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Resistance, but the oligarchy wins the first round

30 July 2017, by **Flavia Verri, Samy Johsua**

These elections take place within the framework of a semi-presidential system, borrowing from the characteristics of both a parliamentary system and a presidential system: the head of the executive, the President of the Republic, elected by universal suffrage, has strong powers but must obtain parliamentary support in order to govern. Emmanuel Macron and his movement "En marche" (now called "La République en marche", REM) obtained an absolute majority in the Assembly. But they did so in a context of decomposition and recomposition on both the right and the left, whose dynamics and outcome are uncertain. The presidential election reflects the crisis of political identification and the splintering of the general landscape. The legislative elections confirmed this. This does not only affect political organizations. The social movement has been impacted and is faced with a crisis of strategy.

The good news, contrary to widespread fears, is that these elections were more polarized around social issues than around migration and security issues. It was a real moment of politicization, of popular education, but also of polemics among movements and supporters of the left.

Oppose Macron in the street, right away!

French political reality means that, in practice, the tone of the relationship of forces is given by the results of the presidential election, especially its first round.

Emmanuel Macron became president - without surprise, given the relentless media campaign to support him and given that his adversary was the

National Front (FN). But he did it without assembling a massive vote based on conviction. He was elected thanks to a strong vote against Le Pen, to which was added a historically high number of blank and spoiled ballot papers and a very strong level of abstention.

On the left and in the social and trade-union movement, the debate on what vote to call for was lively, reflecting the dilemma and the trap of the French presidential system, which saw a face-off between a supporter of untrammelled liberalism and the candidate of a fascist party.

The National Front affirmed its national influence by winning the support of Gaullists of the traditionalist right who crossed the red line. It acquired a solid territorial implantation, particularly in Northern, Eastern and South-Eastern France. Fifteen years have passed since the

2002 presidential election, and Marine Le Pen doubled her father's score at that election around a programme that defends "national preference" and designates foreigners as being responsible for the crisis; but throughout the campaign her programme stressed social questions, with an anti-system profile. Marine Le Pen did not win, but the progression of her movement is constant and reaches voters with very diverse profiles.

Having said that, the defeat of Marine Le Pen produced disappointment among her supporters, since her score did not surpass the 40 per cent mark that unofficially represented the threshold of success. Internally, criticism and tensions have erupted and there has been no hesitation in denouncing mistakes, notably those of Florian Philippot, one of those closest to the party president, who now evokes his departure if the National Front changes its line on the question of the exit from the euro. The founder of the National Front, Jean-Marie Le Pen, has questioned the strategy of the party, attributing its defeat to the influence of Philippot, which he considers to be too great. The knives will be out within the party. And within the Le Pen family. The divisions in the party are regrouped in two broad currents, two figures, and two regions. The trend embodied by Marine Le Pen and Florian Philippot is anchored in the North and East of France. Its line is clearly social, statist, anti-liberal and sovereignist. It addresses the working class electorate of the FN.

The other current is represented by Marine le Pen's niece, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, formerly an MP for the Vaucluse department. She has announced her temporary withdrawal from political life for personal reasons, but very few people would say that there is not a serious political conflict behind her decision. Her discourse highlights national and cultural identity, conservative and fundamentalist Catholicism. This current defends a liberal conception of the economy, where the state should concentrate on its core powers (army, police, borders). Its electorate is less working-class than in the North and more strongly represented in the

world of business and trade: artisans, small employers and those, numerous in this region, who are nostalgic for French Algeria.

Emmanuel Macron is the product of the collapse of the vote in favour of the traditional right and left parties that have governed France for 45 years in an alternating or cohabiting way.

The results of the first round illustrate well the political and democratic crisis in France, which has led to a new stage in the crisis of the Fifth Republic, with the electoral defeat of the two parties, the Republicans and the Socialist Party (PS), who had organized until then the bipolarization of political life and the qualification of two presidential candidates for the second round... It is a real explosion of the political landscape that is under way.

The results of the primaries of the right and the PS were confirmed: the parties and the personnel who have dominated politics for decades were eliminated. The traditional clashes between the right and left government parties have been called into question: the same policies followed on both sides have tended to efface the divisions between the Republicans and the Socialists.

The personalities of these parties were "kicked out" in the primaries of the right and then of the left. This was the case with Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the Republic from 2007 to 2012, of the Republicans, but also with Manuel Valls, Prime Minister of François Hollande from 2014 to 2016, in the Socialist Party. François Hollande did not even stand again, unlike all his predecessors who tried to win a second term, so great was his unpopularity.

Emmanuel Macron has thus become the receptacle of all the defenders of liberalism of recent decades. His "En Marche" movement is a sort of "recycling" movement that will accelerate the decomposition of the Socialist Party and even the Republicans.

Is this the final crisis of the Socialist Party that emerged from the congress of Épinay in 1971?

The Socialist Party has entered a deep

crisis. The candidacy of Benoît Hamon, who defeated Manuel Valls and symbolized the refusal of the policies of the five years of the Hollande presidency, was marginalized, with 6.4 per cent of the votes. Part of the PS tried to undermine his campaign by choosing to support Macron. By choosing not to rely on the dynamics of the primary, but to preserve the balance within the PS, Benoît Hamon found himself subjected to the double competition on his left and his right of the candidatures of Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Macron. Now (but belatedly) he has left the PS, launching a new movement that seeks to be intermediate between En Marche and France Insoumise. This follows the departure of Valls from the PS: the crisis in the PS is deepening, without it being certain that in the short term a new social-democracy can emerge in a credible fashion.

Emmanuel Macron, a former Rothschild banker coming from the financial world, has been built up and supported by all the major media groups and by business leaders such as Laurence Parisot, former president of the MEDEF (employers' organization). Benefiting from powerful financial support and from political figures coming, in an unprecedented way, from all sides, he succeeded in forcing the social-liberal current of the Socialist Party to openly accept an ultra-liberal programme and to make the left/right divide in the party explode. By his trajectory (as a former minister of Hollande) and by the voters he attracts, he comes from the governmental left. But by the ideological coherence he develops - liberalism openly affirmed, alliance with François Bayrou, leader of the Modem (centre right), and sectors of the right, he breaks any kind of ties with the social movement; he has succeeded in drawing sectors of the left towards what constitutes a new right. The Macron phenomenon is the result of a degradation of the relationship of forces, which has crystallized evolutions that had been embryonic for several years (construction of liberal Europe, adaptation to the logic of the market, individualism, left-right alliance...).

He gave the illusion of representing a

break with the past (young, neither right-nor left, without a party), but he represents a continuity. He was part of the government of Hollande, he supported the labour law, enacted by the former PS government, which abolished many forms of legal protections in employer/employee relations and which provoked a long social confrontation. He even wants to reinforce it, with an offensive programmed at breaking down social rights by governing by ordinance (which makes it possible to eliminate almost any control by the Parliament). The calendar of counter-reforms has already been announced: in the autumn a new law to destroy the labour code and then in early 2018 a historic change in the pension system, moving to a "notional account", without excluding a further rise in the official age of retirement. Macron is a virulent advocate of free trade, such as the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between the European Union and Canada... He is a liberal, anti-social European and his friend Junker, President of the European Commission, has just reminded him that "the French spend too much". Macron is already planning budget cuts in public spending and will rely on the "balance sheet" of the former government to free himself from some of his promises, and once again accentuate austerity choices.

The challenge is therefore to oppose him right away, in the streets, by a united front of all those who proclaim that they want to resist him.

France Insoumise: a formidable campaign dynamic!

For the third time since the introduction of universal suffrage for the election of the President of France, the "left" was absent from the second round. But the dynamics of the campaign of Jean-Luc Mélenchon represent undoubtedly a major event for the reconstruction of a real left. He pulled off a major exploit, with nearly 20 per cent of the votes cast, representing just over 7 million votes.

By arriving fourth in the first round, he made a remarkable breakthrough. This success was rooted in the strength of the rejection of the politics of Hollande and Valls, in the social mobilizations, the labour law, the Nuit Debout movement, the ecological and democratic movements that have developed in recent years. The candidacy of Jean-Luc Mélenchon polarized the majority of left-wing voters (as witnessed by the parallel weakening of voting intentions for Benoît Hamon of the Socialist Party) and of many abstentionists. In particular, he achieved significant success in working-class neighbourhoods, among workers and youth.

For the first time, a left-wing candidate opposing the PS's governmental policy and its hegemony was seen as representing a credible prospect of gaining power and not as a means of pressure from the left on the PS. The campaign of Jean-Luc Mélenchon imposed him as the main candidate of the left against liberalism. This was possible through the programme, which, although not strictly anti-capitalist, is quite radical: refusal of austerity, democracy and a Sixth Republic, ecological transition, integral social security, equality of rights... A campaign resonating with the social struggles of recent years.

The major, decisive point after so many years of disappointment, after the mobilizations against the labour law, was first of all a snarling and definitive break with the Socialist Party, foreseeing that anything concerning the PS would be swept away in the very centralized confrontation that characterized this presidential election. This led to a political break with the Left Front, the alliance formed in 2009 between Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Left Party and the French Communist Party (PCF), and with the Communist Party's hesitations concerning the Socialist Party.

The choice that was made was to build a movement from below, outside of parties: France Insoumise, with a way of functioning that was horizontal and at the same time very vertical. The main decisions were in the hands of a small group around the candidate. But this was combined with the

undeniable "free" vitality at local level, in a massive way, and with the support (obtained by commitments on the internet) of nearly 500,000 people. The parties (or factions of parties) that committed to France Insoumise had a specific "political space" where they could put forward their proposals, without it being possible at this stage to draw a concrete balance sheet of that experience. But it is true that the promise to break with the "traditional parties" convinced many people to support the process. On these two questions of democratic functioning and the place of various currents of ideas, heirs to specific political histories, the debate will open in the aftermath of the legislative elections, when it is a question of perpetuating the movement. Then the thorny question of the relationship with social movements will also have to be discussed. We cannot say that FI is cut off from these movements, since the general programme and the material dealing with specific sectors are, in the end, often copied and pasted from what each of the social movements produced. But these movements are not taken into account as such and, to date, the mobilization of FI members remains purely electoral (there are few FI activists as such involved in supporting migrants, irrespective of questions of "line", "or in feminist mobilizations). Is it just because of the elections or is there a more lasting problem to be resolved?

Mélenchon also understood the highly productive use of new means of propaganda, with a real generational break among the organizers of his campaign. He was able to put forward and defend a radical, ecologist, Keynesian programme, democratic on the institutional level. The successful demonstration in Paris for a Sixth Republic showed that the dynamics of the campaign were in tune with the crisis of the political regime and its system of representativeness. Mélenchon has also particularly developed the theme of ecological transition, with the abandonment of nuclear and fossil energies, a strong axis in the development of arguments to build alternatives to this society.

There were points that led to disagreements and polemics on the left: on the Syrian question, on

geostrategic questions, and on the freedom of immigrants to settle here. The suppression of the singing of the Internationale, keeping only the Marseillaise at the end of meetings, and the abundant presence of red, white and blue flags at every initiative was questioned. Would this affirmed patriotism drive people from the working-class neighborhoods away? Some people went so far as to believe that this was a way of attracting the voters of the National Front...

In the end, Mélenchon was very well received in working-class neighbourhoods. Because there the links with the PS had been cut.

He sent signals that were perceived as deeply friendly, otherwise he would not have had 37 per cent of the Muslim vote. What we see as problematic "patriotic" or even imperial signs were not perceived as such. When he says to Le Pen "stop talking about religion" it is understood as "let us live in peace". This made possible an increased mobilization of the popular layers for Mélenchon and assured him pole position against Benoît Hamon. This was very marked in Marseilles, where Jean-Luc Mélenchon (with 24.82 per cent) came in ahead of the FN (23.66 per cent).

There were lively debates defending the idea of unity between Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Benoît Hamon before the first round. This rapprochement was initially associated with the hope of a single candidacy of the two candidates, sharing a left reformist optic and likely have a bigger impact. The many petitions in this sense expressed this hope in various forms. But the respective strategic projects of these two candidates, although close in many respects, were strictly contradictory with any renunciation of one of them in favour of the other. After the Socialist primaries, Hamon believed he could maintain at all costs the unity of a moribund PS. It made no sense for Jean-Luc Mélenchon to join with him. Reciprocally, joining France Insoumise meant for Hamon putting a cross on his strategy of the primary and the recomposition of the PS. Except that this strategy was condemned to finish in a dead-end, as shown by the current splintering of the PS, with Hamon leaving the party

and launching a new movement, while historic figures such as Martine Aubry and Anne Hidalgo (mayor of Paris) are launching another one. Not to mention all those who have joined Macron...

Jean-Luc Mélenchon attracted an electorate that was young (29 per cent among 18-24-year olds), unemployed (32 per cent), working in white-collar (24 per cent) and blue-collar (25 per cent) jobs. Although he marginally bit into the electorates of the FN (4 per cent) and the right (3 per cent), the main result of his campaign was to remobilize the left electorate, which had abstained in intermediate elections (regional, municipal).

Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the campaign of France Insoumise made it possible for debates to focus on subjects other than Islam and immigration and succeeded in reducing the influence of the FN in certain neighbourhoods. By demonizing Mélenchon in the last week before the first round, the media consciously helped the FN. Their cynical calculation was probably that this would facilitate the election of Macron in the second round...

The legislative elections confirm the essential lessons

France's majority electoral system, with two rounds, has a powerful multiplier effect. With 33 per cent of votes in the first round, Macron's party secured an absolute majority, but less solid than the polls had announced. Especially, the level of abstention was massive, breaking records by a long way. So much so that this majority actually represents a small minority of the population. It will be endowed with exorbitant powers, and brutal anti-popular offensives will succeed one another. It is impossible to say whether it will be successful or if the weakness of its roots will make things difficult for it. The old right is clearly weakened, and furthermore it is profoundly divided as to its attitude towards the new majority. And this is nothing compared to the PS, which has been steamrollered and is also still

divided between support to Macron, opposition and abstention. The general political crisis is thus largely confirmed. The FN has suffered a very serious setback compared to its presidential results. This is what usually happens to it, but this time it is much more marked. It is being confirmed that the internal damage will be serious and delicate to repair. Since the far right has suffered many setbacks in Europe recently, there may be a new phenomenon of serious difficulties.

The forces that supported Mélenchon were divided, a combined effect of the Communist Party over-estimating its own influence and a rather closed attitude on the part of FI. Moreover, abstention had particularly negative effects on FI, essentially rooted in the younger vote, the vote of workers and employees, of working-class neighbourhoods, which were precisely the most abstentionist strata. But the overall score remains high, more than 11 per cent for FI and 2.7 per cent for the PCF. As a percentage, that is 5 per cent less than the presidential election, but twice as much as the Left Front in 2012. The PCF emerges very much weakened politically, even though it managed to retain a parliamentary group. For the first time in its history, the radical left, with 17 elected representatives, will have a parliamentary group that should be a solid base to face up to the tough battles ahead.

Uncertainties, likely confrontations, potentialities

In the end, and for the moment, Macron seems to have pulled off a double operation. His own election, obviously. But also the serious weakening of the PS and now the possibility of fracturing the right. Many sectors of the PS and the right who have not yet joined him are willing to do so. With his hands apparently free to launch the liberal offensive dreamed of by the employers and the European Commission, which has been more or less contested and

slowed down up to now. But these political successes do not cancel out the image of a deeply fractured country that was revealed in the first round of the presidential election. And although the incontestable social fatigue after so many defeats can favour Macron's policy, it is just as much possible that, by means of such and such a measure, this or that event, the country finds the road to a confrontation that may turn out to be

brutal. This will take place under the threat of the far right, which is certainly affected by serious divisions, but which nevertheless obtained 34 per cent of the votes in the second round of the presidential election. Fortunately, an almost equivalent bloc appeared on the left, in the first round of the presidential election (with a very high level of electoral participation), which was lacking until then, and which will perhaps provide a

basis for these possible confrontations to have a favourable outcome. Provided that the promises contained in this left-wing vote can really be concretized in the existence of a force that is new, democratic and linked to the social movement in its diversity. For the moment, only a convention of France Insoumise is planned for the autumn. What is needed is a "constituent process". The debate is open and we must get involved in it.

An iron glove on a hand of clay

29 July 2017, by **Léon Crémieux**

The way seems open to restabilising the political edifice of bourgeois domination. And we are witnessing a real acceleration of the social attacks demanded by the employers' organisation, Medef, and some profound challenges to democratic rights. The Assembly is to vote rapidly on a law allowing the government to proceed through decrees (texts having legislative value promulgated directly by the government without parliamentary debate and decision) so as to speed up modifications of employment legislation from September. Meanwhile, a new security law will be voted on making the state of emergency permanent; with exorbitant powers for prefects and the Minister of the Interior, who will no longer need a judicial decision to begin investigation procedures and hearings or to ban demonstrations, place people under house arrest or imprison them.

Behind this façade, several phenomena should be taken into account.

First, the profound discredit of the political leadership, which has led to the dislocation of the Parti socialiste (PS) and the deep crisis of Les Républicains (LR), has not been erased by the election of Macron. This discredit has been concretely reflected by a very high level of abstention in the second round of the presidential

election and during the parliamentary elections. 12 million voters abstained in the 2nd round of the presidential election, with 4 million blank ballots, while there was a 51.29% abstention rate in the first round of the parliamentary elections, a level never before seen under the Fifth Republic, with a rate of 57.36% for the second round.

Thus, in the 1st round of the presidential election, the number of abstentions and blank ballots was 11.5 million, while Macron won 8.6 million votes or 18.19% of those registered, 1.6 million less than Hollande in 2012, nearly 3 million less than Sarkozy in 2007. The candidates of LREM (La République En Marche, the movement launched by Macron) and MODEM obtained 15.40% of the vote in the 1st round of the parliamentary elections.

The crisis of representation and of legitimacy of the political leadership is still present. The collapse of the PS and the crisis of the LR have made Macron's victory and that of LREM possible, but this should not hide the persistence of this reality.

The mode of scrutiny has accentuated two phenomena:

- First the growing lack of interest in the parliamentary elections where the absence of proportional representation and the two round uninominal ballot means that it isn't really possible to vote for the

candidates of one's choice;

- This type of ballot gives an unbelievable bonus to the party with a relative majority: with 13.44 % of the votes of those registered (28.21% of those who actually voted), LREM won 53.37% of the seats in the National Assembly. Faced with this, the Front National only took 1.3% of the seats in the Assembly, although Marine Le Pen reached the 2nd round of the Presidential election and had received 16.14% of the votes in the 1st round.

Thus, immediately after this electoral process, the institutional system allows an artificial and temporary resolution of the crisis of political domination, whereas in numerous other European countries a chaotic situation continues.

Despite a media campaign of a type rarely seen, which lauds the president and his majority, the facts are stubborn: there is no loyalty among youth and the popular classes to the new presidential coupling of Macron-Philippe.

This reality is in no way being ignored by the new president. On the contrary, lessons have been drawn from the previous presidency in which Hollande and Valls encountered a strong popular mobilisation, an unprecedented level of discredit and an inability to hold together a parliamentary majority on major projects.

Macron wants to implement rapidly a series of ultra-neoliberal reforms which obviously runs the risk of coming up against the same obstacles.

Certainly, he can rely on an apparently very strong stability in the national Assembly, with an absolute majority of 289 votes. The LREM parliamentary group has 314 deputies and its allies in François Bayrou's MODEM have 47. The crisis following these elections has also dislocated LR leading to a new group, known as "Les constructifs", bringing together the centrists of the UDI and some of the deputies elected under the LR label, or 35 deputies in all.

But the current picture could change in the coming months. Thus Macron will use the system of decrees which involves having a blank cheque from the Assembly to legislate on a new dismantling of the employment code.

Also, he wants to introduce institutional reforms which will deepen the presidential character of the regime. In this sense Macron has stressed a symbolism playing on the monarchical aspect of the presidency and his function as chief of staff: going down the Champs-Élysées in a command car the day after his election, receiving Putin at Versailles. Also, taking as model the US presidential system, he convened the members of the Assembly and Senate in Congress for a speech on general orientations of the "State of the Union" type.

Playing on these symbols is partly an attempt to restore a strong image of the President, an image which was heavily eroded under Hollande. But behind the image, there is a reality.

Emmanuel Macron wants to accelerate France's passage towards ordo-liberalism, a system allying a still deeper challenge to the redistributive functions of the state, an acceleration of the attacks against the whole system of social protection (health insurance, pensions, unemployment benefits) with a stronger executive power and further erosion of democratic rights. Meanwhile, his behaviour displays a class contempt which is even more patent than that of Nicolas Sarkozy.

The evidence is that the aggressive nature of his social policy of austerity and of challenging social rights will not generate any more popular support than was the case under Sarkozy or Hollande. Also, Macron's whole goal is to advance rapidly without fear of institutional blockage or too much pressure from social mobilisations.

So we should not underestimate the turning point that these orientations represent. LREM has not simply replaced the old traditional parties; the goal is also to change a number of rules in terms of institutional functioning. Macron was shaped by the institutions of the Fifth Republic and will accentuate the rules of the strong state.

At the international level, Macron will intensify the ongoing military interventions in Africa and the Middle East. Meanwhile, after the German general election in September, the French and German leaders can be expected to resume a joint offensive to accelerate a reorganisation of the European Union.

Faced with this remodelling, the two traditional parties are in deep crisis. The Parti Socialiste is clinically dead. LREM has taken a good half of its electorate and a similar proportion of the local notables who make up its base. The PS's parliamentary representation (now called Nouvelle Gauche) is reduced to 31 deputies, one tenth of what it had in the previous assembly. Nearly all the PS leadership have been eliminated. Two centrifugal trends are at work: one prefigured by Manuel Valls which seeks to integrate itself somehow or other with the presidential majority, without for the moment having any distinct political project. The other is led by Benoît Hamon who, by constituting a new "July 1st movement" seeks to reconstitute a "classic" social democratic party on an anti-neoliberal basis to recover the 25% of the socialist electorate who opted for La France Insoumise and Jean-Luc Mélenchon. This project is for now entirely virtual. The leadership apparatus of the PS is completely paralysed, Macron and LREM occupying the place previously occupied by the PS of Hollande/Valls.

That does not mean that the page of neoliberal social democracy has been turned in France. LREM is a very fragile political structure, even if its leader wants to project an image of hyper-solidity. It is not a party, it has no elected leadership body, the parliamentary group and the local spokesperson are a heterogeneous conglomerate. Several hypotheses can be advanced as to its future, but it is highly possible that some kind of social-liberal current will recompose if Macron encounters obstacles to his current dynamic.

Things are to some degree simpler with relation to LR. Highly shaken by the Fillon episode and the coming to power of a Juppé supporter as Prime Minister, we can say that the party apparatus is in flux. But it is henceforth divided between its "constructive" wing and its more reactionary sectors. Here again, Macron occupies the terrain of the neoliberal management of the affairs of the bourgeoisie and the leaders of LR have little political space for the moment.

