscillations between a social democracy faltering before capital, and a bureaucratic perspective of revolutionary socialism. A discourse conditioned by the diatribe between fascism versus Stalinism made possible the construction of authoritarian imaginaries in the dynamics of modern Venezuelan parties from their inception.

The appropriation of the oil income, to concentrate capitalist profits through import, caused four great waves of abandonment of the countryside, within a framework of city-country opposition where the rural was synonymous with backwardness and the city with progress. The first phase occurred in the initial attempts at democracy with their dictatorial intermediaries (1936-1958), the second in the framework of the struggle against the peasant guerrilla war in the 1960s and the third, in the context of the oil price boom of the 1970s. A fourth wave, with an already decimated peasant population, occurred in the last two decades of the twentieth century.

In all these periods and processes, the capacity for national agricultural production was practically destroyed, and the so-called industrial plant was nothing more than a gigantic machinery for capturing oil income, through the development of mechanisms for importing inputs, parts and almost finished products, which generated exorbitant profits and to some extent concealed its

nefarious implications in the capital-labour relationship and the generation of this sui generis surplus value.

2. The beginning of the break

The model entered into crisis as a result of the impact of the global oil price crisis of the 1980s, the crisis of the foreign debts of the dependent countries and the slowdown of the world economy, in the same period. The so-called Venezuelan Black Friday caused the lumpen Venezuelan bourgeoisie to begin a rapid process of transferring the consequences of the capitalist crisis in this period onto the backs of the working class and the salaried professional groups.

Uncontrollable inflation generated by the impact of the devaluation of the bolivar against the dollar, and its immediate transfer to the goods, products, goods and services imported by the lumpen bourgeoisie, generated a brutal fall in the purchasing power of wages for the vast majority of the population. It was a clear sign that the Venezuelan economy was tied to the chariot of imports and that only a very small layer of what the population required was produced in the country.

The deterioration of the standard of living was so rapid that it produced a great malaise in the Venezuelan population that incubated the popular revolt of February 27- 28, 1989. This popular insurgency highlighted the exhaustion of the rentier-importer model of the Venezuelan economy. But the lumpen Venezuelan bourgeoisie was not interested in investing to start producing on the land or in setting up an industrial infrastructure that would meet the needs of the population. On the contrary, they concentrated on political manoeuvres to try to overcome the storm and continue with their model of capital gains through imports.

3. The military

uprising and its vision of the economic model of Venezuela

In 1992 there were two military uprisings that placed the military as a new actor in Venezuelan political, economic and social dynamics. The views of Chavez and much of the insurgent military concentrated between that year and 2004 on the possibility of developing a capitalism with a human face. In this perspective, the insurgent military argued that the Venezuelan lumpen bourgeoisie had no commitment to the people and that it was possible to reverse this situation with the emergence of a nationalist bourgeoisie. This was not a novelty in political terms, since Stalinism had raised it since the 1930s to stop the world revolution and Maoism had made this premise an absolute truth. The novelty lay in it being adopted by the military, and it quickly gained political hegemony in the popular imagination. That is to say, in its origins the Bolivarian Chavista movement argued for the destruction of the old lumpen bourgeoisie and the creation of the objective and subjective conditions for the emergence of a new nationalist, anti-imperialist and progressive bourgeoisie. That gave different sectors and actors who aspired to access oil income to see in this movement an opportunity.

The workers, the peasants, the salaried professionals and the exploited and marginalized in general began to see in the insurgent movement a possibility of changing their destiny. Therefore, quickly and to the surprise of the establishment, they joined the movement endowing it with a sense of class that did not have until that moment. But the Bolivarian Alternative Agenda itself (1996) continued to raise the urgent task of developing a humane capitalist model. This dynamic started a process of conflict within the Bolivarian movement between the bourgeois and aspiring neo-bourgeois elements and those who lived from work. A tension that had a first insurrectional

expression on April 11, 12 and 13, 2002. But that was not the culmination; it was the beginning of an open conflict for the oil income by antagonistic social classes and between sectors of the bourgeoisie.

The Venezuelan left had suffered four successive defeats. The first was the guerrilla war in the 1960s. The second, the combination of forms of legal, electoral and clandestine struggles in the 1970s. The third, the failure of the combination of multiple tactics that opened the possibility to the electoral triumph for the presidency of the republic of a steelworker who many felt had betrayed his victory for a few crumbs from the powerful. Fourth, the fall of so-called actually existing socialism.