Finally, the Front national (FN), despite its great success at the presidential election, has arrived at a crossroads. It has been unable to form a parliamentary group and is marginalised in terms of the parliamentary game. However, it can think that time is on its side and that the political crisis will be still greater after five years of Macron's austerity policies. The successful rooting of the FN among the reactionary electorate of the popular layers could also impel the party to seek to profit from the crisis of the traditional right. Marine Le Pen's project of changing the party's name and openness to a policy of alliances like that realised with Dupont-Aignan for the presidential election seeks to seduce the most right wing layers of LR. In all cases, the FN with its kernel of neo-fascist leaders is just as big a danger as ever for the workers' movement.

The whole question in the coming months for the radical left will lie in the capacity of reaction and mobilisation against Macron's projects. The points of support to launch this resistance are very broad in the social movement.

There is still a debate among the leadership of the trade union movement on the legitimacy of the president which makes it difficult to challenge these decisions. The false idea is advanced that it is necessary to await the concrete outcome of governmental decisions before opposing them and that the president and the government still enjoy broad support, even among the popular layers and youth. The leadership of Force ouvrière, at least, argue for this position and more generally the union leaderships have kept a low profile during and since the elections.

Despite this, numerous local demonstrations are already afoot. Combative trades unionists organising around the Front social thus mobilised immediately after the elections, with some CGT sections and the support of Solidaires. In numerous regions, genuine inter-union coordinations have been established. The CGT has called for a one day strike on September 12 against the decrees. Numerous protests have also taken place against the attacks on democratic rights and the attempt to render the provisions of the state of emergency permanent.

But everyone knows that the challenge is on another scale and that what is needed is a mobilisation still more powerful than that of the movement against the El Khomri law in spring 2016 to block Macron's attacks and destabilise his government.

The forces to do this exist and the exasperation among the youth and popular layers is not extinguished by the media campaign portraying the country as pacified by the new president. But what is needed is the capacity to rally them in the context of unitary mobilisations on all the questions posed.

At the political level, La France Insoumise (FI) occupies the space of parliamentary opposition with the Communist Party (PCF) deputies (the collapse of the PS allowed the PCF to elect 11 deputies and to form a parliamentary group with the support of deputies from France's overseas territories).

But several questions remain unsettled. La France Insoumise based its success on the collapse of the PS and its future remains uncertain. Jean-Luc Mélenchon scuttled the Front de

Gauche and also any electoral alliance with the PCF. He nonetheless attracted at least 25% of PS voters. Also, the FI attracted a great number of activists in the social movements during the presidential and parliamentary electoral campaigns. It is nonetheless not a new party, nor even a place of democratic debate between the diverse components which make it up, without mentioning Mélenchon's numerous chauvinist orientations in a series of areas.

The question of organising the anti-capitalists present in the revolutionary organisations and the social movements to constitute a political force which can meet the current challenge remains posed. The coming months will necessitate the construction of frameworks for unitary mobilisations on the social questions and in defence of civil liberties, against police violence and French and EU policies in relation to migrants. These represent important tasks for revolutionaries and in the first place for the Nouveau parti anticapitaliste (NPA).

Macron's France will undoubtedly not be pacified for very long.

On the nature of the Brazilian crisis and the issues, from the point of view of socialists

28 July 2017, by **Ana C. Carvalhaes, José Correa Leite**

The purpose of this text is not to go into detail on the dumbfounding national situation. It will not develop the consequences of the non-quashing of the Dilma-Temer ticket [1] by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TES) - there was today a demonstration with a funeral wreath not far from the headquarters of this institution in Brasilia -, nor the consequences of the "hold me back or I'll leave" of the PSB [2], nor the prospects of enlargement of the Diretas Já campaign [3], nor the organization of the second general strike [4] in two months, against the ultraliberal

counter-reforms of capital for Brazil [5], which succeed one another in a National Congress that is increasingly discredited.

What we want to do is to attempt an approach to what the current Brazilian crisis means in a broader, more diverse sense (in its economic, social and political dimensions) and also with a longer view in terms of its duration - the crisis we have been experiencing from the beginning of the campaign through which the bourgeoisie united to overthrow Dilma Rousseff through impeachment [6] up until the present.

It is therefore an attempt to analyze the period.

A historic crisis

Our hypothesis is that, since the beginning of 2015, we have been experiencing a political crisis of such depth that, in addition to the serious economic and social crises, it is comparable to the crises of 1929-1930 and 1984.

In the case of 1929-1930, the crisis led to a change in the hegemonic power

bloc in the country, that is, to the replacement of the oligarchic sector which had previously dominated by another sector, a nascent bourgeoisie. Then, with the movement of 1930, a lasting vacuum of hegemony appeared; Get lio Vargas [7] consolidated his position from the Paulist revolt [8] of 1932 onwards and he formulated another project for Brazil, basing himself on "tenentism" [9]. This was a national development project based on industry, on the creation of an urban wage-earning working class with a certain type of rights, on a Bonapartist regime until 1937 and leaning towards fascism from then on, despite the maintenance of scraps of concessions to the dispossessed.

In the second case, in 1984, after three years of a profound recession, the end of the "Brazilian miracle," with a third of the people in the streets during the Diretas J  campaign [10], the military regime was replaced, in a process of an indirect election in the Electoral College, by Tancredo Neves [11] and, following the latter's death, by Sarney [12], both closely linked to the military, but nevertheless civilians. All this without actually destroying the repressive apparatus of the military regime.

It does not seem to us that today there is a change of the power bloc on the horizon; but let us remember, neither was there just before 1929-1930.

Some economists argue, perhaps to justify the need for the reforms they defend, that the present crisis is more serious than the previous ones - which seems to us to be excessive, at least in comparison with the crisis of 1930, the result of the stock market crash in New York and the global recession that began that year.

We are in the third year of recession and there is a complete paralysis of the political system - which clearly shows to bourgeois sectors that the regime (a term used here as a synonym for the political system, that is, a given combination of institutions used for class rule) has become dysfunctional for them. A bourgeoisie with global dimensions and interests (by which we mean business) cannot

coexist with so much instability and uncertainty about the future for such a long time that the political crisis deepens the economic crisis and is detrimental to both the direct extraction of surplus value and the profits of rentiers within the financial system.

What Operation Lava Jato is and the role that it plays

Operation Lava Jato [13] started from an investigation into money laundering by petrol stations around Curitiba. It could have been in Manaus, Porto Alegre, S o Paulo or Recife. The fuel distribution sector in our country is richly provided with mafias. It was through this investigation that the specialist unit of the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office in Curitiba got to the currency trader Alberto Youssef and from him to the director of Petrobras [14] Paulo Roberto Costa - who was going to provide the starting point for the series of denunciations of the Petrobras and Workers' Party (PT) scandal.

Thus, in the context of 12 to 13 years of governments of class collaboration with the PT at their head, with the damage they caused, especially among sectors of the middle class, but more fundamentally with the signs that appeared at the beginning of 2015, that Dilma Rousseff would no longer be able to fulfil her role of containing social movements nor of implementing the neo-liberal agenda, roles she had fulfilled until then, Operation Lava Jato became a key element of the great script written by the elites to force Rousseff and the PT out of government.

Using the clear evidence of corruption in the PT - and in the PP [15] and the PMDB [16] and others - in the Petrobras affair, fundamental sectors of capital took advantage of Lava Jato to unleash a movement in the streets and in the institutions that hatched and executed the institutional coup d' tat of April 2016. It was not only

the prosecutors and the judge of Curitiba, nor only the deputies of Congress in the pay of the corrupters, nor only Temer, nor just the media, nor even the magistrates of the Supreme Courts. All these agents had a fundamental role in the plot, but without Lava Jato the coup would not have happened.

The 2016 coup d' tat was not a fascist coup, with the physical destruction of the militant vanguard and the complete destruction of representative bourgeois-democratic institutions (although in Brazil these institutions are anti-democratic, because they are oligarchic and segregationist). The coup was not Bonapartist; in other words, it did not suspend the existing institutional order or attempt to destroy directly and immediately at the political level the class opposition (although it is now attempting to do so with political reforms). But that does not mean that there was no coup d' tat or that it is not fundamental.

What is at stake in the conflict among "those above"

Each phase of contraction of the economic cycle is for capital a phase of fierce conflict for markets and capital. With neo-liberal globalization, the conflict involves mainly transnational companies, and of course also the Brazilian multinationals, the "green and yellow" [17]. But the novelty, the key element of the present framework, which aggravates the crisis and the divisions within the bourgeoisie itself, is the political crisis that is raging.

The diagnosis that the petistas [18] make of the current situation is that there is a conflict between the "national bourgeoisie" and "big globalized financial capital". This may sound like the truth but it is not, because the Brazilian bourgeoisie is fairly globalized, as the shareholders of Petrobras, Vale [19], the giants of the construction industry, JBS [20] and the banks prove; there is only one major foreign bank in the Brazilian deposit bank market: Santander [21]. There are sectors of financial capital

that depend much more directly on state action, of course, but it is very likely that what is at stake is the form in which the state deals with "economic affairs".

We are making the assumption that a sector of the state apparatus that has become autonomous, represented by a fraction of the Federal Police, the Public Prosecutor of the State of Paraná and Judge Moro, is trying at present to "clean up" the political personnel trained in the old patrimonial school - to employ the language and analysis that the employers use. This sector wants to "moralize the business environment" in Brazil. And it is doing so by striking other sectors of the business world - all largely beneficiaries of the years of Lulopetism [22]. It is willing to chop off the heads of its class brothers. In this sense, what we are seeing is a conflict for the "modernization" of the state.

It should be remembered that one of the great interpretations of the formation of the nation, the one that is most taught by the judiciary in the training of its cadres, is none other than *Os donos do poder*, the work by Raymundo Faoro - a lawyer, which is no accident. This is a classical liberal vision and in this sense it is not a matter of democratizing government but of putting in place stricter and more "republican" (anti-oligarchic) rules for the way the government handles its relationship with capital.

The sorcerer's apprentice

The batteries of the Federal Police, the Public Prosecutor's office of Paraná and Judge Moro directed their fire, with the support of a large majority of the bourgeoisie and broad popular sectors (Greens and Yellows) [23] mobilized by the mass media, mainly against Dilma, the PT and Lula, in order to consecrate the coup d'état. But, contradictorily - because nature, society and philosophy are contradictory - from the moment that these batteries were put into action, with the legal mechanism, hitherto unknown in our country, of *delações premiadas* [24],

the Lava Jato operation escaped the control of the leaderships of the political representatives of the bourgeoisie and even the orientation of the judicial authorities.

The operation, which served the coup d'état so well, went beyond the limits of the existing system, making it impossible for former leading figures of the regime (president, parliamentary group leaders, supreme courts) to retain absolute control over the targets and extension of the process. It is this reactionary origin and this contradictory evolution that many comrades of the socialist left find it difficult to understand in Marxist terms. Ultimately there is a strong temptation to understand the facts in a linear fashion. There is strong pressure to analyse starting from completely anti-Marxist concepts like that of "political caste", taken from the heterodox majority leadership of Podemos, a concept that means nothing from the point of view of the objective relations between really existing social classes.

We affirm that Operation Lava Jato, under the Temer government, is taking a turn that is decisive for the crisis of those above and that it opens up breaches so that those below will gain time to reconstitute their forces in the struggle against the agenda of capital. And yes, it is a positive thing that this process exposes, with numerous sordid details, the intricacies of the political system of private financing of campaigns, the promiscuous relations between the big companies, the parties, the political representatives and members of the police and the judiciary. But none of this, in our eyes, means that on the programmatic level the PSOL, and even less revolutionary socialists, should play this game and start applauding the operation and its investigations - for a lot of reasons.

From the end of 2014 to the end of 2016, Lava Jato was fundamentally an operation directed against the PT. There was material, denunciations and evidence to justify investigating the PSDB [25], the DEM [26] and especially the party that is the symbol of the political system of the New Republic: Temer's PMDB. If this was not done, it was because a decision

was made not to do it. Inspired by Operation Clean Hands in Italy [27], the young prosecutors of Curitiba made the conscious decision to look in the direction of the PT and also, to balance things a little, of the PP. During this period, singing the praises of the trial as a policy meant getting dangerously close to the anti-corruption and anti-class right. This is what the comrades of the MES and comrade Luciana Genro [28] did, during their campaign for the municipal elections in Porto Alegre in 2016, by deciding to cut back on the programme of the party, and their own programme, in order to try and win "Green and Yellow" sectors.

It was a mistake to support Lava Jato, not only because the operation was selective - and on the legal field selectivity already means a lot. But also because, as far as revolutionary politics are concerned, it encourages those who listen to this discourse to develop illusions about bourgeois judicial power, which will supposedly resolve questions which only the independent mobilization of the exploited and the oppressed is capable of resolving. And even more so, because in a polarized country, with a fascist-punitive right in particular, it was and remains necessary to challenge the idea that punishment at any cost can be the solution. It is not that the corrupt do not deserve punishment and imprisonment. The problem is that the easy solution of prison for the corrupt forgot, and continues to forget, the debate, which should not be postponed, on the 622,000 Brazilians who are imprisoned, all of them poor, almost all "black because of being poor" [29]. In our view, it would have been correct to denounce the coup d'état, to demonstrate the selective and pro-coup character of Lava Jato, to denounce the corruption of the PT as a consequence of the political and social project of this party. It would have been correct to steer well clear of the easy punitive solution.

Why Joesley Batista/JBS

informed on Temer and aggravated the political crisis

After having caused historic damage to the no less historic business and profits that giant multinational construction enterprises have realized with the Brazilian state, Lava Jato began a few months ago to look into the affairs of the Lula-Dilma era between the BNDES [30] and the so-called "national champions" - an expression by which Keynesian economists designate the companies which, in their opinion, they should choose to help by giving them broad access to credit, to contribute to "national development".

Luciano Coutinho, who was president of BNDES for nine years under the Lula and Dilma governments, applied this policy in muscular fashion. Large construction companies, all involved in Lava Jato, received 40 billion reais [31] from the BNDES between 2006 and 2013 to trans-nationalize themselves (they operate throughout Latin America and in some countries in Africa); JBS, Marfrig [32], Bertin [33] and BRF [34] in the meat sector, received 14 billion reais; Fibria [35], Oi [36], LBR [37], in the dairy products sector, and EBX [38], owned by Eike Batista [39] also received substantial loans and capital inflows. It would be a mistake to think that only Lulopetism has acted in this way. The financial sector had already been cleaned up and capitalized under the FHC government [40], between 1995 and 2001, through the Proer programme [41]; and the Brazilian financial sector is almost entirely national (private and state sectors, concentrated in Bradesco, ItaÃº, BB and Caixa).

The time had come for Lava Jato to spoil the party of the globalized "super champion", the meat industry. Lava Jato was already manoeuvring towards the encirclement of JBS and its sources of funding, while at the same time promising, and keeping its promise, to tighten the vice around Lula. The Batista brothers - 90 per cent of whose companies were already installed outside Brazil - in agreement

with the leading circles of the PT, decided to take revenge on the new government and help bring down Temer (while at the same time making some money on the foreign exchange market).

The consequences of the ongoing trial

The established political personnel of the present parties (which is different from the bourgeoisie: they are its constituted political representation, with a certain autonomy in relation to it, like the personnel of the judiciary) will do everything possible to ensure that this crisis ends up with the cake being shared. In other words, that it concludes by preserving the current rules of the game, or with even more undemocratic rules of the game.

But at least part of the judiciary will not go back on the "great anti-patrimonial clean-out" and the conflict can continue. It will certainly come before the TFS [42] (Carmen Lucia has already defended the project of a plebiscite or a referendum for political reform). That does not resolve the economic crisis, but it can bring down the New Republic [43] as a regime, around which converged the PSDB as well as the PT, in addition to all the "physiological" parties [44].

This conflict has already resulted in a conclusion that is important for the popular camp, by banning corporate donations to election campaigns, an important democratic demand. In the United States, the Supreme Court has legalized the removal of the ceiling on corporate donations to election campaigns, reinforcing their character as a media show of bourgeois gangs. We can also content ourselves with noting that the bourgeoisie no longer manages to govern as it did before the crisis, on the one hand, and on the other that it has no clear project, apart from increasing exploitation. And finally, that the struggle is still open for sharing out the cake.

What is the nature of this crisis and what kind of outcome should be proposed?

The two questions are related, because from the analysis and the more or less profound understanding of what we are experiencing flows the answer to the second question.

The Brazilian crisis of this period has all the characteristics of a "national crisis" in the sense that Lenin gave to this term. We insist: we are talking about the crisis that began when the majority of capital decided to exchange the Lulopetist project through impeachment; it then supported the masses in the street in favour of the coup d'état, implemented this coup and catapulted Temer to power. It has given a boost to the ultraliberal agenda and has not only come up against unpopularity and popular resistance to this agenda; it has also begun to have a taste of its own poison through Lava Jato.

A national crisis is a political crisis of domination, a crisis of the whole of social relations. It is no coincidence that, in parallel with the crisis in the Union's budget, states going bankrupt, barbaric revolts in places of detention [45] and the no less barbaric repression of the rebels by the punitive state - bringing to light the brutal way in which a "hidden" part of the segregated society is treated. Nor is it a coincidence that we are seeing the strengthening of militias, of organized criminal groups, of territories that are "free" for trafficking.

It is no coincidence that, with 14 million unemployed, social benefits cut through fiscal adjustment and bankrupt states, the statistics of urban violence are exploding and along with that increasing cases of massacres of black youth and the popularity of fascist solutions. It is not by chance that the denunciations of violence against women are increasing. In a national crisis like the one we are experiencing, the way in which classes

relate to each other must be redefined, in depth and not superficially. This is the meaning of the fact that the Brazilian bourgeoisie has finished with Lulaism and has come to support an ultra-liberalism, aligning itself with what is taking place on the international scene.

"Dysfunction" of the political system

Since it is part of this general framework of national crisis, the crisis of the political system of the New Republic is quite deep. This system no longer functions as it did before, it stutters and staggers; and this historically determined combination of oligarchic-republican institutions that has given substance to the domination of the bourgeoisie in Brazil since 1985, and more formally since the 1988 Constitution, creates problems for those who sponsored it. This system or regime was based on a coalition-based presidentialism (where a party can never govern alone), supported by a Congress that is always very diverse (33 parties, the biggest number in the Western world!), where there reigned, as old Plinio [46] put it, the law of "take here, give there"(parliamentary amendments, vote-buying, trading votes against posts, etc.); or according to the words of a baron of the lower clergy [47], "it is give-and-take", all the members of parliament having been elected in campaigns copiously financed by private capital. In this system a "party" that has never been a party but rather a meeting-place of bosses of regional organizations, called the PMDB, has always played a central role. This led the political analyst Marcos Nobre to speak of a "pemedebist" regime.

The end of private financing of campaigns is a serious problem for the rules of the game of the old New Republic. The growing popular rejection of politicians, traditional parties and institutional politics is a symptom of crisis. It is a capital problem that its entrails of crapulous combinations and illicit enrichments have been exposed to the public for

two years and that a very high percentage of elected representatives are accused or cited in the denunciations of Lava Jato. The increasingly autonomous role, sometimes that of a protagonist, that is being played by the judiciary in the face of the loss of prestige and the inaction of the executive and Congress, also represents a serious problem for its functioning. It is an almost lethal element for the regime that, while its institutions are desperately seeking to find formalist solutions for the succession to Temer, and while he is stubbornly trying to cling to power, 95 per cent of the population wants direct elections.

National crisis versus revolutionary crisis

A national crisis, let us recall, is not a "revolutionary crisis". The most well-known concept of the latter, developed by Lenin in *The Collapse of the Second International*, is as follows:

"(1) Impossibility for the ruling classes to maintain their rule in an unchanged form ... (2) Aggravation, more than is usual, of the misery and distress of the oppressed classes. 3) Marked accentuation, for the reasons given above, of the activity of the masses (...), towards independent historical action."

It is obvious that the third element does not exist in Brazil, at least up to now.

Let us remember a few examples more or less close to a revolutionary crisis: during the Venezuelan Caracazo (1989) a revolutionary crisis occurred, which opened a revolutionary situation, because the insurrection of the poor districts of the cities of Venezuela over a few days was sudden and spontaneous. Under the government of Siles Suazo, Bolivia (in 1982-1985) experienced several consecutive revolutionary crises. The relationship of forces was generally very favourable to the exploited and the oppressed, and in general (this

was not the case with the spontaneous Caracazo), they were organized in their own independent institutions. Generally, almost always, a vacuum of power was created for a few days.

For Marxism, no pre-revolutionary or revolutionary situation or revolutionary crisis can open up under the action and the will of social sectors other than the working classes and their dispossessed allies, going on the offensive and organized independently. There is no evidence to support the thesis of a pre-revolutionary situation opened up by Lava

Jato [<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/12215>] `class="snp_out" rel="external">obscene press materials`, "but all the same, we have to agree that in some things those regimes have sometimes done good... One day Hitler and Mussolini woke up and said, 'Honestly, the scandal has gone on long enough' ... And ... the invert [70]... were chased out of Germany and Italy the very next day."

The ascent of Fascism

It's this willingness to make a blood sacrifice of minorities in exchange for "normalcy" or prosperity that has observers drawing uncomfortable comparisons between then and now.

In the 1930s, the Depression spread economic anxiety, while political fights in European parliaments tended to spill outside into actual [street fights](#) between Left and Right. Fascist parties offered Europeans a choice of stability at the price of democracy. Tolerance of minorities was destabilizing, they said. Expanding liberties gave "undesirable" people the liberty to undermine security and [threaten traditional](#) "moral" culture. Gay and trans people were an obvious target. [71]

What happened next shows the whiplash speed with which the progress of a generation can be thrown into reverse.

The nightmare

One day in May 1933, pristine white-shirted students marched in front of Berlin's Institute for Sexual Research – that safe haven for LGBTQ people – calling it “Un-German.” Later, a mob hauled out its library to be burned. Later still, its acting head [was arrested](#).

When Nazi leader Adolph Hitler needed to [justify](#) arresting and murdering former political allies in 1934, he said they were gay. This [fanned](#) anti-gay zealotry by the Gestapo, which opened a special anti-gay branch. During the following year alone, the Gestapo arrested more than [8,500](#) gay men, quite possibly using a list of names and addresses seized at the Institute for Sexual Research. Not only was Paragraph 175 not erased, as a parliamentary committee had recommended just a few years before, it was amended to be more expansive and punitive.

As the Gestapo spread throughout Europe, it expanded the hunt. In Vienna, it [hauled in](#) every gay man on police lists and questioned them, trying to get them to name others. The fortunate ones went to jail. The less fortunate went to [Buchenwald and Dachau](#). In conquered France, Alsace police [worked with](#) the Gestapo to

arrest at least 200 men and send them to concentration camps. Italy, with a fascist regime obsessed with virility, sent at least 300 gay men to brutal camps during the war period, declaring them “[dangerous](#) for the integrity of the race.”

The total number of Europeans arrested for being LGBTQ under fascism is impossible to know because of the lack of reliable records. But a conservative estimate is that there were many [tens of thousands to one hundred thousand](#) arrests during the war period alone.

Under these nightmare conditions, far more LGBTQ people in Europe painstakingly hid their genuine sexuality to avoid suspicion, [marrying](#) members of the opposite sex, for example. Still, if they had been prominent members of the gay and trans community before the fascists came to power, as Berlin lesbian club owner Lotte Hahm was, it was too late to hide. She was [sent](#) to a concentration camp.

In those camps, gay men were marked with a pink triangle. In these places of horror, men with pink triangles were [singled out](#) for particular abuse. They were mechanically [raped, castrated, favored](#) for medical [experiments](#) and [murdered](#) for guards' sadistic [pleasure](#)

even when they were not sentenced for “liquidation.” One gay man attributed his survival to [swapping](#) his pink triangle for a red one – indicating he was merely a Communist. They were [ostracized](#) and tormented by their fellow inmates, too.

The looming danger of a backslide

This isn't 1930s Europe. And making superficial comparisons between then and now can only yield superficial conclusions.

But with new forms of authoritarianism entrenched and seeking to expand in Europe and beyond, it's worth thinking about the fate of Europe's LGBTQ community in the 1930s and ~40s – a timely note from history as Germany [approves](#) same-sex marriage and on this first anniversary of [Obergefell v. Hodges](#).

In 1929, Germany came close to erasing its anti-gay law, only to see it strengthened soon thereafter. Only now, after a gap of 88 years, are convictions under that law being annulled.

[The Conversation](#)

Labor's Legitimacy Crisis Under Trump

22 July 2017, by **Barry Eidlin**

The early months of the Trump administration have been chaotic, but one thing remains clear: despite Trump's rhetorical appeals to the working class, actual workers and unions have reason to be worried. His public pronouncements about bringing back coal and manufacturing jobs are based on pure sophistry, while his less public moves to gut labor regulations and workers' rights will hurt workers. Labor's dire situation predates Trump by decades, but it is likely that his accession to the Oval Office will

further embolden labor's foes, much as Ronald Reagan's election did in the 1980s.

An Anti-Worker Cabinet

Early indications have confirmed these suspicions, as the candidate who portrayed himself during the campaign as a tribune of the working class has packed his cabinet with

billionaires and business leaders.

Of particular concern for workers are his picks to head the Departments of Labor and Education. While personal controversies and popular mobilization derailed Trump's first choice for Secretary of Labor, CKE Restaurants CEO Andy Puzder, his replacement, R. Alexander Acosta, presents more conventional but still troubling challenges for labor. His record while serving on the National Labor Relations Board in the early

2000s suggests an employer-friendly attitude towards labor policy common among mainstream Republicans. Meanwhile his Secretary of Education, Amway billionaire Betsy DeVos, has made her name promoting school privatization and attacks on teachers' unions in her home state of Michigan and elsewhere.

Policy-wise, Trump has run into trouble implementing much of his agenda, most notably with his failure thus far to repeal Obamacare and courts blocking his Muslim travel ban. However, he and his Republican counterparts in Congress have had much less difficulty rolling back a slew of worker protections proposed or enacted under the Obama administration. These include an effort to raise the threshold above which salaried workers cannot receive overtime pay, regulations requiring federal contractors to disclose pay equity and workplace safety violations, rules on mine safety and exposure to beryllium, and mandates for private sector employers to collect and keep accurate data on workplace injuries and illnesses.

On the judicial front, Trump has nominated two reliably anti-union attorneys, William Emanuel and Marvin Kaplan, to fill vacancies on the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). They are likely to reverse recent pro-labor rulings holding parent companies liable for the labor practices of their franchisees and allowing student workers at private universities to organize.

More significantly, after Justice Antonin Scalia's death last year prevented the Supreme Court from overturning decades of legal precedent and allowing right to work laws throughout the public sector via the Friedrichs case, a new case called *Janus v. AFSCME* has been filed in Illinois which will allow a Supreme Court now supplemented by the conservative Neil Gorsuch to revisit the issue.

At the state level, labor's situation continues to worsen. On top of recent labor setbacks in Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin, the first months of 2017 saw Kentucky and Missouri become the twenty-sixth and twenty-

seventh right-to-work states. In Iowa, lawmakers passed House File 291, which, like Wisconsin's Act 10, restricts public sector unions' ability to bargain over anything but wages, eliminates workers' ability to have their union dues deducted automatically from their paychecks, and requires regular union recertification votes.

For its part, labor remains stuck in an organizational and political rut. Total union density currently stands at 10.7 percent, and 6.4 percent in the private sector. This is a level not seen since the Great Depression, and well below levels reached in the mid-twentieth century, when one third of US workers were union members.

Economically, union decline is a key reason that inequality has risen to levels also not seen since the Great Depression. Politically, it has undercut labor's organizational clout. Not only are there fewer union voters, but unions are less able to educate and mobilize their existing members.

In the 2016 election, despite unions spending millions of dollars and deploying major voter mobilization programs to support Democrats, Trump won 43 percent of union households, and 37 percent of union members. In some of the decisive Rust Belt states, Trump won outright majorities of union households.

All told, it's a grim picture. Some of the details may be new, but they are part of a decades-long pattern of union decline that is quite familiar at this point. As we enter the Trump era, we are not entering uncharted territory. We've been here before.

Dead Ends

The question is how to respond. For at least the next few years, two of labor's well-worn tactics are off the table.

First, labor law reform is not happening, and anti-labor measures like a national right-to-work law are almost certain. Second, with Democrats now shut out at the federal level, and Republicans in control of either the governor's house or state legislature in forty-four states, with full control in twenty-five, labor cannot rely on favors from

sympathetic Democratic Party politicians.

Leaving aside the deep crises the Democratic Party currently faces, or the extent to which such a reliance has ever been a good idea, this "inside strategy" is simply not available now. Even less viable is a strategy of "cautious engagement" with Republicans, which is what AFL-CIO head Richard Trumka and American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten seem to be promoting.

At the same time, as frightening as the situation seems, now is not the time for labor to retreat. Unfortunately, that is precisely the approach that some unions seem to be taking.

Most notably, SEIU's response to Trump's election was to plan for a 30 percent budget cut. Instead, labor should follow the advice that SEIU President Mary Kay Henry gave in 2015, when unions were anticipating an adverse decision in the Friedrichs case: "You can't go smaller in this moment. You have to go bigger."

Understanding and addressing the threats that the Trump administration poses to workers is a challenge. First, it requires analyzing the particularities of labor's current challenges in the United States within the broader context of what has happened to labor movements and politics in the Global North in recent decades. Second, it requires addressing a problem that goes deeper than unions' declining numbers and bargaining power: their eroding ability to shape and mobilize workers' political identities.

The Broader Context

Much about Trump and his administration is unique, some say unprecedented. His pre-dawn tweets, his disregard for notions of truth and evidence with which he does not agree, his lack of concern with handling much of the basic day-to-day mechanics of governing, and much more, has dumbfounded his critics on the left and right alike.

At the same time, much of his policy agenda and his method of governing has a long lineage. His budget proposal reprises the combination of tax cuts for the wealthy, combined with massive increases in defense spending and massive cuts to social welfare programs, scientific research, and funding for the arts and humanities that President Reagan and subsequent Republican presidents have long championed.

Equally Reaganesque is his penchant for appointing cabinet members whose primary qualification involves attacking the mission of the agency they are tasked with leading. Meanwhile, his "America First" economic nationalism goes back further, echoing a perspective prevalent in the pre-World War II era, and which lives on today in various "Buy American" campaigns.

Likewise, many of the factors underlying Trump's victory are particular to the US context. Leaving aside the contingencies surrounding the election itself, these include institutional factors like the entrenched two-party system and the disproportionality of the Electoral College.

The first ensured that Trump's populist mobilization was expressed within the confines of the Republican Party, as opposed to a separate far-right party as is common in Europe, while the second allowed him to win the presidency while losing the popular vote. Also particular is Trump's electoral alliance with evangelical Christians, as compared to either the resolute secularism or revanchist Catholicism of the European far right.

At the same time, Trump's success is part of a broader right-populist trend that extends far beyond the United States. Globally, these movements share several common traits, including charismatic leaders; a focus on mobilizing around racial and ethno-religious divisions, particularly Islam; and a deep skepticism of experts and elites. Looking beyond the present moment, historical research suggests that such movements tend to grow in the aftermath of major economic crises such as that in 2008.

Importantly for labor, right populism has emerged in response to a political vacuum on the Left.

Part of this has been the result of a crisis of "third way" social democracy, whereby the traditional parties of the Left adopted the policies of financial deregulation and fiscal austerity that led to economic crisis, abandoning, attacking, and alienating their traditional working-class base in the process. Equally important has been a global decline in labor union power, which has both given employers the upper hand while leaving more workers without any form of collective organization.

The resulting disorientation of the Left has created fertile ground for the upsurge of the populist Right. Beyond simply opposing labor and the Left, it seeks to replace them as the "natural" political home for a (white, native-born) segment of the working class.

These twin crises of working class representation have hit particularly hard in the United States. Politically, social democracy was never as established as in Europe, and while the Democratic Party was unable to serve as a functional equivalent to the social democratic parties of Europe, its Clintonite turn in the 1990s did provide a blueprint for the rest of the Third Way.

Socially and economically, unions are especially weak in the United States, with union density among the lowest in the Global North. And while European unions have generally taken a strong stance against the far right, US unions have been far more fragmented in their response to Trump, as evidenced by Trumka's abovementioned policy of "cautious engagement" and the building trades unions' outright endorsement of Trump.

The "Special Interest" Trap

Taken as a whole, today US labor faces today a crisis of legitimacy.

For all the problems that US unions had in their post-World War II heyday, they were a force to be reckoned with. They negotiated master contracts in auto, steel, mining, and trucking that set wage and working condition

patterns for entire industries. Labor leaders like Walter Reuther, John L. Lewis, and Sidney Hillman were household names whose opinions were worthy of regular news coverage.

That is no longer the case. Today, few labor leaders get attention outside a small circle of labor scholars and activists, and far from setting industry wages and working conditions, they are more likely to cite non-union competition as a rationale for getting their members to accept concessions. Meanwhile, labor's concerns are portrayed as those of a narrow, parasitic "special interest."

Partially this is the result of decades of sustained anti-union attacks, which have now penetrated traditional labor strongholds like Michigan, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. But that is not the whole story. After all, labor has withstood far more vicious attacks in the past, including facing down state, federal, and mercenary armies. A key part of the problem is that the "special interest" label tends to stick. Even within progressive circles, unions are pegged as one among many "special interest groups," albeit one with deep pockets and a knack for getting Democratic voters to the polls.

Perhaps most indicative of this problem is the care with which unions like SEIU and UFCW have sought to downplay their involvement in recent campaigns like the Fight for \$15, the fast food strikes, and Walmart organizing, even as these campaigns have won remarkable victories. Presumably the unions fear that these broad-based campaigns might be tainted if they are too closely linked to labor.

The result, as Jake Rosenfeld notes, is that even as labor scores big wins for large swaths of the working class, few are aware of labor's role. Meanwhile, unions are mainly thrust into the spotlight over political attacks like right-to-work laws that boil down to arguing over technical language about union membership requirements, or contract disputes that are vitally important for the members involved, but can seem distant from the general welfare.

Identity and Organization

Fundamentally, labor today lacks its own core identity.

To be sure, any competent labor leader or organizer can rattle off a list of labor's accomplishments, as well as the tangible benefits that come with the "union advantage." More sophisticated labor leaders and organizers can discuss and implement smart organizing tactics and strategic campaigns.

But as any seasoned organizer knows, movements aren't built on cost-benefit balance sheets and clever tactics. They are built on vision and relationships. Together, these create powerful collective identities, a sense of being on the same side, of sharing a common fate.

Collective identities are crucial because they bring groups of relatively powerless individuals together and change their assessment of where they stand, what is possible, and what they are capable of. Without that reassessment process, workers will quite rationally conclude that organizing is too risky and too likely to end in defeat, and not get involved.

At the same time, the lack of a powerful self-defined collective identity gives movement opponents space to define the movement. In the case of the US labor movement, that's what has allowed the "special interest" identity to stick.

It hasn't always been this way. US labor has a long and storied track record of forging powerful collective identities. Going back to the nineteenth century, early unions like the Knights of Labor organized around powerful ideas of "labor republicanism" and the "cooperative commonwealth" to articulate a broad vision of industrial democracy. In doing so, they highlighted the contradiction between their status as formally free citizens in the political realm, and their status as wage slaves at work.

In the early twentieth century, it was the Industrial Workers of the World's vision of "One Big Union" that mobilized hundreds of thousands of workers. In the 1930s and '40s, the CIO's vision of industrial unionism and

the spectacle of the sit-down strikes galvanized millions. As an example of how contagious this CIO vision was, soon after its founding in 1935, tens of thousands of workers north of the border in Canada flocked to the CIO banner, even though nobody in the CIO leadership was aware of what was going on, let alone lending any kind of material support.

In the 1960s, as an explosion of public sector organizing accompanied the growing civil rights movement, striking sanitation workers in Memphis captured the confluence of both movements with their slogan "I Am A Man." More recently, we can think of the slogan "Part-Time America Won't Work," which united part-time and full-time Teamsters at UPS in their victorious 1997 strike against the shipping giant, or the Chicago Teachers Union's framing of their successful 2012 campaign as "fighting for the schools our children deserve."

While these examples showcase the galvanizing potential of collective identities, it is important to recognize that they have a downside. Identities work by creating dividing lines that define who is on which side. Depending on how those lines get drawn, collective identities can divide as well as unify workers. We need only think of the sordid history of divisions based on race, national origin, gender, or craft within the labor movement to see how this has worked.

Similarly, unions' efforts to forge "partnerships" with employers, or to promote protectionist "buy American" strategies, can divide workers by company or country, while blurring divisions between workers and management. The resulting identities can help or harm labor's fighting capacity.

It is also essential to recognize that durable collective identities, the kind that can create deep and lasting social change, are made up of more than words. They are not the product of proper "messaging" or "framing" of issues. Rather, collective identities are created, maintained, and reshaped through sustained, organized collective action.

More than anything, it's this combination of galvanizing ideas tied to durable, deep organization that is missing from today's labor movement.

We can certainly find elements of each. Despite decades of decline, unions still have plenty of organizational infrastructure at their disposal. But this is not tied to a compelling idea or collective identity.

Leaving aside forgettable efforts at doing so like AFL-CIO's "Union Yes!" and "Voice@Work" campaigns, the ideological work of even more sophisticated campaigns like SEIU's Justice for Janitors has not been aimed at creating a sense of collective identity among its members. Rather, it has been aimed at creating "public dramas" using scripted confrontations to shame corporate targets into making deals with union leaders. Workers in such a model function not as the collective force driving the campaign, but as what Jane McAlevey refers to as "authentic messengers" dispatched by union leadership to influence media coverage and public opinion.

We have also seen galvanizing ideas take hold in recent years. These include the aforementioned Fight for \$15 (and a union, which usually gets dropped), the powerful counterposition of "the 99 percent" versus "the one percent" that animated the Occupy movement, and Bernie Sanders' message of working-class justice and solidarity that fueled his improbable run for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination.

These, however, have lacked firm organizational links. In the case of Fight for \$15, the real organizational tie to unions was deliberately hidden. Occupy, for all its accomplishments in forcing economic inequality back onto the political agenda, foundered on its inability to build lasting organization. As for Sanders, not only was his campaign hampered by most unions' reticence to back it, but there is little infrastructure beyond email and fundraising lists to organize the millions of people who backed him. Strikes, Workplaces, and the Future of Democracy

Historically, unions have used two

methods to link ideas and organization: strikes and shop floor organization.

The first has gotten plenty of attention, grabbing headlines and filling the pages of labor history books. The second, while often overlooked, has been equally important, a necessary building block for the first. Labor scholars, not to mention any seasoned organizer, know the painstaking, day-to-day work that goes into building a strike. Even in cases where strikes seem spontaneous, there is always organization lurking behind.

But beyond strike preparation, shop floor organization has been what gives substance to the well-worn slogan “we are the union.” Not only has it provided a necessary check on management’s authority, but it has created the setting for the everyday interactions that build trust, solidarity, leadership, and the confidence that members can act collectively. It was an essential part of union building efforts from the nineteenth century to the CIO and lives on in certain pockets of the labor movement.

For the most part though, strikes and shop floor organization are things of the past. Not only are strike rates are near an all-time low in the United States, but evidence suggests that they are no longer as effective as they used to be. Meanwhile, corporate consolidation, financialization, and restructuring means that power and authority have moved not just further up the organizational chart, but have disappeared into a hazy thicket of investment funds, shell companies, and merged mega-corporations.

In this new environment, many argue, workplace organizing can only have limited effects. Unions’ leverage must be exerted elsewhere, either in politics or capital markets. Almost by definition, that means that unions’ primary activities must happen at the

staff level, in the strategic research and legislative action departments “not in the workplace. Unsurprisingly, unions that subscribe to this analysis, most notably SEIU, have transformed themselves in ways that make their workplace presence even more remote.

Without denying that these changes are real, and that global strategies that reach beyond the workplace are necessary to confront globalized capital, giving up on the possibility of workplace organizing has troubling implications for labor, politics, and democracy more broadly.

If labor has no way of tying global leverage strategies to workplace organizing, then it is unclear how whatever agreements are worked out between corporations, governments, and unions can actually make daily life on the job better for workers. Agreements mean little without enforcement.

At a basic level, workplace organization is necessary not only to make sure that corporations abide by their agreements, but to provide a check on management’s unbridled authority. Janice Fine’s work on the “co-production of enforcement” offers some ideas as to how this might happen, but labor needs to prioritize workplace organization for these ideas to reach the necessary scale.

More broadly though, if labor abandons the workplace, it implies that workers have no hope of shaping their own destiny; that they remain at the mercy of forces beyond their control, and that they must rely on others to do battle on their behalf. If this is the model of organization and social change that labor has to offer workers in the age of Trump, then the future is indeed dire. If unions are no longer capable of organizing workers on a mass scale to make their voices heard collectively, then that leaves workers vulnerable to demagogues

like Trump who proclaim that “I am your voice.”

Fortunately, there is another way. We saw it in the massive majorities of Chicago teachers who struck against Mayor Rahm Emanuel in 2012, and then forced him to back down again in 2016. We saw it in the CWA strikers who struck against Verizon for forty-five days last year to beat back the company’s concessionary demands and win pension increases and protections on outsourcing.

Politically, we saw it in the work of the Las Vegas Culinary Union, UNITE HERE Local 226, which managed to get even white workers in a right-to-work state to reject Trump this past November. We also saw it in the work of the Massachusetts Teachers Association, which organized against both major parties and billionaire-funded charter school PACs to defeat Question 2, which would have dramatically increased the number of charter schools in the state.

These are isolated examples and do not yet approach the scale needed to respond to the challenges that labor faces in the coming years. But they show that it is still possible to strike, and it is still possible to win. In each case, building workplace union culture and organization was key. Broadening this model outwards could provide ways of reversing labor’s fortunes.

In a recent message to supporters, Senator Bernie Sanders stated that “The great crisis that we face as a nation is not just the objective problems that we face.... The more serious crisis is the limitation of our imaginations.” In bringing workers together and changing their assessment of what is possible and what they are capable of, labor has the capacity to transcend that limitation. To survive Trump, that work is more necessary than ever.

[Jacobin](#)

Mourn Liu Xiaobo, Free Liu Xia - “A martyr, a

man of great moral courage”

21 July 2017, by **Au Loong-Yu**

One only needs to compare how the KMT treated its most well known and daring opposition leader in the 1930s with the present day CCP. In 1932 the KMT tracked down and arrested Chen Duxiu, the once head of the CCP, which by then had already abandoned the cities for rural guerilla warfare. Although Chen was expelled from the party, he was still seen as a serious threat to the KMT. Therefore Chiang Kai Shek initially wanted to send Chen to the military court for trial so as to deal with his opponent freely. But the news spread and a national initiative to support Chen Duxiu, which included KMT celebrities, such as Soong Ching Ling, Bai Wenwei, Cai Yuanpei, etc, followed. Chiang Kai-shek had no choice but to send Chen to court for trial. Cai Yuanpei immediately found a famous “public intellectual”, Zhang Shizhao (later an obedient scholar under Mao), to be Chen’s lawyer. Then, in court, the prosecutor accused Chen of “advocating the idea of ‘down with the Kuomintang’ hence amounting to overthrowing the Republic of China.” Zhang Shizhao stood up and said that Chen Duxiu was no longer a member of the the Communist Party and had formed his own group, the Left Oppositionist, which had nothing to do with the CCP’s guerilla warfare, and he was therefore effectively helpful to the Kuomintang because of this. Chen Duxiu immediately stood up and declared, “Zhang’s defense only represents his own personal view. As to my political view one should only rely on my documents!” Then he read his own defense, openly admitted that he remained a revolutionary, even though this might lead to him being sentenced heavily, including receiving the death penalty.

What is worth noting here, was that in the KMT era in the 1930s, instead of all the party leaders and members either standing behind the top leader to condemn Liu Xiaobo or remaining silent, quite a few big KMT names openly came to the aid of Chen to help him to get a fair trial. In contrast to the CCP’s kangaroo’s court, the KMT had to arrange a real open trial for Chen, and because of this the court hearing and cross-examination was fully reported in the newspapers – owned not by the party but independently; some of them were run by public intellectuals who sincerely believed in free speech. In contrast, there is not a single newspaper in today’s China that is independent. That is why, while Chen’s indictment against the KMT was fully covered by the press, Liu Xiaobo’s public statement that openly declared that the CCP “is not his enemy” was still censored in CCP China. Actually, the KMT also treated Chen in prison better than the CCP’s ill treatment of Liu. Although thousands of revolutionaries died in KMT prisons, at least it treated Chen well. He was able to meet his wife regularly in private and for long enough to exceed the official time limit. In the end, although Chen was released in 1937 and was able to immediately throw himself into the struggle against the Japanese invasion and to criticise the KMT’s half-hearted defensive war, Liu died in custody and his wife remains practically a prisoner.

The KMT in the 1930s was actually quickly evolving into a fascist regime. It was not anything close to a “benevolent absolutism”. But comparing how it treated Chen with how the CCP has treated Liu and

many others, one can still tell the difference. Sadly, there are progressive people in the world today who believe the otherwise.

That said, it is also a bit of an exaggeration when someone declares that Liu is a great democratic thinker. He is a martyr and as such a man of great moral courage and will be remembered. But Liu is not great as a democratic thinker. Politically he repeatedly exhibited naivety and self-contradiction. It is to his credit that he promoted liberal democratic ideas which led to his imprisonment and death there. But he was also a strong advocate of the privatization of state owned enterprises and farm land, and one may wonder how democratic this would be. He was known as an advocate of non-violence, but actually the picture is more complicated. He whole-heartedly supported Bush’s war against Iraq in 2003, and condemned the UN for not endorsing the US-UK’s war, praising the duo as “representing the regime of freedom and benevolence”. The fact that Liu was offered the Noble Peace prize is comparable to an effort to trying to square the circle. But let us not be harsh to Liu now, because it was neither Liu himself who claimed to be “great thinker”, nor did he intervene to make the Norwegian Noble Committee give him the prize. It is the responsibility of those people who wish to use Liu. Right now we should continue to focus on demanding Beijing free Liu Xia. We should consider launching an international boycott of Chinese bureaucratic capital so as to press the CCP to respect basic human rights and especially to release Liu Xia. Let us mourn Liu Xiaobo and stand by Liu Xia.