An electoral left (MAS, PCV, MEP and so on) which mostly supported the candidates of the Christian Democracy in the 1990s and a radical left in the process of dissolving its organizations (PRV-PST-OR and so on) found in the Bolivarian movement a table of salvation. But the moderate and radical left was well aware that the initial aim of the Bolivarian movement was the destruction of the old bourgeoisie and the creation of conditions for the emergence of a nationalist bourgeoisie. Many consciously approached it, betting on an intensification in this process of the class contradictions that would open the door to a socialist revolution. But no one approached this encounter without being aware of this fact.

4. The 1999 Constitution

The Constitutional process of 1999 was intended to establish the juridical bases that would express the new correlation of forces which existed, reflecting political and social phenomena that had taken place since 1958 and also, to open channels for a new way of constructing the nation. It was a constitution designed for a state of social justice that demanded the emergence of a new nationalist bourgeoisie, interested in developing national productive forces and not simply snatching oil revenues from its import model. It was also an effort to

build legally on the aspiration that came from decades of struggle, a political model of participatory and protagonist democracy that guaranteed the expansion of the economic and social rights of the vast majority of the population. This social pact was supported by the political forces and sealed the civic-military alliance to open channels to another possible Venezuela.

The Venezuelan opposition forces with their main actors, Capriles, Leopoldo López, Ramus Allup, Maria Corina Machado and so on, openly opposed the constitutional text because they were representatives of the parasitic bourgeoisie, capturing dollars from the oil revenue, which saw its power threatened. In 1999 they called for a No vote in the referendum on the charter. For this reason, the first thing they attempted to do in the coup d'état organized in 2002 was to repeal the 1999 Constitution. It is unacceptable that they nowadays claim to be its defenders, except for the fear that the constituent process of 2017 builds a new social pact in which the interests and *modus vivendi* and representations of the old bourgeoisie are definitively erased.

It is also unusual that sectors of the radical left, which have always questioned the text of the charter because it did not break with the capitalist model, are now proposing the defence of its content and the impossibility of its reform, opposing it to the constitutional process of 2017. Their arguments indicate that there is a risk of loss of rights, thereby expressing conservatism and lack of confidence in the revolutionary possibilities of the people to generate a radicalization of the process. As Atilio Borón pointed out recently, in Venezuela the class struggle is entering a defining phase and in that perspective, the left has become conservative. Of course in all political action there are risks of counter-reforms, but if that is the place of enunciation in the struggles, then it would be better not to do politics. We prefer to be with the constituent people and dare to live their risks and assume their fate, which is our fate as workers.

5. What happened between 2005 and 2013

The recuperation of the oil industry by the Bolivarian government, concretized in terms of public policies, marked the beginning of the destruction of the old lumpen bourgeoisie. The closure of access to the currencies from the oil income was to a significant sector of that lumpen bourgeoisie an attack that they had not suffered since the beginnings of oil exploitation. For that reason they reacted violently and tried to dissolve the Bolivarian process by means of the coup d'état of 2002. What the appropriators of Venezuelan wealth, the importing lumpen bourgeoisie did not count on was that the workers and employees came out to defend the Chavista government. The latter emerged more popular, unveiling the profound class struggle ran through Venezuelan society and impelled the Bolivarian movement, before the possibility that the rebellion of April 2002 would open the way to a revolutionary situation.

This popular support enabled Chavez and a significant part of the Bolivarian Movement to turn left, in a two-year process that culminated in December 2004 with the declaration of the socialist character of the revolution. But in politics there is no empty space; as agricultural production and the industrial infrastructure were not reactivated, it was necessary to continue importing more than 90% of the products, goods and services required by the Venezuelan population. This led to the emergence of new proto-socialist associative forms such as communes, communal councils, social production enterprises or companies recuperated by their workers, while a new group of importers became converted into a neo-bourgeoisie. Thus, since 2006, strong tensions have emerged between the old lumpen bourgeoisie, deprived of access to the foreign exchange from oil income, the importing parasitic neo-bourgeoisie and the workers who embraced the socialist idea. The class struggle began a new stage.

In these contradictions between capital and labour, Chávez usually placed himself at the side of the interests of the workers, but at the same time assumed himself as an arbiter to avoid direct confrontation between the antagonistic classes. The radical left was always clear in this dynamic, but it always gambled on a new correlation of forces in which the popular sectors with Chávez and the anti-capitalist Bolivarians would open the way to a radical socialist revolution.