Mélenchon, "La France Insoumise", populism: questions about the 2016-2017 electoral cycle and its implications

20 July 2017, by **Pierre Rousset**

Jean-Luc Mélenchon's presidential and legislative campaign this year was different from the previous ones. There was a huge change in the relationship to political parties in general and to his former Left Front allies in particular. It's important to understand the reasons for this change, as well as the implications and the specific context in which it took place.

First, let's take a quick look at who Mélenchon is. He called on voters to "get rid of" traditional politicians, successfully skirting over the fact that he himself is a rather caricatural example of such figures. He was a member of the "Lambertists", a current of Trotskyist background with a symbiotic relationship to the apparatuses of Social Democracy, the Freemasons and the Force Ouvrière trade-union confederation. In this capacity, he was sent into the Socialist Party (PS) in 1976 and built a career there. In 1983, he was elected as a municipal councillor and then to the departmental level. He became a professional politician and didn't put down roots in any particular constituency; he moved up to the Senate, in a country where senators aren't elected directly by universal suffrage but indirectly by other elected officials, and then was elected as a member of the European parliament on the PS party list. He was appointed to cabinet in the government of prime minister Lionel Jospin, who himself had come out of the Lambertists. Only now has he finally been elected directly to the parliament, but only after parachuting himself in to a constituency in Marseilles, the large Mediterranean port city. Lacking local roots, he was still able to lead the left-wing *Gauche Socialiste* current within the PS. This

was a genuinely activist current that enabled him to leave the PS in 2008 and found the Left Party (PG).

What are his political points of reference? As I said, he originally comes out of the Lambertist current, not exactly the most democratic strain of French Trotskyism. He didn't burn his bridges with this part of his past but nonetheless fully immersed himself in the Socialist Party. In fact, one of his main points of reference, and perhaps the main one, is François Mitterrand, French president from 1981 to 1995, to whom he was close. He considers Mitterrand to be a political genius. Though somewhat of a loner, Mitterrand was able to take over the PS, turn the Communist Party (PCF) into a junior partner by forging an alliance with it (the Union of the Left), win the presidency and hold on for two seven-year terms (a record for longevity, though not for radicalism!).

Mélenchon feels absolutely no connection at all to the revolutions of the 20th century. It's almost as if they had never taken place. There's before - the Paris Commune, Jean Jaurès; and there's after - for example, Hugo Chavez. It's a huge understatement to say that he feels no empathy whatsoever for my generation's revolutionaries [72].

He is part of a current of opinion that's quite strong in France - one that is simultaneously left-wing on socio-economic questions (public services and so forth) and nationalist. I'll come back to this later.

2012-2017: from

presidential ambition to the benches of parliament

What has made Mélenchon tick since he left the PS in 2008? Well, Mélenchon has made Mélenchon tick, and it's not a clever one-liner to say so but rather an important insight into what he believes. He identifies with figures who embody important political change (beginning with Chavez - but also Mitterrand in 1981 after 25 years of right-wing rule in France). It took me some time to get my head around the idea, since it seemed so odd and so foreign to me, but it was indeed Jean-Luc Mélenchon's ambition to become president in the 2012 and 2017 elections. If you haven't understood that, you haven't understood anything. The change in orientation from 2012 to 2017 was tied first and foremost to a sense of *opportunity*. He chooses the character he will play and the political tack that he pursues on the basis of a tactical assessment of the period rather than a strategic project. This is the point *Podemos* citizen-council member Jorge Lago makes in his description of how Mélenchon changed tactics in 2017 after realizing that he had misread the presidential contest (with Fillon winning the right-wing nomination, not Sarkozy; Hamon as the PS candidate, not Valls or Hollande; and Bayrou supporting Macron) [73].

When Mélenchon speaks of a "citizen insurrection", he means a "revolution through the ballot box". His aim was to quickly secure the presidency -

with the hopes of doing so either in one fell swoop in 2012 or by becoming the “third man” in those elections with a view to winning in 2017. In the event, he came fourth in 2012 – behind National Front (FN) candidate Marine Le Pen. He ran as the candidate of the Left Front (FdG), an electoral alliance between the Left Party (PG), the PCF and the various groups and networks that came together in the *Ensemble!* grouping. With 11.2 percent of votes cast, he took the bulk of “radical Left” votes. This was a respectable result; but in his eyes it was altogether insufficient.

Debates at the time ran along familiar lines, having especially to do with the question of electoral alliances with the PS, on which the PG (Mélenchon) and the PCF disagreed. The PCF has a number of elected officials whose re-election often depends on reaching agreement with the PS, whereas the PG had very few (and ironically those they did have had been elected while still members of the PS).

In reaction to this initial setback, Mélenchon opted to break free any constraints placed on him by the established parties – free from his allies in the Left Front, but also free from his own party, the PG [74]. He made a “Bonapartist” turn by declaring his candidacy for the presidential election without consulting or negotiating beforehand and by creating his own movement vehicle for the elections, *La France Insoumise* (“France Unbowed”) (LFI). He has aggressively pursued this tack and it’s no longer a matter of rallying forces together (behind him) but rather of *replacing* forces much further afield.

Mélenchon always builds in opposition to something or someone, carefully selecting his target. For many years it was the Front National (FN). He took on Marine Le Pen one-on-one in the 2012 presidential elections and again in the northern constituency of Hénin-Beaumont in the subsequent legislative elections. He lost each time. In 2016-2017 he switched targets. “Kick them all out” became the new rallying cry. In the 2017 legislative elections, he ran in Marseilles – not in a constituency where the FN is strong but rather in

one where he had done very well in the first round of the presidential elections and where the outgoing MP (from the PS), Patrick Mennucci, no longer had any hope of being re-elected – going down to defeat along with most PS MPs.

The economic program has not changed qualitatively. It’s essentially a radical Keynesian approach, absent any kind of anti-capitalism, with a far greater emphasis on ecological questions than in the past. Over the months, though, language, symbols and communication techniques did indeed change. Mélenchon has taken a close look at what has worked in other countries, such as Obama’s use of social media and the Sanders campaign in the USA, or the history of *Podemos* in Spain. He has taken stock of the traditional media’s declining influence. He has worked on his image down to the smallest details (such as the clothes he wears on different occasions). He likes PR stunts, such as using holograms to address two rallies simultaneously – an expensive trick that has already been used abroad (contrary to what he has suggested), and especially by Indian prime minister Modi. He works very closely with PR consultants. He is a professional politician, more than at any time in the past.

Facing a threat on the Left from dissident PS candidate Benoit Hamon, he intensified his campaign’s populist profile. Jorge Lago approvingly highlights this turn and only regrets that it came rather late, and for reasons of tactical expediency rather than strategic commitment:

“[Mélenchon’s] campaign has been superbly crafted. For example, the campaign video depicting how France will look in 2018, one year after his election, is really smart because he speaks the language of government and state. [...] The French understand and identify with this kind of language. When I lived in France, the fact that this language of government and state was so widespread among people is one of the things that struck me most. In short, the idea of obliterating the language of the traditional Left and radical-Left shibboleths, and of banishing red flags and certain references from campaign

rallies, was executed really well in my view, albeit perhaps a little late in the day.”

Speaking the language of government and state, obliterating the traditional language and shibboleths of the radical Left, banishing red flags, Mélenchon has systematically and deliberately built LFI by breaking with the historic references and symbols of a class identity (and not only of the so-called “traditional Left”). Though promoting the creation of a Sixth Republic, he has fully immersed himself in the Fifth Republic tradition by which the presidential election creates a personal relationship between a man (rarely a woman) and the French people. He has catered to the rejection of political parties, just as Emmanuel Macron has. From this angle, a candidate’s *profile*, his media brand and what it embodies are more important than the content of the campaign program. Before getting to that, though, a few more words on the elections.

Bouncing back from his defeat in the presidential election, and emboldened by his 19.6 percent score in the first round, Mélenchon called on voters to elect an LFI majority in the legislative elections – which would have made him prime minister, setting the stage for a conflictual cohabitation with the Macron presidency. In the event, LFI’s first-round legislative score had a sobering effect even if Mélenchon was happy with his own win in Marseilles.

In the end, having run for the presidency, Mélenchon had to be content with his own election to the lower house and with that of enough fellow LFI candidates to form a parliamentary caucus – LFI has 17 MPs in total and 15 are required to form a caucus. This was actually a better result than what the polls forecast. In fact, all opposition parties gained from a relative demobilization of the Macron electorate in the second round of the lower-house elections. The PCF, for example, won in 11 constituencies and the FN in eight – depriving Mélenchon of the satisfaction of indirect revenge over FN leader Marine Le Pen.

The PCF has formed its own parliamentary caucus, separate from

LFI, thanks to the addition of five overseas MPs, who enable it to hit the 15-member cut-off.

The new LFI caucus has positioned itself clearly on the left. Like the PCF, it has made defending the labour code its main focus. It's too early to know how Mélenchon will remould himself or what he will do with *la France Insoumise* (whose remit, in its present form, was time-limited to the election campaign). Still, we can and should look at the recurring features of Mélenchon's orientation and at the implications of the "populist moment" of 2017.

Populist symbolism

Mélenchon often demonstrates a keen sense of political timing. This was the case, for example, when he broke with the Socialist Party in 2008 in order to create the Left Party (PG) and then the Left Front (FG) with the PCF. That same year, we had launched the idea of the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) and received a very favourable response – a fact which probably hadn't escaped Mélenchon's notice at the time. The NPA could only be built as the outcome of a lengthy and complicated process; whereas the PG was built overnight on the basis of forces already organized within the PS.

The NPA process was initiated at a time when the Left Party (PG) and Left Front (FG) didn't yet exist. But the NPA's actual foundation took place after their creation and when they were very much on the offensive. As a result, the entire dynamic surrounding the launch of the NPA was thrown off kilter.

When the Left Front began to run out of steam (created for purely electoral purposes, it ultimately became an empty shell), Mélenchon tried to break free from the arrangement in a number of ways, in particular by launching the Movement for the Sixth Republic (M6R). At the time, I found this initiative to be completely off the radar, since working-class concerns were primarily socio-economic in nature. Though the M6R itself was

stillborn, the idea of the Sixth Republic did get some traction, with the crisis of the Fifth Republic's institutions and the related system of parties going into full-blown crisis in 2017.

Mélenchon is always on the lookout for novelty, and this is certainly one of his qualities. He's also an excellent stage performer, a talent he uses and even abuses. In a presidential system like France's, this is an asset. The PCF was unable to find a candidate that could rival him in this respect, and this allowed Mélenchon to dominate – and subsequently abandon – the Left Front.

Here we come up against the question of an individual embodying a political future; with a project closely tied up with their own personal fate. I submit that this is the common ground between Mélenchon and the protagonists and theoreticians of Left populism: especially Chantal Mouffe and Ernest Laclau; and Pablo Iglesias and Álvaro Errejón.

On the Verso Books website, Chantal Mouffe herself supports Mélenchon as a "radical reformist against a mounting oligarchy" [75]. She makes a careful distinction between the Latin American context (societies with powerful, entrenched oligarchies) and Europe (where the Left-Right divide remains key). But in Europe, too, she argues, it's a matter of bringing an end to the domination of an oligarchic system, by way of a democratic reconstruction.

One of Mélenchon's spokespersons and a member of his inner circle, Raquelle Garrido, is less finicky in an interview with *Jacobin* [76]. The watchwords of the 2017 campaign were humanism, populism, patriotism and Constitution. LFI is a "a grassroots citizen movement, our ideology is humanist populism. In many ways we have adopted the populist strategy of Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau. [Populism] "is a program. It is a demarcation strategy between a 'them' [the oligarchy] and an 'us' [the people]. [...] our movement [...] is intended to build something beyond parties. It has constructed itself by design" really deliberately "as something

different from the cartel of parties we had in 2012." The situation is "ripe" for "what we're saying" that we need a peaceful solution" to the numerous tensions that run through French society. In 2012, Mélenchon may have appeared "too radical, too subversive". He now "seems wise".

It continues to be said of Mélenchon that he is an eternal "Jaurésien" (after the early 20th century French socialist leader Jean Jaurès), maintaining the reference to class but squarely within the reference to the Republic. The election campaign nonetheless saw a deliberate blotting out of the symbols of class-struggle politics. As the weeks went on, red flags vanished, giving way to a sea of French tricolor flags; and the *Internationale* made way for the French national anthem, *The Marseillaise*. The word "humanist", unqualified, was seen as self-sufficient. Going the way of the hammer and sickle, even the raised fist has been upstaged by the Greek letter *Phi* (?).

Phi has become the movement's logo, used everywhere including on ballot papers. There's some wordplay here (*Phi* sounds like LFI's usual acronym "FI", just as Emmanuel Macron's initials, EM, are the same as those of the *En Marche!* vehicle created to support his presidential run), but much more. *Phi* evokes philosophy, harmony and love and is unburdened by a political past. A symbol of neither Right nor Left. When it comes to harmony, Mélenchon often disrupts things with his deliberately arrogant and contemptuous remarks, but *Phi* remains a neutral marker all the same.

Labour issues were at the heart of the Mélenchon campaign (against stripping workers of labour-code protection; on paycheque and taxation questions; and more), but not social classes as such. The idea of the "99 percent" is about the people against the oligarchs. On repeated occasions, Mélenchon organized the biggest rallies of the campaign season. For the tens of thousands of people in attendance, class identity had been rendered invisible. This will have consequences, since France is among those Western European countries where class identity has been effectively pushed from centre stage

to the fragmented margins – much more so, I would argue, than in Belgium or Britain, for example. A win for the neoliberal ideological offensive. In fact, although both come out of a left social-democratic tradition, in this respect Mélenchon is the antithesis of British Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn.

In Left politics, is populism a temporary tactic? For one of the founders of *Podemos*, Juan Carlos Monedero, it should only be used temporarily, during what in Spanish he calls the movement's "*fase destituyente*" ("deconstruction phase") – and then surpassed in the "*fase constituyente*" ("constituent phase") [77]. He specifically criticizes Á Áigo Errejón's approach:

"Defenders of the 'populist hypothesis', and especially Á Áigo Errejón, felt that it was enough to mobilize those sectors who could deliver victory and that we shouldn't raise issues that might lose us votes. That is, that we should only raise abstract matters in order to secure the broadest support possible: country, [the oligarchical] caste and corruption. [The idea] is to empty signifiers, but in fact it's the very possibility of change that ends up being gutted. When Laclau says that politics and economics are the same thing, he brushes aside the material conditions for class struggle. I think that's a mistake."

It's possible that Mélenchon will opt to resurrect a class-based approach in parliament and not leave it to the PCF alone. Still, and the question can just as well be directed to Monedero, is it really so easy to rebuild something that you have deftly dismantled in the first instance?

"Replacement" and *La France Insoumise*

"Replacement" has become a central part of Mélenchon's message and political choices. There's nothing to regret about the death of the PS, which long ago ceased to be a "workers party". Nor should anyone

want to breathe new life into it. If that were all this was about, then "replacement" would be fine and dandy.

However, for Mélenchon the era of parties is finished. So long live the movements! He doesn't merely take note of the decline of said parties, he actively contributes to their marginalization. This dovetails nicely with the current situation in France, and it's precisely how Macron and his *En Marche* (now *La République en Marche* – LREM) movement have succeeded.

In the present context, the consequences of this approach might be especially serious. With whom can a coalition of social and democratic resistance against Macron be organized when one's ambition is to "replace" all of one's possible party allies? After having carefully separated the field of electoral politics (a matter for politicians) from that of socio-economic action (a matter for trade unions), Mélenchon now appears to be portraying himself and his parliamentary caucus as the natural parliamentary expression of the struggles that the trade-union movement will undertake.

There is an urgent need to unite all resistance forces at the risk of being summarily defeated by the offensive that Macron is preparing around a range of questions – from granting employers more workplace-level powers; to enshrining in ordinary law the temporary measures of the present state of emergency in the country.

The problem is that replacement is the antithesis of unity.

Question: what's going to happen to *La France Insoumise*? What does it mean to say that the era of (traditional) parties is over?

Mélenchon toys with the notion that it's possible to circumvent parties, totally marginalizing and shattering them [78] But he hasn't explained what will replace them. LFI wasn't conceived to be a lasting formation but as a temporary instrument for the 2017 elections. It was created in February 2016. No one could join, it

was impossible to pay dues and the only thing you could do was make financial contributions for the upcoming elections. Dues imply membership and the rights and responsibilities that go with it. Signing up to the LFI process entailed neither rights nor responsibilities. Nothing is expected of you and you have no formal power.

There were perhaps up to 500,000 Internet clicks of people supporting LFI. That's a lot. Internet users submitted their ideas online. A "synthesis", or program, *l'Avenir en commun* [79] ("Our common future") was posted for approval and about 97 percent of respondents were in favour. Restrictive rules were handed down: LFI support groups were not to have more than 15 members, and shouldn't straddle constituencies or coordinate their work between each other within larger geographic zones. There should be no local LFI conventions or general assemblies. These highly unusual rules (which haven't always been abided by locally) obviously strengthen the authority of top leadership, while not necessarily doing away with the need for electoral horse-trading among different competing internal party-type groupings. Overall, horizontal functioning was at once very informal and circumscribed, with tight vertical control by the core leadership.

Activist teams were established, often at the initiative of the top leadership, and took on a number of tasks – in particular doing an excellent job of getting out the LFI message on social media. While there have been analogies to the Spanish party *Podemos*, it's not quite so simple. We didn't have a mass movement on the same scale in France and there was no space within LFI for a founding organization like the Spanish far-Left group *Anticapitalistas*.

The core leadership group was drawn from the Left Party (PG). There's an all-in-the-family feel to it, with people who have a long history together. Some of them are now LFI members of parliament, some of whom had been LCR/NPA members before getting involved in the *Ensemble!* group.

Close identification to the leader has given rise to highly sectarian forms of

behaviour from the Mélenchon fan club, which swarms together against any criticism online, to the point where their targets' online accounts have occasionally been blocked. Mélenchon himself is no fan of criticism. I really want to stress this point because it's part of a deplorable trend on the radical Left, where debates on substantive issues are mediocre at best and demonization has become commonplace. Disagreement is seen as illegitimate as soon as it touches upon a "sensitive" question.

So that's how things have gone so far, but where are we headed? Mélenchon and the tight-knit group around him have to spell out the kind of lasting movement they hope to build. And they have to explain how the pluralism of society will be expressed if, as they have argued, it is not meant to do so via the plurality of parties.

It's not hard to see why parties have been discredited. It's not because of Macron or Mélenchon. The PS in particular self-destructed under the recently concluded Hollande presidency. And nor should the PCF and far-Left blame their own failures on anyone else. The same goes for the parties of the Right. But what must we (re)build now?

LFI's social roots are very shallow. It would be quite ironic were it to make the same hegemonic claims as the PCF used to during its Stalinist phase. Long-time PCF member and faithful Mélenchon supporter Roger Martelli raises this very question in decidedly measured terms [80]:

"Like the PCF in its heyday, La France Insoumise could very well choose to argue that there is no space outside its ranks for politics that are both realistic and revolutionary. Yet at a time of crisis and reconfiguration, where broad regrouping and collective invention are the order of the day, it is advisable to steer clear of any approach that in one way or another appears to call on other forces to pledge allegiance."

The people and patriotism

Mélenchon sings the praises of France and always has. He sings the praises of France as global power, spanning all the world's seas and oceans. He wants France to quit NATO – but "À la Charles de Gaulle", in order better to defend its interests and prestige around the world.

This has nothing to do with the actual relationship of forces in today's world, but it was very much part of LFI's campaign. Running for the presidency, Mélenchon enjoyed speaking as the country's (future) commander in chief of the French military, whose capacities he wants to strengthen (and whose nuclear weapons he wants to keep).

The "people" is a national-people, the foundation for patriotism. In an imperialist country, patriotism is not a sure bet for the Left! For Mélenchon, though, France is not imperialist. LFI doesn't fight against French imperialism because such a fight is unwarranted. Its view of foreign policy is not based on an internationalist outlook but a geostrategic one [81]. So its view of the situation in the Middle East is based on an assessment of the relationship between global powers – hence the calls to cooperate with Russia and too bad if this means negotiating terms with Assad.

The same approach of rival global powers can be applied to Europe – so the target becomes Angela Merkel's Germany (with borderline Germanophobic rhetoric).

Mélenchon also sees the unity of the Republic – France's "one and indivisible" character – as sacrosanct. He inveighs against the country's Regional Languages Charter; he attacked Hollande when he called for strengthening Corsica's regional powers; and on and on it goes. All this prompted a retort from Philippe Pierre-Charles of the Martinique GRS [82]

It has to be said, though, that Mélenchon's stance around these matters has not elicited much

response within the French "radical" Left. It's a worrying and indeed demoralizing symptom.

Contradictory impact

It's quite natural, especially from abroad, to see LFI's success solely as a hopeful sign of radical-Left recovery and renewal. And it is indeed the case that to a large extent people voted for LFI for left-wing reasons. The flipside, though, is that this success was also built upon a policy of shattering the Left's identities, symbols and historical reference points (in the true meaning of the word "Left").

This apparent paradox can't be grasped within the usual analytical framework. But we must come to terms with what is taking place. The danger is that the net outcome will be more negative than positive – with the destructive ramifications on people's consciousness weighing more heavily in the balance than the underpinnings of renewal and reconstruction. LFI requires a specific analytical framework that takes in its contradictory features.

LFI is clearly a multi-faceted space. A number of radical-Left activists have gotten involved based on the compelling argument that we should be in those spaces where things are happening. Unfortunately, this involvement took place without in-depth debate (with a few exceptions, such as Samy Johsua). In any event, a chapter is now closed. The long 2016-2017 election cycle is over. The important choices now are the ones that will be made over the coming days and weeks. There can be no getting around a substantive debate on the very notion of "Left populism", its ambiguities and the serious dangers that they entail. As Samy Johsua and Roger Martelli have pointed out, "*populaire*" ("working-class") and "populist" are not the same thing [83]:

"Of course, there's nothing disgraceful about finding populism appealing; there are solid arguments in its favour. But these same arguments can also lead us into a dead-end. Populism

claims to be combative but it could well be paving the way now for future defeats. We aren't about fighting with the far-Right for control of the nation; rather, we seek to extend the realm of popular sovereignty toward all political spaces without distinction. We aren't about wresting collective identity, be it national or of any other sort, away from the far-Right; rather, we advocate the free embrace of identities and belonging – with a massive increase in equality, the only lasting basis for common endeavour. We aren't about taking populism back from the far-Right; rather, we undermine their influence by building an emancipatory force rooted in the working classes. 'Populaire' (‘working-class’) is not the same as ‘populist’. Our efforts must focus on building this force for working-class dignity.”

Once again on the political situation

Overall, the results of the presidential election are very worrying. In the first round, the top three candidates were of the Right and far-Right. Emmanuel Macron is man of the Right in every respect – economic, of course, but also “philosophical” (his conception of the role of the individual in society); his profile differs only in that he hails from a modern Right on societal questions, unlike the very conservative Catholic third-place finisher François Fillon. As for the second-place finisher Marine Le Pen, she is the figurehead of the far-Right Front National (currently facing internal challenges following the calamitous end to her second-round campaign and the broad range of voters that coalesced against her).

The presidential race also shed light on the fragile state of bourgeois “governance” in the country, given the important role played by unexpected

“bumps in the road”. After the right-wing primary, Fillon was seen as a shoe-in to win the presidential election. But he then got embroiled in a series of what can only be described as unprecedented financial scandals. The striking thing about it all, though, was how his party was unable to find a replacement, placing the hangman's noose around its own neck. Had it been otherwise, Macron wouldn't have won in 2017.

PS party rebel Benoît Hamon had a stroke of luck, securing his party's nomination in the Socialist primary. At one point, he was ahead of Mélenchon in the polls. But he was unable or unwilling to break with the PS and the apparatus of the moribund party clipped his wings. Had this not occurred, it's not certain that Mélenchon's campaign would have taken off in time to reach his final 19.6 percent result.

Mélenchon's campaign crossed over into shooting distance of the presidency during a short period of time and in a number of stages – first, the shift of polling numbers from disgruntled Hamon supporters; then a TV debate where he got the better of the four other candidates; and finally, the growing sense that he could make it into the second round.

Macron and Mélenchon were adept at seizing the opportunity that the paralysis of the two government parties opened up for them. As a result, the political-institutional stage in France is now dominated by two movements that are “works in progress” – on a large scale on the Right (Macron and LREM) and on a small scale on the Left (Mélenchon and LFI). There has been an unprecedented 72 percent turnover among members of parliament. We are in uncharted waters.

That being said, I think that the outcome of the legislative elections,

coming on the heels of the presidential contest, have revealed the limits of the changes that have taken place. The president got his majority, but it wasn't a landslide. In the first round, opposition tickets experienced the usual decline relative to their presidential candidate's scores. They rebounded somewhat in the second round thanks to the estrangement of many Macron voters, no doubt troubled by new scandals involving newly appointed ministers (Richard Ferrand and François Bayrou among others). And through it all, abstention broke all previous records – hitting 57 percent in the second round of the legislative elections!

Mélenchon probably paid a price for refusing to make a clear call to come out against Marine Le Pen in the second round of the presidential election (as part of an attempt to hold together the wide range of voters that supported him in the first round); and for appearing excessively ambitious at each stage. Macron paid a price for scandals involving ministers in his first cabinet. But ultimately there was neither left-wing insurrection at the ballot box nor right-wing landslide. Even at a time of great party-political and institutional upheaval, political disaffection remains the dominant feature [84]. The democratic crisis is deepening.

Emmanuel Macron knows full well that he has not won a landslide. He also knows that his opponents have been seriously weakened, for the time being. So he does indeed have room for manoeuvre – and will do so for the worse. We are in a defensive position. We will probably need time to build a broad coalition of social and democratic resistance (instances of resistance already exist, but they are still marginal). No such coalition will be built without unity and absent renewal of political practice on the radical Left and in social movements.

Translation from French: Nathan Rao

The reasons for the rise of Daesh

Its current leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, began his experience as a jihadist after the invasion, when he joined the Iraqi branch of al-Qaeda under the command of the Jordanian al-Zarqawi. In 2010, he became the head of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), which replaced al-Qaeda in Iraq.

The invasion of Iraq in 2003

The US and British military invasion was the decisive element in the initial expansion of the jihadist group. The destructive consequences of the invasion resulted in the death of one million Iraqis and the forced displacement of four million others after more than ten years of inhuman sanctions. The US occupation policy created the conditions for the development of Daesh: fierce repression of all political opposition to the occupation, forced introduction of neo-liberal policies and repression of independent trade union movements, destruction of institutions (military, administration, university system, etc.), and establishment of a political system based on religious denominations.

Not forgetting the policy of "debaathification" implemented by the US occupation forces after the invasion of Iraq, which led to a profound marginalization of the Sunni population. With these measures, anyone who had been a member of Saddam Hussein's Baath party was immediately dismissed, excluded from the public sector and lost their pension. The marginalization of Sunni populations was also accompanied by frequent attacks by the US occupation forces against Sunni towns and villages. Tens of thousands of prisoners were incarcerated in prisons run by the US, where isolation, torture and the "Taylorized bureaucracy of detention" were regularly used to consolidate the occupation.

These policies fostered religious tensions and led to a terrible war between Shiite and Sunni extremist groups between 2005 and 2008, with a monthly average of 3,000 deaths and the displacement of populations of several million people.

Successive Iraqi governments dominated by the Shiite fundamentalist movement Da'wa continued and even intensified the policies of marginalization and oppression of Sunni populations. Shiite fundamentalist militias, with the help of the Islamic Republic of Iran, also consolidated their power during these years. These militias are detested by large sections of the Sunni populations of Iraq because of their abuses and their denominational discourses and practices.

In this context, a number of former officers of Saddam Hussein joined the ranks of the Islamic State. This dynamic was also linked to a process of Iraqisation of the command of al-Qaeda in Iraq in the mid-2000s, but also to the policies of Islamization of the Baathist regime from the early 1990s, involving all sectors of the state apparatus, including the military and intelligence services, and of society in general.

The Revolutionary Processes

The second phase of expansion of the Daesh took place after the beginning of the revolutionary processes in the Middle East and North Africa in 2010-2011. Daesh played no role in popular uprisings and mass actions such as strikes and civil disobedience. On the contrary, the jihadist group regarded these movements with suspicion because of their democratic and social demands. After the fall of the Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak, Daesh issued a statement denouncing secularism, democracy and nationalism, calling on the Egyptians not to replace the best by the worst.

The fierce and massive repression of the old regimes and the inability to fulfill the demands of social justice have gradually allowed the expansion of Daesh in some countries; the organization fed on popular frustrations and the radicalization of certain sections of the population. Daesh and other jihadist groups are symptoms of the retreat of revolutionary processes.

In this context, the involvement in the Syrian revolution from the end of 2011 through Jabhat al-Nusra (which at the time was a branch of the Islamic State, funded massively by it and made up of many organizations) allowed Daesh to expand again massively. The fighting in Syria has provided it with unprecedented training and learning opportunities, as well as the control of large areas of territory. The war of the Assad regime against the Syrian people and the democratic aspirations of the popular movement have greatly contributed to its expansion.

At the same time in Iraq, the repression of popular demonstrations in the Sunni areas in February 2011 and 2013 revived Daesh. The Iraqi army, rebuilt on a community basis and undermined by corruption, was increasingly perceived as an occupying army in Sunni majority regions. The intensification of repression and the continuation of the government's sectarian policies prompted sections of the population to join Daesh, which had almost disappeared in Iraq in 2010.

Daesh thus experienced unprecedented progress following the crushing of popular movements, feeding on the massive repression perpetrated by authoritarian regimes, in Syria and the region, and on religious hatreds generated by the instrumentalisation of religious denominations.

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Popular mobilisation continues

18 July 2017, by **Joseph Daher**

On June 2, a general strike was launched from the town of Al-Hoceima at the initiative of the “Hirak”, against the authoritarian policies of the government and for the release of imprisoned activists of the movement, in particular Nasser Zefzafi, a popular leader arrested on May 29 under the pretext that he had, three days earlier, interrupted the imam’s sermon in the mosque relaying the regime’s propaganda accusing the demonstrators of sowing “fitna” (discord) in the country. Since then demonstrators have boycotted prayers in the pro-regime mosques.

This strike day was marked by numerous confrontations between demonstrators and the repressive forces of the state.

On June 5, two leading members of the “Hirak” were arrested: Nabil Ahamjik, considered as the movement’s number two, and Silya Ziani, one of the new figures involved in the demonstrations. Nawal Ben Aissa, a high profile figure in the movement, was also questioned by the police on June 7. Another leader, El Mortada Amrachaa, was arrested in Al Hoceima on the evening of June 10, before being released on bail on June 23. Several journalists have been arrested. Some of the detainees have launched a limited hunger strike.

These arrests only fed the anger of the several thousand demonstrators who meet every night in Al-Hoceima and

the surrounding area. There have been more than 120 arrests since the beginning of the protest. Sentences of up to 18 months imprisonment have been handed down against 40 detainees and 18 others have been released on bail. An intervention by dozens of police in anti-riot gear on the beaches of Al-Hoceima to dissuade bathers from chanting slogans in favour of the “hirak” has gone viral on social networks.

The movement of popular protest has spread to several other cities, including Rabat, Casablanca and Tangiers, in the form of demonstrations and strikes to denounce social and economic marginalization following the appeal of some political parties, trade unions and human rights organizations.

Demonstrations in solidarity with the popular movement in the Rif and its demands have also subsequently been organized in Rabat and other big cities. An appeal for an initiative centralized in Rabat has been launched in this context with the slogan “We are one country, one people, all against the Hogra”. [85] This initiative has been supported by a broad spectrum of political forces from the activist sectors of the social movement, the non-governmental left, radical left forces, the independent Islamist opposition, human rights associations, local co-ordinations in support of the Rif, and Amazigh

movements.

The objective was to counteract the propaganda of the regime against the accusations of separatism of the movement in the Rif, and to centre the struggle on the themes of “Hogra” and social questions, solidarity with the popular mobilization in the Rif and demanding the release of the political prisoners and the end of repression. In addition to these objectives, the opportunity to build a movement on a national scale was also on the agenda. The demonstration organized by the committee of detainee’s families was a real success with a participation of 100-150,000 people. We should also note the massive role played by women in the mobilisations.

The revolt is then far from over, and the determination of the demonstrators in the Rif persists. Solidarity is developing progressively throughout the country, despite the attempts of the Moroccan monarchy to prevent a snowball effect in the country. Extension is the key to the success and survival of the movement.

It is moreover in this climate of continuation of popular mobilisations that the forces of order have begun a “progressive” withdrawal from symbolic public places in Al-Hoceima and Imzouren, interpreted as a sign of a softening by the authorities.

Solidarity with the struggles for freedom and dignity!

The Qatar Crisis

17 July 2017, by **Adam Hanieh**

The June 5 decision by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE),

Bahrain, and Egypt to suspend diplomatic ties with Qatar has sent

shockwaves through the Middle East.

The ensuing blockade shut down much of the Gulf's maritime and land trade with Qatar, provoking fears that the tiny state would soon face food shortages. Major air carriers, including Emirates, Gulf Air, flydubai, and Etihad Airways, canceled flights, and Qatari citizens living in the participating nations had just two weeks to return home. Even immigrants with Qatari residency permits would be caught up in the expulsion.

The UAE outlawed any expression of sympathy for Qatar "including on Twitter" and threatened offenders with jail terms of up to fifteen years.

Governments closely linked to Saudi Arabia and the UAE quickly expressed support for the blockade, including the Tobruk-based House of Representatives in Libya (one of the country's warring governmental factions), the Saudi-backed [Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi](#) government in Yemen, as well as the Comoros, Mauritania, and the Maldives.

The move against Qatar came after months of bad press in American and Gulf media, in which state officials repeatedly claimed that Qatar was financing Islamist groups and growing closer to Iran.

[Yousef Al Otaiba](#), UAE's ambassador to the United States, played a major role in this campaign. Since the beginning of the 2010 Arab uprisings, Otaiba has roamed Washington's corridors of power, warning that these popular revolts threaten the region's established order and claiming that Qatar supports movements and individuals hostile to both Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Former American government officials and think tanks "notably the neoconservative, pro-Israel Foundation for the Defense of Democracies (FDD), a prominent supporter of the 2003 invasion of Iraq" have taken up this anti-Qatari crusade. On May 23, the FDD convened a [high-profile seminar](#) to discuss the Gulf nation's relationship with the [Muslim Brotherhood](#) and how the Trump administration should respond. There, former secretary of defense Robert Gates called on the

American government to relocate its massive airbase in Qatar unless the country cut ties with such groups.

According to [emails released](#) shortly after the conference, Otaiba supposedly reviewed and encouraged Gates's comments. Indeed, this leak reportedly helped trigger the blockade, revealing the ambassador's cozy relationship with Gates, the FDD, and other figures close to the Trump administration.

Both the UAE and Saudi Arabia have also claimed that Qatar has sought to strengthen ties to Iran over the past months. One piece of evidence [offered for this](#) is the claim that Qatar recently paid \$700 million to Iran in order to secure the release of twenty-six Qatari royals who had been kidnapped in Iraq in 2015, and had been held in Iran for a year and a half. This story "which also allegedly involved a separate payment of up to \$300 million to Al Qaeda-aligned groups in Syria" was [denied](#) by Iraqi Prime Minister [Haider al-Abadi](#), who stated on June 11 that the money remains in the Iraqi central bank.

For its part, Saudi Arabia decried a statement attributed to Qatari Emir [Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani](#), which appeared on the state-owned Qatar News Agency. During a graduation speech for national guard officers at the Al Udeid base, Al Thani purportedly praised Iran and criticized the Gulf states that see the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization. Qatar explained that the website had been hacked "an assertion the [FBI later supported](#)" and that Al Thani had made no such statements.

Amid all these claims and counter-claims, some observers argue that Donald Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia on May 20 represented a key moment in the campaign against Qatar, alleging that Trump gave Saudi Arabia and the UAE the green light. Indeed, one of his characteristically eloquent tweets [seems to confirm this](#), as the president bragged that the blockade came out of his meetings in Riyadh.

Not everyone in Washington, however, fully supports Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Other officials "notably Rex

Tillerson" are calling for an easing of the blockade and a peaceful solution. The United Kingdom's foreign secretary, Boris Johnson, also weighed in, calling for an end to the conflict while also stating that Qatar "urgently needs to do more to address support for extremist groups."

Interneecine squabbling is nothing new for the Gulf's fractious ruling families, but the decision to isolate Qatar marks a significant escalation. How should we understand the blockade in the context of wider developments in the Middle East, particularly in the wake of the Arab uprisings? Do these events mark an irreconcilable schism in Gulf politics or a fundamental shift in the historic patterns of American alliances in the region?

Shared Interests and Rivalries

We cannot understand the current conflict without analyzing the wider regional integration project, embodied in the [Gulf Cooperation Council \(GCC\)](#). Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman established this organization two years after the 1979 Iranian revolution and at the beginning of the war between Iraq and Iran that would last until 1988.

At the time, the GCC was widely seen as an American-backed response to these regional upheavals, designed to establish a security umbrella across the six member states, which the United States would encourage, equip, and oversee.

Not only do these states have rich oil and gas resources "the ultimate explanation for the United States' interest in such an alliance" but they also share similar structures, marked by authoritarian ruling families and a labor force that primarily consists of largely rightless temporary migrant workers "a feature often forgotten in the flurry of media discussion about the Gulf over the past few weeks. The GCC's integration project reflected these states' collective interests, which are uniquely aligned with Western powers.

The relationship between the United States, other Western powers, and the GCC has strengthened considerably since 1981, as Qatar's [Al Udeid air base demonstrates](#).

Now over fourteen years old, Al Udeid hosts over ten thousand American troops and is the United States' largest overseas airbase. As the forward headquarters of Special Operations Central Command and Air Forces Central Command, Qatar helps coordinate the United States' military footprint throughout the region, including in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The United States also runs its principal naval base from Bahrain, home to the Naval Forces Central Command and Fifth Fleet. More than twenty thousand American military personnel are stationed throughout the rest of the Gulf.

The sale of military equipment to the Gulf by the United States and European nations, particularly the United Kingdom and France, is closely linked to this military presence. Trump's recent visit to Saudi Arabia put this aspect of the US-Saudi relationship on display: the dealmaker-in-chief reportedly signed contracts for more than one hundred billion dollars. (The precise values remain disputed, as they are largely based on letters of intent and include deals agreed upon with the Obama administration.)

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's Arms and Military Expenditure Program, nearly 20% of world military imports went to GCC nations in 2015; Saudi Arabia and the UAE ranked first and fifth. Saudi Arabia and the UAE accounted for 80% of all GCC military imports that year, but Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman also appear on the list of the world's top forty importing countries. The GCC's share of the global market has more than doubled since 2011, and it has become the largest market for weapons in the world.

These purchases recycle a portion of the Gulf's petrodollar surpluses to the companies that produce the world's military hardware. The GCC not only hosts American forces, but it also pays

handsomely for the privilege.

The Gulf's Political Economy

But the significance of the GCC project extends beyond protecting an exclusive club of oil-rich monarchies and maintaining the region's role as forward headquarters for American military power in the Middle East, Central Asia, and East Africa.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the institutional framework laid down by the GCC encouraged the six member states to devise a much closer political and economic alignment, an arrangement often compared to the European Union. The last two decades have seen considerable progress toward this goal: increased levels of pan-GCC capital flows, a move toward standardized taxes and tariffs for imported goods, policies that encourage the free movement of citizen labor, and more unified political institutions. A common currency, the khaleeji, was even proposed.

This regional integration process supports the [specific form of capitalism](#) GCC states share. The large Gulf conglomerates (both state and privately owned) that dominate the Gulf's political economy operate across Gulf borders, and "similar to the European Union" are also marked by a pronounced interpenetration of capital ownership structures across different Gulf states.

Importantly, however "and this helps us understand the latest conflicts in the region" this integration project did not extinguish the members' rivalries or competitive tensions. A sharp hierarchy of political and economic power has marked the GCC since its inception, with the main pivot revolving around a Saudi-UAE axis.

These two countries have become the primary sites of capital accumulation, and firms from Saudi Arabia and the UAE dominate the GCC economy in the real estate, finance, trade, logistics, telecommunications, petrochemicals, and manufacturing

sectors. There are also significant cross-border investments between Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

This axis is not without its own tension "reflected, for example, in the Emirati rejection of the Saudi-backed unified currency project in 2009" but their political alignment has developed alongside their economic ties.

Bahrain is closely integrated into this axis as a junior partner. Its ruling [Al Khalifa monarchy](#) depends on Saudi financial, political, and military support, as the 2011 uprisings clearly demonstrated.

This sub-alliance influences how other GCC states relate to the rest of the world, a feature clearly illustrated by the region's trade patterns. Due to relatively low levels of non-hydrocarbon manufacturing and small agricultural sectors, the GCC relies heavily on imports. The Saudi-UAE axis mediates these shipments: they bring goods in, then re-export them to other states, sometimes after value-added processing.

Food imports are of particular importance. The four other GCC states import more food from Saudi Arabia and the UAE combined than from any other country in the world. In 2015, Saudi Arabia and the UAE each ranked as either the first or second food exporter to every one of the other GCC states.

Remarkably "particularly since these figures include major wheat and meat exporters, including the United States, India, Brazil, and Australia" Saudi Arabia and the UAE were responsible for 53% of the total food export value to Oman, 36% to Qatar, 34% to Bahrain, and 24% to Kuwait.

These trends not only underscore the importance of placing the Saudi-UAE axis at the center of our understanding of the rest of the Gulf, but they also help explain the potential effects of the current blockade.

The Regional Scale

Dominated by this Saudi-UAE axis,

the other smaller states have played a more marginal role in the Gulf's political economy. With a tiny citizen population (only 313,000 citizens out of a total population of 2.6 million, an astonishing 12% of the country) and enormous wealth from its vast natural gas reserves, Qatar has particularly chafed at this hierarchical structure.

On a per capita basis, it is the richest country in the world – with 17.5% of its citizen households worth more than one million dollars – yet it has largely been denied a place in the GCC's wider political and economic structures, muscled out by its bigger neighbors.

Limited by the size of their domestic markets and flush with surplus capital from nearly fifteen years of rising oil and gas prices, a key consequence of these internal competitive hierarchies has been the attempt by all Gulf states to grow beyond the GCC's borders. Large private and state-backed conglomerates have expanded their operations globally, investing in real estate, financial institutions, emerging technologies, agribusiness, and other sectors. While all GCC states have participated in this process, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar have led the way.

Although Gulf capital flows have largely concentrated on North America and Europe, the Middle East has also become an important target. As Arab states opened their markets and liberalized key economic sectors – a process led by the World Bank's neoliberal poster child, [Mubarak's Egypt](#) – Gulf capital took a leading role throughout the 2000s in buying up privatized assets (often through corrupt deals with state elites) and benefitting from the market opening that followed in the wake of neoliberal reform.

From 2003 to 2015, GCC states accounted for a remarkable 42.5% of total new foreign direct investment (FDI) in other Arab nations. In this period, around half of all foreign investments in Jordan, Egypt, Libya, Lebanon, Palestine, and Tunisia came from the Gulf. Further, from 2010 to 2015, European, Gulf, and North American investors spent just over twenty billion euros on mergers and

acquisitions in the Arab World. The GCC share made up almost half, at 44.7%.

As stunning as these figures are, they actually understate the level of internationalization. They do not include, for example, the considerable levels of bilateral aid from the Gulf, nor do they necessarily incorporate Gulf firms' portfolio investments in regional stock markets.

As this process unfolded, the GCC's political role became increasingly prominent. The Gulf not only drove the construction of a regional order marked by authoritarian states and liberalized economies, but also benefited from it. All of this occurred under the auspices of Western powers and international financial institutions.

As this process drew the GCC states closer together, it also intensified their rivalries. One of the most important manifestations of this tension came when Qatar attempted to adopt an autonomous regional policy, relatively independent of Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Qatar began sponsoring different political forces – the Muslim Brotherhood, [Hamas](#), and the [Taliban](#) – and hosting a variety of exiled dissidents – the Egyptian cleric [Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi](#), who hosts popular television shows on Qatari channels, and the Palestinian intellectual [Azmi Bishara](#). Qatar also used its extensive media network to promote itself as a regional force, notably through [Al Jazeera](#) and its affiliates and, more recently, the daily newspaper and TV channel [Al-Araby Al-Jadeed](#), launched in early 2015.

The Arab uprisings that began in Tunisia in late 2010 [accentuated these divisions](#), but they also emphasized the Gulf's shared interests. By profoundly threatening the regional order and its authoritarian regimes, the uprisings presented the GCC states with a sharp challenge: how to head off the popular movements and reconstitute the authoritarian, neoliberal order? Each state had a common interest in this counterrevolutionary process, but their responses differed along the lines described above.

Qatar supported forces allied with the Muslim Brotherhood, while Saudi Arabia and the UAE looked toward people like [Abdel Fattah el-Sisi](#) in Egypt and former CIA asset [Khalifa Haftar](#) in Libya. A contradictory and rapidly changing constellation of alliances formed around the GCC's common interests and their internal rivalries.

Qatar supported the Saudi-led intervention in Bahrain, participated in the war against Yemen, and, in Syria, opposed its supposed new ally, Iran. In Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Palestine, however, Qatar tended to back rival factions. The lines blur even in these cases: Qatar expressed support for Sisi following the 2013 coup, despite its clear alliance with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.

These diverging alliances also extend to other participants in the current blockade; Sisi's Egypt, for example, [supports](#) the Assad regime in Syria, lining up with Iran but against Saudi Arabia, despite its almost complete dependence on the Saudi-UAE axis.