6. The Maduro government and the tensions openly expressed

Reality usually surpasses any political lucubration. Chávez's illness and subsequent death, as well as the sharp drop in oil prices to levels well below the minimum income required to maintain the situation of governability initiated in 2006, open a new chapter in the class struggle in Venezuela. The American empire, with its international lackey governments, and the national lumpen bourgeoisie, see that the time has come to recover the oil income to return to the model of a late, dependent and import-based capitalism that they had upheld.

But the new bourgeoisie that emerged between 2006 and 2013 is not willing to give up control of 96% of the mass consumer products that are imported. In the middle there is a government and a party that had played on a new socialist multi-classism that avoided direct confrontation between antagonistic classes. Those workers who were affected by brutal inflation, loss of purchasing power and the replacement of socialist discourse by a rhetoric of survival in power, hesitate between passivity and unrestricted support for Maduro's government. This hesitation led more than a million Chavez voters to abstain in December 2015, which made it possible for the opposition to Chavismo to win in the National Assembly.

The street has re-emerged as the space for the measurement of forces.

The truth is that each of the sectors in conflict, with an electorate that exceeds four million votes, can mobilize 100-200,000 people. The propaganda about the superiority of one or the other from the mobilizations does not conceal that what lies behind is an intensification of the class struggle. The sectors influenced by the right are betting on a return to the pro-capitalist model prior to 1998, a very significant group of workers influenced by Chavismo is beginning to tire of the current situation and poses a radicalization without breaking with the bureaucratic apparatuses, while the neo-bourgeoisie wants everything to remain the same so that nothing changes.

The political sectors in both camps, influenced by one or another bourgeois factor, are unable to talk because both want 100% of the oil revenue. Failure to agree on how to share profits from oil revenues sharpens conflict, in a spiral of permanent tension with no possibility of exit. The political crisis is an expression of the tensions between bourgeois sectors that do not agree on how to share oil income.

But for the parties of the Gran polo Patriótico (Great Patriotic Pole) and most intermediate cadres, the rank and file and elements of the leadership this dispute does not involve them, but they could be affected by its resolution which could end up being regressive in terms of political, social and economic achievements; so they begin to turn left towards an encounter with "popular logic".

The greatest risk to the establishment of this impossibility of political dialogue, given that economic interests and ambitions are overflowing, is that (a) an authoritarian solution emerges that seeks to rise above both bourgeois sectors in dispute, building roads of forced understanding: to the extent that this authoritarian exit manages to break through to an economic consensus the political solution would be eminent and the "authoritarian" one would cease to have reason to be; (B) a social revolution emerges that builds a political centre radically opposed to what was known during

the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century in Venezuela.

7. Is the Constituent Assembly an opportunity to resolve the class conflict in Venezuela?

The crisis in Venezuela has deepened in 2017, and is no longer only economic and political but also social, moral, cultural and fundamentally a crisis of perspective as a nation. This situation, a consequence of the long conflict explained above, is one of the peaks in terms of violence and misunderstanding since Hugo Chávez emerged at the head of the movement that has been trying to change the model of capitalist state known as the Fourth Republic almost 20 years ago.

At present we are experiencing levels of daily violence that are totally unbridled, the escalation of which opens the possibility of a civil war situation as an expression of an overflow of class struggle and the beginning of a revolutionary situation, but also opens possibilities for the formation of an authoritarian government that seeks to arbitrate the bourgeois dispute, foreign military intervention to erase the bad example of Chavismo in Latin America, the Caribbean and the world, or even economic blockade with the freezing of oil accounts.

Each time that friction between the social classes threatened to break the social pact of 1999, the solution of the Bolivarian movement with Chavez at its head was more democracy, expansion of popular participation or elections. These tensions have a long expression at different historical moments, perhaps the most relevant ones were expressed around the elections for the National Constituent Assembly in 1999; the recovery of control of PDVSA and the coup d'état (2002); oil sabotage and the

employers' lockout at the end of 2002; the sabotage of investment in the productive sector by the employers; electricity sabotage at different times; the economic war with the programming of food shortages, violent protests, (*guarimbas*, blockades of roads and industrial plants).

Unfortunately at many of these times we have also witnessed abuses of authority, criminalization of protests and violations of human rights that show the tensions of the class struggle within the Bolivarian movement itself.