The key point, often overlooked in the media commentary on the blockade, is that there are no principled political positions involved in these alliances – this is about calculated expediency and a pragmatic assessment by each state of how best to further their regional influence, always within the framework of reordering the region in a way amenable to their collective political and economic power.

We need to keep both these tendencies in mind when we assess the current situation. A strong unanimity of interests underpins the Gulf states' position on top of the regional order, a situation fully supported by – and in full support of – Western powers. Simultaneously, the GCC is split by rivalries and competition, reflected in the members' different visions of how to maintain their shared interests.

The Question of

Israel

In the wake of the Arab uprisings, we are now seeing an assertion of both of these tendencies. Specifically, the current blockade is a play by Saudi Arabia and the UAE to fully assert their hegemony over the region and to put Qatar back in its place.

But this is not just about Saudi Arabia and the UAE; it fundamentally expresses a general counterrevolutionary process that has been present since the beginning of the uprisings – restoring the status quo of authoritarian neoliberal states that has served the interests of the GCC as a whole (including Qatar) for several decades. All of this must also be seen through the lens of the Gulf's continued and ever-strengthening alliance with the US and other Western powers.

Within this process, the place of Israel plays a key role. Since the 1990s, American regional policy has sought to bring the GCC and Israel closer together, [normalizing economic and political relations](#) between the two pillars of US power in the region. Since the Arab uprising, this rapprochement has appeared more and more likely.

It is no accident that Trump's first international trip had him visit Saudi Arabia and then Israel (flying directly between the two), a travel schedule that perfectly illustrates the United States' strategic priorities in the region. Despite the [Arab League's](#) long-standing boycott of relations with Israel, the Gulf region (particularly the Saudi-UAE axis) and Israel agree on key political questions, and both sides are actively seeking to build closer ties.

In late March 2017, Haaretz reported that the UAE and Israel participated in [joint military exercises](#) in Greece alongside the United States and several European countries. This was not their first collaboration: a year earlier, Israel, the UAE, Spain, and Pakistan participated in [Red Flag](#), an aerial combat training exercise that took place in Nevada.

In late November 2015, Israel opened

a diplomatic office in the UAE's capital city, Abu Dhabi, as part of the International Renewable Energy Agency – the first time an official Israeli diplomatic presence appeared in that country. Bloomberg Businessweek reported in February 2017 that the office [could act as an embassy](#) for Israel's expanding ties in the Gulf.

Israeli security firms have reportedly [set up more than \\$6 billion](#) worth of security infrastructure in the UAE; this comes after Israel sold an estimated \$300 million worth of military technology to the Gulf nation in 2011.

Israeli high-tech military and security firms are also [active in Saudi Arabia](#), where they are purportedly helping Saudi Aramco set up cyber-security, selling advanced missile systems, and even conducting public opinion research for the royal family. Israeli media has stated that the country has offered the Saudis its Iron Dome military technology to defend against attacks from Yemen.

These once-clandestine relationships are now being spoken about openly. The Times of Israel reported in June 2015 that Saudi Arabia and Israel [had held five secret meetings](#) since early 2014. In May 2015, then-director general of the Israeli ministry of foreign affairs, [Dore Gold](#), appeared publicly with retired Saudi general Anwar Eshki. The next year, Eshki visited Israel to meet with the former spokesperson for the Israeli Defense Forces and current coordinator of government activities in the territories, Major General [Yoav Mordechai](#).

It shouldn't come as a surprise, then, that Israel supports the blockade against Qatar. But that doesn't mean Qatar hasn't also tried to normalize its relations with Israel. Like the other GCC states, Qatar's involvement in Palestine has been designed to guarantee itself a better seat at the table – a goal the Israelis have happily supported when it serves their interests.

In 1996, Qatar permitted Israel to open a trade office in Doha, making it the only Gulf state to maintain official

relations with Israel at that time. Although the office closed following Israel's bombardment of Gaza in 2008, Qatar has repeatedly offered to re-establish ties in return for being allowed to supply financial and material aid to Gaza. An Israeli trade delegation that [visited Qatar in 2013](#) reportedly learned that Qatar was interested in investing in the Israeli high-tech sector.

Qatar is the only GCC state that admits Israeli visitors and has allowed Israeli athletes to participate in sporting and cultural events. In 2013, Qatar chaired the Arab League meeting that changed the 2002 peace initiative to allow Israel to keep its settlement blocs in any final agreement. [Tzipi Livni](#), the Israeli justice minister, described the development as "[very positive](#)." And in early February 2017, Muhammad al-Imadi, head of Doha's national committee for the reconstruction of Gaza, [claimed that](#) "he maintains excellent ties" with Israeli political and military officials.

All of these trends indicate that none of the Gulf states – including Qatar – should be viewed in any way as a reliable ally or friend of the Palestinian struggle. But the current tensions in the Gulf also hold potentially important implications for political power in Palestine.

[Mohammed Dahlan's](#) increasing political influence speaks to this possibility. Dahlan, a [Fatah](#) factional leader some believe will replace [Abu Mazen](#) (the current head of the Ramallah-based [Palestinian Authority](#)), lives in Abu Dhabi, and the UAE has long supported him politically and financially. He has close ties to Israel and the United States and has become their preferred candidate to succeed the octogenarian Mazen.

Although rivalries within Fatah may cut Dahlan's rise short, his growing importance points to how the current tensions in the Gulf might realign the power balance in neighboring areas.

Future Directions

Not all GCC states or regional actors support the current blockade. At the

time of writing, Oman has allowed Qatar-bound ships to use its ports, and Kuwait has been engaged in frantic diplomatic efforts to calm the tensions. Only Bahrain has stood fully behind Saudi Arabia and the UAE, largely thanks to the Al Khalifa monarchy's long-standing dependence on Saudi Arabia.

Turkey has offered to send troops to a Turkish military base in Qatar, and Iran has pledged to send food and water to overcome the closure of Qatar's sole land border with Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia's attempts to recruit other countries with large Muslim populations "such as Senegal, Niger, Djibouti, and Indonesia" have largely failed. Arab countries like Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia have also rejected the blockade.

In light of these disputes, we should remember what the GCC represents as a whole. This bloc of states is fully integrated into a US-aligned regional power structure, has massively benefited from neoliberal reforms in

the Arab world, and has become more and more intertwined with the region's political dynamics.

These states share an interest in preserving their regional position and their long-standing political structures. These commitments outweigh the potential benefits of fracturing the project. Likewise, the West and Israel want to see the GCC hold together, as it has served their interests so well over recent decades.

Despite the current schisms, some kind of negotiated solution that sees Qatar defer to the Saudi-UAE axis and accept diminished regional influence is the most likely outcome.

This settlement would ultimately strengthen the Saudi-UAE axis and help consolidate the counterrevolution; it would also likely precipitate a realignment of political power in places like Tunisia, Libya, and Palestine.

But the Left must realize that none of Qatar's putative allies "specifically Turkey and Iran" represent a

progressive alternative for the region. While they may be lined up against the Saudi-UAE front in this context, these states have participated in the post-2011 counterrevolutionary process just as enthusiastically as their rivals.

Perhaps the most important lesson of the current crisis is that we must avoid simplistic readings of the Middle East, especially those based on the notion that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend."

It would be utterly foolish to consider Qatar, Turkey, or Iran as representative of some progressive realignment just because they happen to be "at least for the moment" on the wrong side of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Israel. Jostling for regional power sparked these tensions and produced all sorts of contradictory and shaky political alliances, but none of the states involved represent any kind of political alternative worthy of the Left's support.

[Jacobin](#)

Statement of condemnation and clarification by the Socialist Forum

17 July 2017, by Socialist Forum

On Friday June 30th, 2017 at dawn, a faction of the Lebanese Army raided two Syrian refugee camps (Nawar and Qareiah) in the town of Aarsal, in what was officially designated as a "preventive raid" in search of "terrorists" based in the camp.

As a result, several people were killed, amongst them a child, and several soldiers were wounded due to a suicide bombing inside the camps. This was followed by the arrest of more than 350 Syrian refugees based on their alleged potential link to "terrorist" organizations. Soon after, photos of the detained held under inhumane conditions and subject to

torture and humiliation, were circulated in the press.

A few days later, on Tuesday, July 4, 2017, the army announced that four Syrians who had been arrested during the raids on the camps on Friday (June 30th) died in detention as a result of "chronic diseases and climatic conditions." However, the images that were circulated through social media channels clearly revealed bruises, wounds and the effects of torture on the bodies of the victims.

The Army's statement about the circumstances that led to the death of the detainees was rendered even more dubious when they exerted pressure

on the families of the victims to bury the bodies immediately, without the right to a coronary or forensic examination, access to lawyers, or even photographing the deceased.

In addition, the Military Intelligence intervened on July 7th, 2017 to disrupt a judicial decision issued by the Judge for Urgent Matters in Zahle, authorizing the examination of samples from the autopsies. Military intelligence personnel confiscated the evidence held at Hotel Dieu hospital from the lawyer granted power of attorney by the families of the victims, in a clear case of judicial obstruction by the military courts in order to

withhold evidence related to civilians who were not definitively shown to have been involved with any terrorist associations.Â

This attack on Syrian refugees is not the first of its kind. It indicates a dangerous escalation within the framework of an organized racist campaign against refugee populations by ruling class parties, who are using various state apparatuses in Lebanon to impose curfews, close the border to those fleeing the war in Syria and deprive them of their most basic rights, which are universally guaranteed under international law. Furthermore, the General Security has imposed impossible conditions for the renewal of residency permits since the beginning of 2015. These conditions are only aimed at turning refugees into illegal aliens, making them easier to exploit and increasing the precarity of their living conditions. This policy of limiting mobility has gone hand in hand with raids, evictions and arbitrary arrests over the last two years, as well as the continuing threat of forcible repatriation to a country still embroiled in war.

Within this context, a large group of Lebanese activists gathered on July 13, 2017 to organize a solidarity rally for Syrian refugees, against racism, and against the repression that occurred following the events in Aarsal. The goal was to attempt to restore, and strengthen, the relations between Lebanese and Syrians, hoping to counter the discourse of hatred and racism. The Socialist Forum called for a sit-in in solidarity with Syrian refugees to take place on Tuesday July 18th, 2017 at the Samir Kassir Square in Beirut. Three members of the organisation were in charge of getting the permit clearance from the Municipality of Beirut, following the usual legal procedures for organizing a protest in Lebanon. However, given the atmosphere of fear and intimidation that followed the widespread incitement campaign that was launched by a shady intelligence Facebook page called the "Syrian People's Union in Lebanon", and taking into account the numerous

threats received by some of the organizers, the Socialist Forum decided to cancel the sit-in.

However, it is important for us to clarify that contrary to what is being circulated in the media and on some social media platforms, the Socialist Forum is not attempting to incite against the Lebanese Army. As per its statement on July 13, 2017, the Socialist Forum is simply asking for:

1. A transparent and independent investigation to uncover the causes of the suspects' deaths.
2. A strict public accountability for all those involved in torture, murder, and other forms of abuse.
3. Revealing the fate of the remaining arbitrary detainees, their release and compensation.
4. The end of the exploitation of the refugee issue for political manipulation, and to stop treating it as a security threat.
5. Abolishing all racist decisions against refugees, and the end of practices that forces them to return against their will to brutal killings and massacres, as the regional and international community remains suspiciously and criminally silent.

We, at the Socialist Forum, condemn all the rumours and accusations made against our comrades in the media and through social media or social networking platforms. We strongly condemn the leaking of the protest permit request document from the Beirut Municipality which mentions the names of three comrades and their telephone numbers. We also condemn the bias media coverage and the circulation of the a names and photos (and Facebook pages) of our comrades by many of the local television channels. The circulation of this leaked document has put the three activists under serious and severe danger reaching death threats. The Socialist Forum would like to point out that Beirut Governor, Ziad Chebib, specified to the news that the protest permit request has nothing to do with the "Syrian People's Union in Lebanon", and that the protest

request had no mention of the Lebanese Army, but was rather planned as a sit-in against racism towards the refugees, as opposed to what rumours are claiming.

Despite the fact that the Socialist Forum has organized numerous solidarity meetings with Syrian refugees over the years, this is the first time that the call for a sit-in has received so many open threats. We believe that this incitement is aimed at paving the way for an all-out war in Aarsal, and imposing a deal with the Syrian regime within the framework of a settlement that would require the forcible transfer of Syrian refugees to so-called "safe-zones" within Syria.

Therefore:

1. We categorically reject any alterations to the objectives of the sit-in that puts it in the context of a confrontation against the Lebanese Army, especially that the Socialist Forum has previously condemned the bombings that targeted the Lebanese Army in Aarsal on June 30, 2017. It also condemned the kidnapping of the soldiers and security forces in that region and called on the Lebanese state to take responsibility on this issue.
2. We call for the Beirut Municipality to provide an explanation for the publication of the permit request document in such a way, to cause incitement and marginalization, and we hold it responsible for any harm that might be inflicted on members of our political organization.
3. We ask media outlets to circulate a clarification containing the accurate statements and information, including the calls for the sit-in and this clarification statement.
4. The Socialist Forum shall resort to the Lebanese judiciary at any time it sees fit to prevent any bodily or physical harm on its members .

The Socialist Forum in Lebanon

Beirut

16-07-2017

China's Ancient Labor Party

16 July 2017, by **Au Loong-Yu**

Mozi is worth remembering because he represents the highest form of political consciousness of craftsmen and other lower classes in Ancient China. Since the demise of his school, for two thousand years, although there had been lots of toilers' rebellions, they had never been able to attain the level of Mozi and his disciples. One reason for this was that the political and cultural intolerance imposed by the highly centralized absolutist state since the Qin Dynasty made alternative political thinking, let alone those that represented the working people, nearly impossible to thrive.

Unfortunately this is a similar situation to that which today's Chinese working people are facing. Thanks to the Great Leap Forward of industrialization, however, their material conditions today are far better than their counterparts in ancient China. Therefore, in the long run today's working class is more equipped in their fight for emancipation. I believe that future generations of the labor movement could draw a lot of inspiration from reading and learning from Mozi's school.

Taiwanese scholar Wang Zanyuan has said that of the pre-Qin dynasty philosophers, while almost all concentrated on social, political, ethical and other values, only Mozi was similar to Western philosophers and, in addition to the above, his knowledge also crossed into metaphysics, epistemology and moral philosophy. He was also a Western style scientist and philosopher. [86]

The two scholars Zheng Jiewen and Zhang Qian have said that Mozi's writings, a short ten thousand words of ink alone, covering philosophy, logic, psychology, politics, ethics, education and natural science, should qualify as an encyclopedia. [87]

Ancient Chinese education lacked instruction in science and production technology. Confucius once rebutted his disciple who wanted to learn the skill of farming as degrading himself from being a part of the gentry to the status of "little people." Mozi's writing is so remarkable in contrast because it contains so much, including technological knowledge.

It is of course worth commemorating him on the May 1st Labor Day because he was a man of praxis and therefore also a politician, military strategist and engineer. It is also possible to say that he was the founder of an ancient labor party.

A Civilian Peacekeeping Force

Mozi lived during the late Spring and Autumn period (770-476 BC) at about the same time as Confucius or shortly afterwards, possibly between 468-376 BC. In the 294 years during the Spring and Autumn period there were 297 wars. These were often provoked by large states exterminating smaller ones. But regardless of whether they were from the large or the small states, ordinary people were the victims.

This provides the background to Mozi's "fei gong," or "against military aggression," which became his most famous doctrine. He was not a pacifist who opposed all wars, even including self-defense wars. Mozi opposed wars of aggression, but not only supported wars of self-defense but also led his disciples to help small states to defend themselves.

The most famous of Mozi's stories is stopping the King of Chu from attacking the small state of Song, which was recorded in the chapter of

"Mozi - Gongsu." King Chu wanted to attack the Song state, and was glad that one of Mozi's classmates, Lu Ban, an excellent engineer in military affairs, decided to help him to make a special kind of ladder.

Upon hearing the news Mozi sent his disciples to defend the Song state while he himself immediately travelled to the Chu state to speak with King Chu. When he met with King Chu he first played a war game with his classmate and defeated him. [88]

"I know how to beat you," Lu Ban said slanderously when pausing for a while, "but I will not tell you how."

"I know how you will beat me," replied Mozi calmly, "but I will not tell you how."

"What are you two talking about?" asked King Chu, surprised.

"Lu Ban's meaning is that if he kills me then no one can stop you from attacking Song," replied Mozi turning towards the King. "However, around three hundred of my students have travelled to Song city with defence equipment and are waiting for the enemy from Chu state. Therefore killing me serves no purpose at all."

Therefore King Chu had no option but to give up his attack on the Song state. [89]

From the People, For the People

Mozi's advocacy opposing military aggression came from his higher level thought, being completely dedicated to working people's interests. Although there is no direct and inevitable relationship between class origin and thought, it does not mean that they are unrelated.

Mozi is an example of this. Although

Mozi's distant ancestors were nobles, [90] after many generations his family had been reduced to the status of common people. He himself was an outstanding craftsman who according to legend built the first mechanical flying bird "which in ancient times, however, meant that he belonged to the humble craftsman class.

The majority of his disciples were also ordinary working people, mostly craftsmen. This is what distinguishes him from the majority of pre-Qin dynasty philosophers who had higher class origins, and why Mozi stressed the position of working people.

Throughout his book he criticised the rulers for victimizing the poor who stole a dog or a pig as evildoers, while on the other hand the rulers stealing a country made them "righteous." He further made the accusation that "the wealthy live in luxury while the poor freeze in winter as they have no clothes on."

Mozi always spoke out strongly for ordinary people and repeatedly said, "The people suffer from three evils: those who starve are denied food, those who are freezing are denied clothing, and those who labor are denied rest."

Love and Redistribution of Wealth

There are two kinds of resistance by the poor. At the end of the Qin dynasty Liu Bang, a lowest-ranking official, violently rebelled against the Qin dynasty, but he only fought against the emperor in order to be made the emperor. This is similar to the current "localist" leaders in Hong Kong.

But Mozi did not think in this way. He wanted equality and fraternity to replace society's law of the jungle. His advocacy of "universal love" and "mutual benefit" were concerned with bringing fraternity into play.

He argued that the root of social turmoil originates from the disappearance of fraternity and the rise of inequality, resulting in the

occupation of high government posts by incompetent nobles who led extravagant lifestyles.

In opposition to hereditary power and wealth of the nobles he advocated Shangxian (employment of worthy people) and "Jieyong" (moderation of expenditure).

That people do not love one another is firstly reflected in the way that rulers do not care for the people and how big countries bully smaller countries. The wise do not use their wisdom to promote public happiness and instead use it to bully people.

Mozi criticized this, saying "big states attack small states, big families bully small families, the strong rob the weak, the nobles look down upon common people, those who are cunning cheat the less wise."

To stop this requires the promotion of universal love. In the chapter "Shangxian" he puts forward a kind of political logic that is contrary to the law of the jungle that is also working under capitalism:

"The strong should be forthcoming in helping others, the rich should share their wealth, those who are knowledgeable should teach others. With this new order of society those who are hungry shall have food, those who feel cold shall have clothes, and then social turmoil shall give way to social peace."

In the chapter "Jingshuo," an opponent of universal love asks the question, "you advocate universal love but you do not know how many people there are in the world, so to say that you love all the people in the world is against logic."

This question was rather drastic, as it challenged Mozi's logical premise. Mozi's witty reply turned the tables on his critic:

"Yes, I do not know the size of the world's population but that does not prevent me from loving all the people in the world. Go ahead and ask a person if I love that person, I will say I do love that person. If you are able to ask about each person in the world, I will be able to love all the people of the whole world."

Ancient China was not without revolutions, but revolutions such as those led by Chen Sheng and Wu Guang (peasant leaders who overthrew the Qin dynasty) only wanted to change the emperor after all. Mozi on the other hand proposed bold changes to the class system, breaking the feudal era bloodline theory.

He criticized the idea of blue blood and put forward the idea of Shangxian, or qualification by merit. "The officials should not enjoy life-long high status. Similarly common people should not always stay at low social status. Those who are capable should be promoted; those who are not should be demoted." (Shangxian, part 1)

According to the late Qing scholar Liang Qichao, there is a sentence in Mozi's book that may be understood as arguing for a social contract between the people and the kings, and it is only this that gives legitimacy to the King. This interpretation is criticized by Wang Zanyuan, however. He thinks that the sentence should be interpreted as "the King is meant to constrain his subjects," an explanation that is completely the opposite. [91]

There is no need to dwell on this battle of words here. In short, Mozi and his group were the only ones at that time to stand in the position of ordinary people and to have a complete vision of social transformation. They were without a doubt the political organisation that was promoting the most progressive program.

Why Call Mozi's Group a Labor Party?

Some people say that Mozi's advocacy is spiritual and concerns in "heavenly destiny" and that his group should therefore be regarded as religious. Zheng Jiewen and Zhang Qian disagree. They say that although Mozi respected the heavens and ghosts, he did not lead people to an unknown spiritual world and instead was concerned with reality and actively

transforming society. Therefore although Mohism appears to contain religious belief it is not actually a religion. [92]

We can say that Mozi's group was an ancient labor party due to the following reasons:

1. They were mostly laboring class in their social composition.

2. They possessed a comprehensive social transformation program, from its fundamental principles for governing (universal love and re-distribution of wealth), Shangxian (the employment of worthy people), and thrift and free will theory applied to political lobbying methods and military knowledge, etc.

3. They actively struggled for political and military power in order to implement their program, sending students to different states to become officials in order to promote Mozi's ideas and to help small states to defend themselves and to resist against larger states.

4. Not only did each member hold a position in accordance with their own abilities but they also had organisational discipline. Disciples had to pay a "party fee" and if any disciple violated the group's "program," the leaders of Mozi's group could recall them from their government positions.

5. This party was also a military organization which had strict fighting discipline. One classic book recorded that they had 180 well-trained warriors who were ready to die for the cause. Volumes 14 and 15 of the book Mozi were also about military science and knowledge. From the defence of a city and methods on how to provide military training to make all of the people become soldiers, details are provided.

It is clear that Mozi's group had actual combat experience and were not just scholars. Mozi's later disciple, Meng Sheng, upon failing to defend a city

inspired 183 people to face martyrdom (see details below).

Why Mozi's Ideas Did Not Spread

Mohism had a lot of influence during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods. However, although Mozi's writings have continued to be circulated until today, after the Warring States period Mozi's group completely disappeared from China.

Among the reasons for this is first of course that the theory of representing the interest of the working people was vigorously attacked by monarchs, nobles and scholars. The upper classes at this time hated this doctrine and practice.

Mozi opposed the extravagance and waste of the upper classes, and this drew the attack of Confucius's student Xunzi who criticized Mozi's teaching as "advocacy of the lowest laboring classes."

Mencius even more viciously attacked Mozi's theory of universal love for defying the moral of loving one's father and therefore as being a theory of animals, because for Confucianism there cannot be universal love as love must necessarily be hierarchal according to status.

Another reason that Mohism did not continue to spread was that Mozi's group were loyal citizen soldiers. This can be seen from the story of Mozi's group defending the city of Yang Chengjun. Many years after Mozi died, the leader of Mozi's group was Meng Sheng. He was good friends with the feudal lord Yangchengjun and when the latter went away he asked Meng Sheng to defend the city.