A special aspect in the current conjuncture is the involvement of governments of other countries in our internal affairs, as is happening with the so-called Obama Decree that considers Venezuela as a country representing "a high danger for the stability of the United States", or the claim by Almargo that the OAS intends to apply its Democratic Charter to the Bolivarian Revolution and / or impose an alleged humanitarian aid to the country. The consequences of these destabilization attempts patented abroad have generated consequences that have been left in conditions of impunity, despite the lamentable numbers of deaths and substantial material and economic losses.

This street violence financed by the lumpen bourgeoisie and by foreign forces is being suffered daily, with the unfortunate outcome of numerous deaths. In LUCHAS we demand the immediate imprisonment and prosecution of those guilty of the murders, whoever they are and no matter what they say they defend; for us these are the children of workers and wage earners who are being manipulated or have fallen into the fray and, in order that this does not happen again, there can be no tolerance, impunity or concealment of procedural truth.

The violent protests sponsored by the opposition sectors have as their sole aim the breaking of the constitutional thread through the departure by force of President Maduro from government. They disguise this with supposed democratic aspirations but what is behind it is their desperation to return to control of the currencies

coming from the oil income. Therefore they have been oscillating in their demands; at the outset, demanding a disqualification and de-legitimization of President Maduro; then demanding gubernatorial elections which have been delayed as a result of the economic crisis of supply, prices and productivity. Later they began to demand general elections and a constituent process to erase the constitution of 1999.

From "peaceful" protests, some for legitimate democratic rights, they immediately passed to violent expressions with vandalism, death and destruction of infrastructure. All this is manipulated to make them appear in the international media as democrats accusing the government of violating the right to protest and of being a repressor and even a murderer. All the imperial media has been put at the service of the overthrow of the Bolivarian government.

Opposition violence has increased, with acts of pillage and criminality, since the Resolution of the Supreme Court of Justice (TSJ) to limit the attributions of the National Assembly, in permanent contempt and faced with a prolonged conflict of powers. The statement and position taken by the Attorney General of the Republic, Luisa Ortega D'Áz, questioning the TSJ Resolutions, reinforced the spiral of violence despite the return of full powers to the Assembly.

In this context, they escalated the slogans accusing the government of President Maduro of carrying out a coup, evidently to seek isolation and international condemnation, in the context of a growing influence of the right in the region. The governments of several Latin American and European countries, including Colombia, the USA, Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Mexico, Canada, Spain and others, are belligerently pressing the government of President Maduro for a dialogue with the opposition. This international articulation is not new, repeated attempts have been made to isolate Venezuela at a world scale. Recall the automatic solidarity of the right-wing governments with the *guarimbas* of 2014 known as "La Salida", criminal violence led by Leopoldo López, which sought to

effectively bring down the newly installed government of Maduro.

This time, the aim is to give violent protests a "democratic cover" with the request for gubernatorial elections; the election of a new National Electoral Council; freedom for those they call "political prisoners", first and foremost the convicted criminal Leopoldo López, judged responsible for the crimes and damage caused in the insurrectional acts that he publicly convened and directed in 2014.

The call for a National Constituent Assembly has incensed the right, uncontrollably generating violence. In some states of the country, such as Carabobo, paroxysm was reached: armed gangs of criminals in different areas of the main cities of this state, controlling some housing estates and neighbourhoods, imposing looting on all types of shops, food transport and even residential housing, collecting tolls to allow the transit of citizens and even assaulting and killing humble passers-by travelling through the streets.

MUD leaders, including Julio Borges, president of the National Assembly, called on the people to "rebel" and to protest against Maduro's call for a Constituent Assembly, characterizing it as an auto-coup and a manoeuvre by Maduro to gain time and perpetuate himself in power. Sectors of the middle-class and supposedly radical left, including a former Chavez minister, who are increasingly biased by hatred in the analysis of reality rather than by a capacity for characterization of the conjuncture proper to the class struggle, have said "This call for a Constituent Assembly means a great betrayal of Chávez because the CRBV was his monumental work." For them, "daring to change or modify the CRBV is to proceed against his legacy", forgetting that they supported Chávez himself when he tried to modify 69 articles of the Constitution by calling a referendum, which he lost. The right, as expressed in the MUD, was in the past opposed to the reform of the Constitution because it feared a radicalization of its content that would break with the logic of capital, so it is understandable that today they oppose again. What is inexplicable is

the regression of that other sector of the left that now with timorous arguments shares the tactics of the MUD. This is not a minor element in the field of class struggle.