Later Yangchengjun's overlord the King of Chu took away the city from him during a fierce power struggle. Meng Sheng was unable to defend the city, and was so ashamed that he told his disciples that they needed to die in

martyrdom. Disciple Xu Ru advised Meng Sheng that their deaths would not bring any benefit to the ruler of Yangcheng and that it would result in the death of Mohism. Meng Sheng answered:

"If I do not die then from today onwards those seeking strict teachers will not choose Mohism anymore, those seeking friends will not choose Mohism anymore, and those seeking good ministers will also avoid choosing Mohism. I will die in order to practice the principles of Mohism so that it can continue. I will now pass on the position of leader of Mozi's group to Tian Xiangzi. So there is no need to fear that Mohism will not continue to be passed on."

When Meng Sheng died, 182 disciples also martyred themselves. Only two disciples were spared to go as messengers to find Tian Xiangxi. After listening to their account, Tian Xiangzi appealed to them to stay but the two disciples refused and returned to also die as martyrs.

Mohism did not fail because of this loss. But it is not difficult to see why the ruling classes could not tolerate a working people's military organisation such as that of Mozi's group for long. They were only able to survive in a period where there were still a lot of smaller states existing side by side with big states.

When China entered its Warring Period where eventually only seven big states remained, Mozi's group was already disappearing together with many small states. At the time of unification by the Qin dynasty Mohism was definitely destroyed forever as the emperor made very clear that even civilians bearing arms and practising military skills were not to be tolerated.

Similarly, in the following two thousand years of empire, no Mohist style egalitarian labor party and civilian "peacekeeping force" would ever be tolerated either.

[Against the Current](#)

Deadly fires in Portugal: the eucalyptus business and European austerity stand accused

15 July 2017, by João Camargo

The images of the violent fire that devastated central Portugal for several days this week, following a dry storm, have raised many questions. The unprecedented human drama - 64 dead, more than 200 injured - constitutes a challenge, in the midst of the ashes, burnt-out cars and charred bodies along National Highway 236, to the public policies carried out in recent years in a country regularly confronted with forest fires.

After the crisis of 2008 and with the blessing of the Troika which arrived in 2011, politicians accelerated the "liberalization and dismantling" of forest management and protection services, in favour of a very profitable monoculture launched in the 1980s: the cultivation of eucalyptus trees, sharply criticized in the pages of the daily *Público* by João Camargo, researcher at the Institute of Social Sciences of Lisbon (ICS-UL).

This specialist in climate change explains for *Marianne* the obsession with "deficits" and the pressures of the magnates of the paper industry who flourish on the banks of the Tagus.

What climatic factors were involved in the fire of Pedrógão Grande?

João Camargo: There was a combination of the above-average temperatures (5 to 7 degrees more) recorded on Saturday 17 June when the fire started, the very strong winds and the ground affected by the drought. .

Pedrógão Grande is also located in a thinly inhabited area, marked by the rural exodus, where the cultivation of eucalyptus is dominant... It is a kind of perfect cocktail that led to the worst outcome. The phenomenon is not new: in 2003-2005, Portugal had two

apocalyptic years, very hot. At that time huge areas were on fire [in 2016, the country was also hard hit, especially the island of Madeira]. Compared to its neighbours with a similar climate

(Spain, Greece, Italy and even France), Portugal is the country whose territory has burned the most. The affected areas were then quickly replanted, essentially with eucalyptus, the specificity of which is to grow again fairly quickly, without needing much looking after. So the fires are part of a cycle: the trees burn, new ones are planted, they grow... and if nothing is done, they are ready to burn again...

You rightly denounced in the daily *Público*, on Monday, the scale of the cultivation of eucalyptus in Portugal, an industry that counts for a great deal in the economy of the country. Explain it to us.

João Camargo: In my opinion, there is a correlation between the increase in the number of fires and the expansion of eucalyptus cultivation in Portugal [an expansion of 13 per cent between 1995 and 2010]. Agricultural land has gradually given way to a forested area, dominated first by pines and then by eucalyptus. It was precisely during this transition that there was an increase in the number of fires, whose intensity also increased [the leaves, the bark and especially eucalyptus oil are highly inflammable]. Today, eucalyptus represents nearly 30 per cent of tree species in Portugal. As a result, according to the latest official figures, released in 2010, 9 per cent of the territory (more than 800.000 hectares) was then covered with eucalyptus. Only Brazil, India, Australia and China exceed this figure. In proportion, however, if we take into

account the area covered, Portugal is undoubtedly the country in the world with the most eucalyptus per square metre. This is partly due to the importance of the paper and pulp industry [mainly fueled by eucalyptus wood.], which represents one per cent of Portuguese GDP, despite the few direct jobs created.

According to you this industry has been lobbying and trying to influence legislators. How?

João Camargo: Take the controversial law decree n.º 96/2013, which liberalized considerably, in 2013 under the previous (right-wing) government, eucalyptus plantations. For example, for land of less than two hectares, a simple declaration is now sufficient for landowners wishing to invest in eucalyptus. However, this kind of land represents more than 80 per cent of the Portuguese forest area. All the environmental associations and other stakeholders, such as firefighters, denounced at the time this law, which also contributed to lifting some of the remaining restrictions. However, the present (left) government is now considering revoking the decree.

Nevertheless, the discussions that began almost a year ago were faced with huge opposition from the industrialists; who threatened to put an end to their investment in the country. The giant Navigator Company (formerly Portucel), the former public company that was privatized, is present in many countries [The Navigator Company recorded a turnover of 5.6 per cent in 2015, amounting to 1.6 billion euros]. Since then, the government, under pressure, has gradually softened its position on the subject.

Another element is the proposal to establish a "cadastro florestal", a centralized public register, in order to identify and list all the owners. This register does not exist today in Portugal. It is a scandal. It has been at least twenty years since governments promised to establish it, but the idea provokes a lot of resistance. Perhaps because we will discover that the number of owners who are unidentified, who have died, emigrated, etc., leaving their land abandoned, is even higher than expected; or that the land is exploited by third parties or even companies without authorization. [The owners of one third of the Portuguese forest areas have not been identified so far. The register being proposed would cost 700 million euros].

What impact has the crisis, especially the injunction from Brussels on deficits, had on forest

management and protection?

João Camargo: Portugal has stopped having a public forestry policy worthy of the name. One example is the successive cuts, first of all in the number of people employed [The number of forest rangers, for example, which had already begun to decline, fell from 1,200 under the previous left government to 317 last year, according to Francisco Louçã, from the Left Bloc]. The intervention of the Troika only accelerated this disengagement of the state; in addition it encouraged the liberalization of the sector. The forest guard corps, which is very active on the ground, was therefore dismantled, just like the old "Serviços florestais", a major entity responsible for the management and protection of the forest, which no longer existed as such before the arrival of the creditors but which was subsequently, under the

pressure of the Troika, severely restructured.

The Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture have in reality merged, and the "Serviços florestais", now called "Autoridade florestal nacional", have in turn been merged with the "Instituto da Conservação da Natureza. As a result, the number of people employed has decreased, the services are less specialized and less operational, especially in their capacity to carry out field operations. At the same time, in addition to these restructurings, the Troika has encouraged the government to liberalize not only labour and finance, but also the resources of the soil.

This interview was published in the French magazine [Marianne](#) on 22 June 2017. João Camargo was interviewed by Patricia Neves.

The struggle for abortion rights - from Simone Veil to the present day

14 July 2017, by **Suzy Rojzman**

Can you look back at the context in the early 1970s of the struggle which culminated with the passing of the so-called Veil law in 1975?

On the question of abortion, the 1920 law was still in force which forbade abortion and any propaganda in its favour, with the aim of boosting the population of the nation after World War 1. The right wing as a whole remained very hostile to abortion. The representations of women were completely traditional: they should remain at home to look after children, the pressure of the reactionary Church was very significant.

What is revealing on the period is for example that the Neuwirth law on contraception was voted through in 1967, but the decrees of application only came out in 1972. There were obviously many clandestine abortions.

Women who had money had abortions in Switzerland under good conditions. Others had them in much worse conditions, with medical consequences which could be very serious for health. But in any case, a woman who wanted an abortion did it.

In the last few days, homage has been correctly paid to the personal courage of Simone Veil who in particular had to confront her own camp [93], but little has been said on the mobilisation - which was nonetheless essential - in favour of abortion with in particular the role played by the Mouvement pour la liberté de l'avortement et de la contraception [MLAC - Movement for Freedom of Abortion and Contraception].

It was a few years after May 1968 when there had not been any feminist

movement in the proper sense. Symbolically, the point of departure of the Mouvement de libération des femmes (MLF - Women's Liberation Movement) was the placing of a wreath to the wife of the unknown soldier at the Arc de triomphe in August 1970. In April 1971 the *Nouvel observateur* published the Manifesto of 343 women who stated that they had had abortions, a first gesture of civil disobedience: no signatory was prosecuted. Then in October and November 1972 there was the trial in Bobigny where a young girl from a working class background, Marie-Claire, was prosecuted for having had an abortion after being raped, as well as her mother and two women who had helped them. The lawyer was Gisèle Halimi and the trial became politicized around the demand for abortion. The verdict was a moral victory: Marie-Claire and the two

women who had helped here were released and nobody was imprisoned. Finally in February 1973, the Manifesto of the 331 doctors who stated they had carried out abortions was published – a new gesture of civil disobedience.

In April 1973, the MLAC was set up, in particular to ensure protection in case there were prosecutions of doctors. This became the main actor in the mobilisation, a very unitary force made up of feminists, lawyers, family planning activists, far left organisations, the MNEF, the CFDT and so on. There were between 300 and 400 autonomous committees across the country: where the right to abortion was demanded, it was practiced by the Karman method (by suction), collective trips abroad were organised, to England in particular, to have abortions. There was also a film which was banned but was shown all over France, *Histoire d'A*, to show an abortion by the Karman method. And obviously, there were also big demonstrations. It was a huge social movement.

And the government was obliged to respond, by changing the law.

On November 26, 1974, when Simone Veil made her first speech in the National Assembly, before highlighting the question of women in distress, clandestine abortions and so on, she first said that the 1920 law was ridiculous and that order had to be restored. As a woman of the right, she was caught between a big social movement and the reactionary right. So the government was obliged to legislate. It was in this context that she was able to confront the hard right, in the Assembly and outside of it.

The 1975 law is a compromise law, very restrictive. It was voted in for a trial period of five years and in 1979 it was necessary to go back on the streets. Abortion was not reimbursed. The period was very short, at ten weeks, nine if we add the week of reflection after the obligatory prior interviews. There were restrictions for foreigners who had to be resident for at least three months to have an abortion. For minors, the authorization of their parents was

necessary, and there was a special conscience clause for doctors.

It was then necessary to improve this law subsequently. There were street mobilizations in 1979 to confirm the law, with two demonstrations (one mixed and one non-mixed), with a real risk of going backwards. In 1982, it was necessary to force the reimbursement of abortion from the left wing government, as Bérégovoy, then minister of social affairs, was opposed to abortion. And later, we obtained new improvements in 2001 and 2014.

Abortion is then a right which now exists in France, but what threats exist to this?

The most significant threat is linked to hospital restructuring, with the HPST law which has restructured public hospitals, notably by closing local maternity units in where the CIVGs (abortion clinics) are often located. This poses problems in terms of having an abortion. So we demand the opening of abortion clinics, the lifting of the conscience clause for doctors, and an increase in the time limit, which is now twelve weeks.

Also there remains obviously the sword of Damocles: the anti-À-abortion activists who have never given up, entering abortion clinics, chaining themselves up, destroying files and so on. The Cadac (Coordination des associations pour le droit À l'avortement et À la contraception – Coordination of associations for abortion and contraception rights) has succeeded in making trying to prevent carrying out abortions an offence, but recently there have also been anti-abortion activists like “les Survivants”, Xavier Dor, SOS Tout petit, or Sens Commun – the latter are Fillon supporters who emerged from the Manif pour tous mobilization against gay marriage and chose in this context not to affirm their opposition to abortion, although they are of course against it. Having said that, it is complex: Marine Le Pen, in order to obtain the women's votes she needed, removed any reference to abortion from her presidential programme for 2017, while saying that she would ensure that the hindering of abortions would

no longer be an offence if she became president!

Beyond our frontiers, we see that mobilization for abortion rights also remains a necessity. What perspectives?

In 2014, there was a serious threat to abortion rights in Spain, with a response initially in the country then throughout Europe. In Paris, there were 30,000 demonstrators on February 1, 2014. Recently, there were mobilisations in Poland, where the government wants to tighten an already very restrictive law. There are countries like Ireland or Malta where abortion remains illegal, and many countries where there are all types of threats linked to austerity, as in France. Abortion is a subject for national legislations, and doesn't come under the remit of the European Union. It's a question which isn't dealt with in the charter of fundamental rights.

From these demonstrations of support an appeal has emerged, an international petition, with mobilisations across Europe around September 28. In particular, there will be a big demonstration in Brussels on September 28, an international day of struggle for abortion, with delegations from all over Europe. Beyond this, the question of perspectives, notably for 2018, the year of the European elections, remains posed.

Abortion - Women Decide!

This campaign, launched by the World March of Women, the Family Planning and the CADAC in France on the basis of an Appeal has been supported by feminist and human rights groups, trade unions and political organisations notably in France but in many other European countries. The multi-lingual site is here: [Abortion - Women Decide!](#) with the appeal in several languages as well as other campaign material.

Catalonia: The referendum and its previous lives

13 July 2017, by **Josep María Antentas**

1/ The referendum on independence for Catalonia scheduled for October 1, 2017 comes five years after the beginning of the independence process marked by the gigantic demonstration of September 11, 2012. It reappears shaped by its three previous incarnations: first, as the official perspective of the movement in 2012-14; second, in the form of the mutation of the parliamentary elections of September 27, 2015 into a plebiscite on independence after the alternative consultation of November 9, 2014; third, in the proposal for a referendum agreed with the state within the framework of a new constitutional political majority formed by En Comença Podem [94] and Unidos Podemos in the general election campaigns of December 20, 2015 and June 26, 2016. The referendum obtained a new and unexpected viability after September 2016, following the commitment of the Generalitat [Catalonian government] to hold it by the end of 2017. It was reborn as a result of the phantasmagorical incompleteness of its three previous lives: the failure to reach its goal in 2012-14, the imposture of the plebiscite version, and the impossibility of a short-term favourable majority in the state (an impossibility, however, parallel to the great evocative power of the proposal launched by En Comença Podem that destabilized Catalan politics).

2/ November 9, 2014 marked the end of the first phase of the movement opened in 2012. Halfway between a legitimate consultation and a frontal act of institutional and civil disobedience, 9N was finally a *disobedient detour* that avoided both a surrender to the central state dictates and a direct institutional

confrontation. The Spanish federal government could not prevent the celebration of a democratic and massive event. But neither was the pro-independence movement capable of promoting an act of explicit institutional rupture that would precipitate events decisively. It opted for a last-minute feint which involved an activity that was not simply bearing witness, but nevertheless without opening a scenario of an unequivocal future.

3/ By not projecting an unambiguous political message, by a combination of the level of yes-yes support and by the hybrid nature of the consultation (neither a recognized referendum nor an open institutional confrontation) 9N was paradoxically the perfect formula to *have a referendum without doing so*, and *not to do it*. Thus, as it was an unquestionable political and social success, it represented a serious strategic error, opening a strange situation of impasse and precipitating the pro-independence movement onto a new roadmap that would continue to be based on an internal contradiction: the same movement that did not dare to disobey the first legal ban on one of its initiatives was now at a second stage that required more social strength, mobilization and clashes: initiating a process towards independence within eighteen months through the conversion of parliamentary elections into a plebiscite on the question.

4/ With the diversion towards the 9N alternative and the plebiscitary elections, the Catalan government, endorsed by the pro-independence social organizations, gained time but at the cost of taking a detour through paths that, sooner or later, would have

to return to a situation not very different from that of autumn 2014. Without having passed the first test, it entered a second phase that always rested on a fragile uncertainty. In the end, the strategic inconsistency of the itinerary outlined to justify the plebiscite-elections of September 27 became through an impossible strategic rewind, the initial goal of 2012-14, the referendum, was again put forward. This reflected the exhaustion in itself of the policy followed after 2012.

5/ Implicitly, but without ever recognizing it, the Catalan government and the independence movement self-amended their own road map set in autumn 2014. Those who then argued that there were no conditions for a referendum, and sponsored an alternative consultation and the conversion of the parliamentary elections into a plebiscite, have not given any explanation, nor any serious public political balance sheet, of their strategic mistakes during these three years. In the end we have come back, but in different conditions, to the starting point. The need for a referendum as a *precipitating and catalyzing moment* of a democratic confrontation.

6/ We cannot be neutral in the clash of legitimacies between the state and the Catalan government represented by October 1. On the one hand there is a reactionary and antidemocratic approach. On the other, a democratic demand. If it is the state and the PP government that win, their position will be strengthened. It is not certain that the referendum can be held under fully normal conditions, but there should be no doubt: this is the

responsibility of the state, which has closed every door to negotiating its holding. Nor can it be argued, as some do, that the referendum is precipitous and the fruit of impatience for independence. Rather the process has been the opposite, kicking the ball forward for five years, and always with Convergencia clinging, ever more precariously, to the rudder.

7/ For those who, inside and outside of the pro-independence movement, have a perspective of social and economic change, there are two storm clouds flying over October 1. The first, the attempt of the Catalan right to continue to lead Catalan politics in an artificial way, using another milestone of an independence process that has been built since 2012 with the idea that the leadership of Convergencia (now Catalan European Democratic Party, PDeCAT) was imperative. The second, ERC's *Republican Left of Catalonia* claim to become the central party of Catalan politics, stealing part of its social base from the Catalan right, but also blocking the deployment of the potential of Catalunya en Com  . Short-circuiting the aspirations of PdeCAT and ERC is decisive in order to form a constituent and post-neoliberal majority in Catalonia in the future.

8/ In the re-alignments preceding October 1, the unknown is the position of Catalunya en Com  . [95] It may not have yet taken its final position, but it has advanced much more in internal debate, and the provisional consultation with its affiliates is positive that it will have some kind of participation. After marking Catalan politics with its two electoral victories in the general elections of December 20, 2015 and June 26, 2016 and challenging the independence roadmap with its proposal to build a state-wide political majority favorable to the referendum, it was paralysed and placed on the defensive once the Catalan government set the course for the unilateral referendum. Contrary to strategic anticipation, its policy has been one of *formal passivity*.

9/ Without a convincing discourse, and marked by electoralist tactics, a lightness of principles and an increasingly institutionalist mentality, the inconsistencies of Catalunya en Com   prevent it from exploiting those of the pro-independence movement and particularly the left-wing of the latter after the failed journey from the 9N alternative to the return of the referendum. Fearing being dragged along by the Catalan

government, in reality their passivity is a gift to the PDeCAT and ERC, who will be able to capitalize better on October 1 if they present a positive balance sheet, or will try (rightly or not) to attribute to Catalunya en Com   their failure if things are not going well. Passive spectator? Subaltern and second row participant? Both are very problematic options for a force like Catalunya en Com  .

10/ Catalunya en Com  's passivity and discomfort before the referendum is a concrete reflection of the superficiality of its position on the national question and the debate on independence, where it has prioritized a softly-softly approach to complex issues instead of addressing the great strategic debate on how to set a perspective and a concrete policy that would put an end to the bifurcation of coming from the 15M legacy and the independence process, and seeking points of common agreement in the perspective of breaking with the framework of 1978. The unexplored paths of the federalist-independence synthesis surrounding the slogans of the Catalan Republic and the Catalan constituent process remain there as future opportunities lost in the present. Like battles lost without even being waged.

The Marawi Siege and the Declaration of Martial Law in Mindanao - Part III

12 July 2017, by **Raymund de Silva**

Hapilon came to Lanao in the middle of last year and it was all in the news. In fact, there was a well-published merging of his group - the Abu Sayyaf from Basilan - with the Maute group in Butig, Lanao del Sur. He saw a big opportunity to establish a Wilayah or a caliphate of Lanao del Sur and Marawi City to the Daesh or the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS). He (Isnilon), together with the Maute group have since built-up their forces through massive recruitment, Jihadist indoctrination and military trainings.

Clearly, their family-based groups have morphed into fully developed Jihadist militants.

It has become clear that the attempted seizure of the municipality of Butig and the big military showdown in the town of Piagapo late last year and the beginning of this year, respectively, were preparation of Hapilon and the Maute group's conquest of Marawi.

When the security sector has started to announce that Isnilon Hapilon

might have already escaped Marawi on the third week of the Marawi's rampaged - then the disappearing or the vanishing act begins.

The seizure of Marawi by ISIS-inspired Maute/Abu Sayyaf groups has entered its sixth week today. Obviously, it has caused the biggest and most serious internal security crisis in decades for the Philippines or any Southeast Asian country for that matter.

It has started on the 23rd of May 2017, with the botched arrest operation of the most wanted terrorist in the country – Isnilon Hapilon by a joint military and police forces in a community, inside the city. The Islamic Jihadists led by the Maute brothers and Isnilon Hapilon in return have attacked and laid siege of Marawi, the only Islamic City in the predominantly Catholic Philippines, making it into a smoldering war zone.

The government troops have made counter-siege and launched a relentless and massive air and ground offensives in a bid to crush the Islamic militants but as of today, they have failed to dislodge the fanatic extremists from their well-entrenched and strategic positions in the city.

The protracted seizure of Marawi has turned into a very brutal urban warfare which both the government forces and the Jihadist extremists are not very much familiar with. So, while the latter has made use to its outmost advantage their familiarity of the areas in the city as well as the streets and the buildings to strategically put their skilled snipers into position and block the advance of the government forces, the former has made use of its superiority in military hardwares and its air assets. The intense bombings and the massive artillery shellings have reduced Marawi to rubble.

The would-be caliphate has been laid into ruin. And the attempt by the government forces to wrest control of the city has resulted into its destruction.

The Salafist/Jihadist model of Islam which the extremists have tried to impose on the population of Marawi disrupted their very social fabric and did not get the latter's support nor sympathy in the former's war against the Philippines security forces. The longer the battle of Marawi progresses, the more the Jihadists are finding themselves friendless.

The declaration of Martial Law by the President as a response to the rampage of the extremists in Marawi has caught everybody but especially the "Marawinians" by surprise. But the manner of how the battle to retake Marawi has progressed made more

and more Maranaos to be critical of Martial Law.

The Islamic City of Marawi has been emptied by its population both for the protection of their families and not to be caught up in the middle of the raging bloody war between the country's security forces and the ISIS-inspired group. It is important to note that both the security forces and the extremists are mainly coming from the outside the Islamic City.

Furthermore, the local government units (LGUs) have been paralyzed by the surprised seizure of the extremist group and the counter seizure by the government security sector. It has taken several days before one could hear the voices of the city government and the provincial government officials. It is no different with the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in which the city of Marawi and the province of Lanao del Sur are both organic part. It has taken several days before an Assemblyman, representing Lanao del Sur in the Regional Legislative Assembly (RLA) came out and become the spokesperson of the province of Lanao del Sur in the government's counter-offensives to retake Marawi.