If, in a clear way that Chavez had already considered 10 years ago, the CRBV was not perfect and that, by then, changes had to be made in order to move forward, the positions of these "critical Chavistas" and the declarations of the Attorney General of the Republic, affirming to the international press that "Our constitution cannot be improved" appear ridiculous.

In light of the events of violence that have arisen in recent weeks, especially in important states such as Carabobo, it seems to us that we could be a step away from a tragedy like Colombia's "Bogotazo", which would open a long period of violence in our country, as happened in that brother country with the killing of Jorge Eliezer Gaitan.

That would be a very serious injury to Venezuelan society and would place the resolution of the class conflict in the field of the military and violent forces. For this reason, it is urgent to close the way to any attempt at an authoritarian solution, from above, to the ongoing class struggle. In this perspective we value the call for the Constituent Assembly, and from that scenario we frame our political positions in the contradictions of the class struggle.

The fundamental criticism that the right makes of the call for a Constituent Process in the year 2017 is that it is not an agreement of parties, but a call to the involvement of all citizens. We point out that in the current circumstances of deepening conflict over foreign exchange from oil revenues, multi-class political parties of any kind are incompetent to reach an agreement and resolve the issue of street violence. The bourgeois elements in dispute, each for 100% of the oil income, have no chance of mediating in the conflict. Party solutions, of simple dialogue and agreement without the popular involvement of workers, housewives, students and salaried professionals are impossible because the people are

a fundamental player in the current dispute. For that reason, we consider progressive the Convocation of a Constituent Assembly from the popular power as a possibility not only of a resolution of violence at the bases of society, but also as a clear path for revolutionary deepening and socialist radicalization of the process. The criticism that unites the right and some on the radical left, that the call to the constituent process is a government strategy to prolong itself in power, seems to us ancillary and cosmetic, because the substantive element is the popular role in determining the direction in use and enjoyment of the oil income.

For revolutionaries it is very progressive that Maduro has said that this Constituent Assembly is: “deeply working class, communal, youthful, indigenous and for all people”! For the employers and their supporters and for the constitutionalist pontiffs of “critical Chavismo” that is a heresy against the CRBV and a gross manoeuvre by Maduro. When you are at crucial moments of the class struggle, opportunists as well as sectarians only see manoeuvres in challenges and opportunities.

Nor are we deluded enough to believe that by itself the Constituent Assembly will be the magic wand that allows an end to the existing crisis. This call means a challenge for the social movement and workers, as vanguard sectors, to demonstrate their capacity for class independence vis-À-vis capital, state, and their institutions. Both the right-wing and the radical left and / or critical Chavistas oppose it, not so much for constitutional and democratic conceptions, but for mathematical questions as they have little influence on trade unions, federations, communes, communal councils and indigenous organizations. The right have some professional guilds and some student centres, but they are afraid that this accumulation is not enough, that is, the sum does not give them victory. And, for them, if they do not have a voting advantage equal to or greater than during the National Assembly elections, they consider it an early defeat for their central purposes: that Maduro should go and the CRBV that exists today is radically changed, as good hypocrites

say when defending and retaking access to foreign exchange from the oil industry.

8. This call for the National Constituent Assembly 2017 is necessary

In the midst of this situation of impossibility of a meeting that resolves the situation without violent conflict and the growing tensions from below for a prompt radical solution, President Maduro has taken the bold political initiative of calling for a Constituent process. This constituent process should not be seen only as a democratic development, but as a new chapter of the class struggle. In this sense, the call by President Maduro acquires a progressive character as a possibility of resolution of the conflict not by agreement between factions of the bourgeoisie, but through popular and working class self-activity. This call triggers the tensions of the class struggle.

In this context, as LUCHAS we have decided to participate actively and openly in the constituent process. We ratify our critical support for the Bolivarian process and in that sense we will accompany the workers, peasants, students, women, salaried professionals, exploited and marginalized in the perspective of having a broad and legitimate representation in the great parliamentary scenario which this constituent assembly should be, so that its deputies contribute in opening the way to a revolutionary socialist radicalization of the process. Without any doubts or hesitations, we are standing alongside President Maduro stressing the role of the workers in promoting the radical socialist revolution of the Bolivarian process.

The workers must be the primordial social class that together with capable professionals and revolutionaries must be at the forefront of the decision-making bodies to carry out the necessary changes and

transformations. Only revolutionary actions and measures can really lead us to socialism. As a form of government, the most extensive democratic discussion must prevail in order to confront the problems of the revolution. Only in this way can the legitimacy of participatory and proactive democracy established by the CRBV be realized.

The Preparatory Commission for the convening of this Constituent Assembly has said, among other things, that its objectives would be: 1) A Constituent Assembly for peace; 2) Building a new post-oil economic system; 3) Advancing more in the state of social welfare, giving constitutional rank to the missions; 4) Promoting the functioning of the system of justice and protection of the people to end impunity; 5) Promoting the new forms of participatory and protagonistic democracy, giving a constitutional role to the Communes; 6) A sovereign foreign policy; 7) Cultural identity and a new Venezuelan identity; 8) A guarantee for the future and 9) Preservation of life. These points give us a way to transcend capitalism beyond what has so far happened. But we cannot wait to install the Constituent Assembly to face the problems that hinder the support of the social bases of the process.

9. The Constituent Assembly and the “Golpe de Timón”

We are for criticizing the tactical and strategic errors that have led to this crisis to the enormous magnitudes that we now suffer. We still await the “golpe de Timón” [“Change of direction”] that Chávez demanded before dying, when attempting a balance sheet of his periods of government. We must face, because the hour is late, the shortage of food and medicines, the vertiginous loss of the purchasing power of wages. The economic war, because conjunctural and structural issues were not addressed in time, has degenerated into this economic chaos that we suffer, where from the biggest to the smallest merchants, winemakers and

bachaqueros put the prices that they want on products without any real price controls.

Immediately, an Economic Emergency Plan should be issued, which should revive the productive apparatus to guarantee consumer and service goods and restore the purchasing power of wages. That is key to curbing the existing popular discontent. It is necessary to denounce the facts of corruption and demand that the corrupt are tried and punished; we demand the dismissal of incompetent and corrupt civil servants. It is still in the memory of many compatriots who want to know who were the supposed entrepreneurs who used more than 20 billion preferential dollars to import and only brought containers which were empty or full of waste. And, how is it that in the last four years 160 million dollars have leaked away?

Likewise, the payment of the foreign debt and concessions for the exploitation of our natural resources, like the Orinoco Mining Arc, concessions of oil and gas exploitation to transnational and private companies, need to be addressed by the Constituent Assembly and should be the starting point for a citizen's audit of the foreign debt and public spending, of a permanent nature, and with constitutional status.

It will be necessary, after passing this

stage of propaganda for the Constituent Assembly, to elaborate from the different social sectors programs which are economic; social; environmental; concerning citizen rights; concerning integration and regional cooperation; as well as presenting immediate proposals to guarantee peace and coexistence, which will form the basis of the debates and discussions of the Constituent Assembly. In the last two weeks a fervour among workers and other social movements has been reborn. We have witnessed dozens of assemblies of workers in different states and in different sectors, convened by affiliated unions and federations and related to the CBST trade union federation where they have already formed campaign committees for the Constituent Assembly. Events where there has been a surprising enthusiasm to continue debating everything that is there to debate.

However, we must go much further. It is necessary to extend the Constituent process to the communities and the different social bases that will have representation in the Assembly, with regular and permanent meetings between these representatives and those bases from which they come. They should present accounts and assume the guidelines that the bases in democratic assemblies decide. These deputies and the rank and file

have to accompany the struggles in which the workers and the different popular sectors fight for their particular rights. Above all, today there is the risk that many conflicts will develop and that hundreds of workers lose their jobs, if the employers follow the example of companies like General Motors, a corporation that has decided to "cease operations in the country" when it is evident that they want to fire 2,700 workers and return after a year or two to restart their operations. GM Corporation contributed its share of silliness to the international media campaign, informing the press that the Venezuelan government had expropriated the company.

Now, as never before, the greatest class solidarity and the best expressions of revolutionary consciousness must prevail. Let us follow the advice that Leon Trotsky recommended to various organizations in the world and in different circumstances of the class struggles: "We must help the masses in the process of their daily struggle to find the bridge between their current demands and the program of socialist revolution. This bridge consists of a system of transitional demands that starts from the current conditions and the consciousness of broad layers of the working class".

Valencia, May 2017