It has been the play of the security sector which has been calling the shots in the whole counter offensives of the government to retake Marawi. The LGUs have been put to take charge of the humanitarian efforts which in the context of Martial Law – the security sector can still intervene in its deliveries and performances.

One important reality which has been revealed by this humanitarian crisis is the nature and functions of the LGU officials in this part of the country.

The LGU officials in the city of Marawi as well as in the municipalities of Lanao del Sur do not regularly stay in their offices except on special occasions or when the elections are fast approaching. So, in terms of the basic social services reaching the people, one would not be surprised that it is in its minimum. The mayors and many of LGU officials are having their houses and residences in the cities of Iligan, Cagayan de Oro or as far as Davao and Manila. They usually

spent most of their times in these areas. Such situation cannot be much different from the other areas in the whole of the ARMM. This is inspite of the fact that the Region is considered to have the lowest poverty indicator in the whole country. It is useful to highlight that, 48.2% of the families in the ARMM which includes Marawi live below the poverty line compared to the national average of 16.5%. It is no wonder then that in these areas, rebellion and insurgency have found fertile ground and have taken roots easily. In the same manner, that the extremists and the terrorists can likewise easily attract followers who are ready to follow their fanatical activities out of their extreme poverty and desperation. The absence of government's representatives in these places has not helped in correcting this situation.

The Moro Revolutionary Fronts (MNLF and MILF) have been struggling to correct the historical injustice on the Bangsamoro through their quest for the right to self-determination. But for almost five decades they have not reached even a minimum level of determining their own economic, political and cultural lives.

With the neo-liberal globalization the country has been closely tied up and integrated with, the global economy and politics. The national liberation of peoples like the Bangsamoro has been more integrated to the mainstream economy and politics of the country. The framework of the peace talks of the different Philippine administrations has been determined by these national and global realities.

The mainstreaming approach of the Philippines government has pushed the Moro Fronts to scale down their political demand from independence/secession to autonomy. In the different peace processes, the development of the Bangsamoro consciousness among the different ethno-linguistic groups has been stunted and frustrations and desperation on the Moro people have turned them into passive stakeholders or desperate seekers of other solution. The different autonomous governments have been disowned by the fronts and the Moro traditional

leaders have slowly taken over the reign of the autonomous governments including the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). The lone criterion for the traditional Moro leaders to be in charge of the ARMM is his/her outmost or blind loyalty to Manila or specifically to Malacanang.

After several decades and spending billions of pesos of the taxpayers' money, this kind of political solution has never answered the Moro peoples' quest for genuine self-determination and the ARMM experimentation has been considered as a political failure. Currently, the struggle for substantially different form of autonomy has been bannered by the MILF and based on the lessons in the past, they tried to define the legal parameter of the nature of Bangsamoro (both the people and their ancestral lands) and work on the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL). This is now pending in Congress but can have complication with the Administration's move to change the form of government into a federal type and the place of BBL in this framework has not been clearly defined.

The more protracted the peace processes have become, the more opportunities they created for the Jihadist extremists and their brand of building an ummah which is strictly based on shariah and the literal translation of the Holy Qur'an.

The economic aspect of the development of the Moro people has been seriously neglected. Basically it follows the mainstream economy of the country which is export-oriented and import-dependent. Agricultural production has been very minimal and mono-cropping is promoted like the oil palm trees. Its natural resources like mineral resources have been subjected to extractive method of mining. Many of the families have been dependent on the remittances of their relatives working in the Middle East and other parts of the world.

But in reality, the formal economy and the financial system of the country have not really penetrated into the system and lives of the people in the rural areas. Hence, the major role of the informal economy and financial lending networks, have successfully

thrived in those areas and even in many urban areas of the ARMM. The local moneylenders have become more popular and influential in these areas than the elected politicians. But in many instances the politicians and their families are also the moneylenders making them to have effective control of the whole area in both politics and economy. Even the revolutionary groups and even the Islamists have become dependent to these powerful local lenders cum politicians in their financial needs for weapons, budget for military trainings, ammunitions and foods. Clans who are involved in the clan feuds or rido have also become dependent to these local usurers.

The situation of Marawi and its neighboring municipalities in Lanao del Sur have been in similar situations. They have not developed their own economies and business tradings. They became dependent on the economy of Iligan and Cagayan de Oro cities. Big part of the income of these two cities have come from Marawi City or the municipalities around Lake Lanao. The moneylenders have played important role in these financial activities and business trading of peoples in both the urban and the rural areas.

So, when the ISIS-inspired extremists stormed the city of Marawi last month and have been locked in fierce fighting with the Philippine security sector, they have not only destroyed the city but also the informal economies thriving around the city which have been dependent to the latter. Furthermore, it has also affected both the formal and informal economies of the cities of Iligan and Cagayan de Oro. This kind of symbiotic relationship has been maintained and nurtured through all these years.

It is not surprising then to see that when more than 90% of the people of Marawi have evacuated mostly to Iligan, it has almost doubled the population of Iligan from 342,618 to almost 500,000. The number of vehicles has almost tripled causing daily traffics to the city and its residents.

It should also be noted that the latest number of the IDPs has reached more

than 270,000, which is much higher than the population of Marawi (200,000). It is simply because the population of the neighboring towns have also left their places because they had been dependent to Marawi in terms of their food needs and financial activities and which in turn came also from the cities of Iligan and Cagayan de Oro.

The peoples of the municipalities of Marantao, Bubong (towns near Marawi City) and others have left their places not primarily because of the threats of the extremist Jihadist but because their food supply lines to and from Marawi have been cut-off. These people became part of the constantly increasing number of the IDPs specifically in the city of Iligan. In fact, in some of Iligan's 44 barangays, the population has increased by more than 50% since May 23, 2017.

Iligan City, 27 kilometers away from Marawi, is the nearest city from the latter. It became the destination of most of the 264,000 IDPs and its social service institutions together with the humanitarian non-government organizations have almost been exhausted. Other social service institutions coming from the ARMM and Region X - the Region which Iligan geographically belongs could still hardly cope-up with the demands of humanitarian tasks at hand. There are more than two thousand of the IDPs mostly women who have been suffering mental disorder after more than a month of staying away from their own homes and staying in places which urgently need cleanliness and sanitation. For those women with their small children and some of the members of their families are still unaccounted for, their situation in the evacuation centers would be more than enough than they could handle both physically and psychologically.

The other day, the legislative as well as the executive branches of the city of Iligan have turned down the proposal of the civilian authority of Marawi and Lanao del Sur that the mass burial of those civilians newly found dead bodies in the ruined city should be done in Iligan. It should be recalled that earlier those unidentified dead from Marawi were already

buried in an Iligan cemetery. This time the reason given by Iligan is that, they are considering the religious sensitivity as they would not want to handle problem that may erupt later.

But this fact is really pointing out to the paralysis suffered by the civilian authorities of both Marawi and the province. Part of the reason might be, they, themselves, have been victims or IDPs too or maybe nobody could want to be accountable to the kind of responsibility or manage the massive problem brought about by this humanitarian crisis.

Meanwhile, Iligan City has been feeling the negative impact on its economy. With the sudden increase of the people staying in the city, the people have complained on the daily traffic and its malls have been earning less even with more people staying inside the establishments but these people are more of getting the respite of the very hot temperature outside and they are not definitely purchasing goods from the businesses in the malls. The Iligan famous water resorts have also felt the negative impact of the crisis in Marawi. They simply lost almost all their customers and patrons - which means that in the past they had been catering people mostly from Marawi or the neighboring towns.

Moreover, an almost hourly non-stop sounds of the ambulances carrying both the dead and the wounded down to Iligan City or the nearest airport for airlifting of those seriously wounded can be heard. This simply means that the offensives and counter-offensives by both the government forces and the extremists have intensified and become more and more bloody.

It does not really help, except for propaganda purposes that the security sector and its spokesperson would describe a different picture than what is happening on the ground. For instance, when they (spokesperson) have described that the ISIS-inspired extremist group has been already push from 8.7 square kilometers to one square kilometer cannot simply be supported by facts on the ground. It might be of service when the Sri Lankan Armed Forces had used this similar picture to describe the encirclement of the forces of the

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the famous battle of Jaffna peninsula in 2009. The battle was fought in a conventional manner and mainly in the rural areas of the Northern part of Sri Lanka so one could really see the blow by blow and hourly development of the battle. Before the literal annihilation of the LTTE including the death of its leaders Velupillai Prabhakaran, it was shown to the world through the modern technology of the media how the LTTE was pushed to a square kilometer shrinking their area of maneuverability before the big punch and the LTTE final defeat at least militarily.

The battle of Marawi is basically fought in an urban type of warfare that when one mentioned of four barangays of Marawi namely: Lilod, Bangolo, Raya Madaya and Marinaut, it is practically referring to the whole city center, where it can still connect to the mountainous areas at the eastern side and the Lake Lanao in the western part of the city through these barangays.

Hence, the Jihadists have still plenty of area to maneuver or outmaneuver the country's security sector. In fact, based on survivors' account, the extremist could even outsmart the advancing security forces and avoid the bombs unleashed by the Airforce, by advancing very close to the latter and engage them in a bloody close quarter combat while the aerial bombings are hitting the empty spaces or hitting the empty buildings.

Furthermore, it is very important to note that the President's postponement of his plan trip to Marawi to be with his soldiers on the first year anniversary of his presidency, is a clear manifestation that not all is well in the government's campaign to retake the city.

But then again, the planned President's visit has added pressures to the government troops to advance and occupy more areas but this also means putting themselves to the lines of fire by the extremist snipers.

The number of deaths and wounded from both sides but especially from the civilians has been increasing. The

other day, there were 17 dead civilians in the different stages of decomposition which were found in the central part of the city. Five of these bodies were headless which could mean that they were beheaded by the extremists or had been directly hit by high caliber sniper fire or even by the bombs. In any case, one can help but think about the level of bestiality that this brutal war has reached especially towards the unarmed civilians.

That is why, it would be very difficult to comprehend the President's reasons why he would not be open to other ways to hasten the end of this brutal war. The civilian traditional leaders of Marawi and Lanao (the Sultanates) had earlier volunteer to talk to the leadership of the extremists. Their agenda (according to their letter to President Duterte) is to convince the Jihadists to immediately end the war and leave Marawi. This cannot be a compromise or a soft approach to the extremists as what the President would want to believe. This is delivering the message of the people of the city and the surrounding municipalities that there is no point of continuing a war without the peoples' support. But the most important thing there is to have a direct knowledge who is still in control of the Jihadists and to know the status of the hostages.

In the situation where the intelligence sources of the security sector is almost nil, this can be one of the most reliable way to know one's enemy and to defeat him without even firing a single shot. But this cannot be the framework/mentality of cold war soldiers where body counts is given paramount importance to gauge one's winning or losing the war. In ending the war in Marawi in the soonest possible time one does not need this cold war mentality.

On the other hand, since the most affected stakeholders in this urban war in Marawi are the civilians, then their voices should be given more importance. The security sector or the government should read and understand the situation of the war in Marawi in such a framework even if Martial law is still in operation in Mindanao.

I. Humanitarian Works under Martial Law

Responding to Climate Change related disasters is not very difficult for humanitarian workers and volunteers in the disaster-prone areas like in Mindanao or the Philippines. But is very different if one does it in a human-induced disaster like war or massive destruction caused by terrorism. And doubly difficult for humanitarian works when one is doing them under Martial Law. This is exactly the concrete experiences of humanitarian workers and volunteers who have gone out of their comfort zone to help in whatever ways and means they can for the dislocated population of Marawi.

The declaration of Martial Law by the President in the whole island of Mindanao when the Jihadists rampaged Marawi has caused difficulties not only to the movements of the IDPs but also to the humanitarian workers. The security forces have acted as if they are seeing all the time the fingerprints of the Jihadists in every IDP and the humanitarian organization.

Moreover, the very peculiar nature or characteristic of the people (Maranao Muslim) of Marawi and its neighboring towns, which is clannish has added to the difficulties for humanitarian responses and actions.

The IDPs have grouped themselves on the basis of their relationships (relatives) and they preferred to stay as a group in houses of their relatives than the formal designated evacuation centers. Hence, as has been mentioned earlier, only 5% of the almost 300,000 IDPs are staying in 79 evacuation centers (ECs) in the cities of Iligan and Cagayan de Oro as well as the province of Lanao del Norte. The other 95% of the IDPs are home-based (HBs) or staying in the houses of their relatives mostly living in Iligan City.

The negative implication of such arrangement is that the social service institutions of the government like the Department of Social Welfare and Development have difficulties in tracing those IDPs who stay in the HBs and therefore support in terms of

relief goods and psychosocial services could hardly reach these people. The social institutions of the government have only catered to the ECs (5%) as what they used to do in the past and almost nothing in terms of relief and psychosocial services to the IDPs in the HBs. And, as a result, there are so many relief goods like canned goods and non-food relief which have been delivered to the IDPs creating a surplus in the ECs so that one can easily see these goods being sold out in the neighboring grocery stores. The EC-based IDPs have received so much quantity of relief goods and from the social institutions of the government and they simply sold them in order to buy other food items like vegetables and other basic needs.

The humanitarian workers from the civil society are basically the only ones who have tried to trace these IDPs who are home-based. But since they have limited and less resources compared to the government social institutions, they can only help so much. Added to the difficulties of the humanitarian workers are the strict measures that the implementers of Martial Law are subjecting them. The vehicles use to deliver the humanitarian relief goods for the HB-IDPs are required to renew their vehicle passes every three days otherwise these delivery vehicles have to queue or line up several kilometers along with other vehicles and wait in turn to pass military checkpoints, which would mean waiting for one's turn to be checked for several hours. The humanitarian volunteers without military or government-issued identification cards (IDs) have to go down from the vehicles and walk for more than a kilometer before one is allowed to ride again with the vehicles carrying the humanitarian relief goods. Again, with the news coming out nowadays that bullets and ammunitions are allegedly found in the relief goods intended for Marawi IDPs, one can just imagine the extreme added difficulties of bringing relief goods to the IDPs if all the items will be subjected to intense inspection.

In addition, the IDPs, both from the ECs and the HBs are facing another problem. Many of them do not have proper identification cards or government-issued IDs which the

security sector would randomly ask from them. Not few of them simply forget to bring these documents or lost them when they hurriedly left their homes in Marawi City. In many instances these people (IDPs) would have difficulties in explaining to the Martial law authorities who always see the Maute's or Abu Sayyaf's faces in the "undocumented" people, who (IDPs) do not have documents. For these IDPs, their personal documents are less in their mind to worry about because they are more concerned of the safety of their persons and their houses and valuable materials they left behind when they hurriedly left their instant war zone city.

There are very few humanitarian workers and volunteers who are helping the IDPs with regards to this particular problem. But oftentimes, these humanitarian volunteers also need to be helped in the long and very meticulous process of obtaining legal requirements so that the IDPs can have their legal documents. Specially so in the case of Marawi and Lanao del Sur province where keeping proper record or legal documentation have not been a practice. One has to go to several layers and see lawyers (advocates) to get proper authorization to obtain a voter's ID for instance. One needs not only human resources but financial resources as well in order to accomplish this work and in the context of Martial Law it is almost an impossible mission.

Meanwhile, the people hosting their IDPs relatives are themselves to be helped, too.

For more than a month or 48 days to be exact, they have been supporting their instant expanded families and since they have not been reached by the government social institutions they have not received the food and non-food relief goods. Only a few and mostly from non-government humanitarian organizations which have reached and offered help to them. And again, their not having proper documents have made them to stay put at the places or houses that they are staying rather than go out and make connections with government humanitarian institutions which can be very risky.

The congestion as a result of so many people living in a small houses/places have caused several problems like hunger because of lack of available food and nutrition, health and sanitation. As mentioned earlier, there are more than two thousand five hundred people (mostly women) who have already suffered mental illnesses. Several children have also died because of common diseases.

These IDPs have been the victims of not only human-induced disaster (war) but they have also become victims of Martial Law. Their basic human rights like access to food, free association with other human beings and basic health care have been restricted if not violated by Martial Law. The extremists have destroyed their houses and properties but Martial Law has ruined their lives and dignity as people.

Humanitarian workers and volunteers have found out that it is indeed very difficult to help the displaced and dislocated people in a raging brutal war but it is doubly difficult or almost impossible to help the victims (IDPs) when you have people always watching your back and restricting your actions and your works.

The Presidential pronouncements have indicated that Martial Law continues until the war in Marawi ends and when the security forces are satisfied and advise the President to lift up Martial Law in Mindanao. But as development have unfolded the war in Marawi is continuing and can possibly surpass the 60 days Constitutional limit of a period of the declaration of Martial Law. The 60th day will be on the 23rd of July – a day before the President will address the nation when he will make his State of the Nation Address in Congress. Both Houses of Congress have already compromised and expressed their unconditional support to the President to extend Martial Law in Mindanao.

The Supreme Court will give its decision on the legal bases of the declaration of Martial Law in Mindanao and the suspension of the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus by the Presidential Proclamation 216 in the first week of July 2017. Everybody, especially the

humanitarian organizations have placed their high hopes in the Supreme Court to defend the country's Constitution and advise the President to lift up Martial Law in Mindanao even if the security sector and the Presidential generals (active and retired) will recommend the opposite to President Duterte.

II. The US and other Countries' Role in the Declaration of Martial Law in Mindanao

The role of the US in the declaration of Martial Law in Mindanao and in the raging battle in Marawi should be understood in its long history of strategic and tactical interventions in the affairs of its most reliable ally in the Southeast Asia. The US relationship with the Philippines is always defined by its interests only and how can its ally help to secure them. It would help much to have profound understanding of the development of such interventions by briefly reviewing its immediate past.

A month after the botched PNP Special Action Force Mamasapano, Maguindanao operation in January 25, 2015, the US Intelligence operators who had actively taken part in this action had left Mindanao and avoided Congressional investigation. Since then, the US has maintained a skeletal force in Zamboanga City.

The current US involvement in the Marawi siege and its counter siege should be understood as just part of several decades of the US ongoing program of misjudgments, misbehavior and series of bombing interventions in Mindanao until the present day.

This situation has been clearly seen in the case of Michael Terrence Meiring, a 67 years old American who accidentally exploded his ammonium nitrate bomb in his room in Evergreen Hotel in Davao City on May 16, 2002. His case was put into the limelight

because when he was in the hospital, US agents had immediately arrived and spirited him away to Manila courtesy of the US National Security Council which chartered a private jet to facilitate the escape of their special guest. Among the documents found in his Evergreen Hotel room was his Moro National Liberation Front – Bangsamoro Armed Forces Identification Card (ID) complete with his picture and his officer's rank. Before he blasted himself in his hotel room, there was already a big blast on April 21, 2002 in General Santos City killing 15 people and wounding 35 others. After the Evergreen explosion, there were series of explosions in Davao City, the old airport on March 2003 which killed 21 people and wounded 148 others. Another blast was in Sasa wharf which had killed 17 people and wounded 36 innocent people which had happened on April 2003.

It has been known that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is maintaining its connection with different terror groups in Davao and the neighboring areas. The CIA has made sure that they can always use these "sleepers" for special missions.

It should also be recalled that on July 2002, there was a twenty hour mutiny by 300 Junior officers and their troops in Central Manila. The officers and their troops came from the elite units of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and their issues against the Arroyo government and the AFP leadership were corruption and selling military hardwares to the Moro Liberation Fronts and to the Maoist New Peoples Army. Furthermore, these officers had revealed that the series of bombings were done to "destabilize" the government so that it would be the bases for the declaration of Martial Law in the country by the Arroyo government. They (Junior officers) also claimed that they were asked by their higher ups (including the Commander in Chief) to initiate bombings in Mindanao and blame these to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) – this special operation was called OPLAN Green Base.

Anyway, in all these events the fingerprints of the US covert agents were clearly manifested. Meanwhile,

Michael Terrence Meiring had changed his identity when he went back to the US - he became Michael Van de Meer and finally disappeared in 2010.

Further, one had to take note the US active presence in Mindanao even in 2013 Zamboanga siege of the Nur Misuari faction of MNLF. The US agents had used their modern technology like the unmanned drones but they did not do much to help lessen if not to avoid the burning and ruining of the big part of Zamboanga City.

The US active involvement in Marawi today should be critically examined. They had already lost one of their unmanned drones in the second week of Marawi rampage. It is too much of a coincidence that when the overt US agents began to closely monitor the development of the ruining of Marawi by both their unmanned drones and the P3 Orion Surveillance planes, it was almost the same time that news of the escape of Isnilon Hapilon from Marawi had happened.

One cannot help but be concerned once again that what had happened to the Special Action Force (SAF) 44 in

Mamasapano under the close watch of the US covert agents would again happen to the gallant soldiers of the AFP in the siege in Marawi.

In the US bid to block the pivoting away of President Duterte from the US, it makes sure that it must have an active presence and influence in the abovementioned battle. It wants to strengthen its connection to the corps of officers of the AFP so as to continue determining the latter's direction. It (US) is also trying to make sure that the result and the impact of the Marawi takeover will keep the Philippines and its President into the circle of the United Front against terrorism led by the US.

Meanwhile, Australia a close ally of the US in the Pacific has already entered to help the Philippines' offensives to retake Marawi from the extremists. Specifically the Australian government in aiding the Philippines by providing intelligence and technical assistance in its battle to retake Marawi.

Not to be outdone and in order to maintain the momentum of the efforts that the Chinese government and President Duterte have started in terms of economic and military

agreements, the Chinese delivered military hardwares like assault rifles and long range sniper rifles worth \$7.8 million or 50 million yuan. It also donated a cash of Php15 million as an immediate help to the people of Marawi. Accordingly, the Chinese Ambassador, who personally delivered the military hardwares and the cash donations, these military hardwares and donations are just the first delivery and more help will be delivered to the country soonest.

Definitely the reasons of these countries in offering the help to the Philippines is not so much to really help the country in solving the reasons behind the proliferation of the extremists and Jihadists so that the siege like Marawi will not happen again. It is obvious that it is a way to influence the foreign policy direction of the Philippines to favor the donors' interests, one of which can be part of the reasons why there is so much social inequity and extreme poverty in the areas like Marawi or the ARMM. The same situation which have caused the birthing of rebellion, insurgency, extremism and terrorism in Mindanao and in the whole country.

June 30, 2017

The unbearable burden of being an Indian farmer : shot dead for demanding debt relief

11 July 2017, by Sushovan Dhar

However, what turned this case different was that as the farmers' agitation turned militant, the administration clamped curfew to snuff out their protests. Unable to do so, the police openly fired on the agitating farmers killing five of them. Another died of lathi (baton) charge. The ruthlessness is further explained by the fact that there have been 45 FIRs (First Information Report - case of investigation registered by the police) against protesting farmers, but not one against those who murdered 6 farmers in cold blood. There are also

reports in the media that clear instructions were issued to use maximum force against the agitating farmers.

This incident is an indication of a deeper malaise plaguing Indian agriculture. Between 2001 and 2011, nine million farmers left their ancestral homes and migrated to cities. A study suggests more than 2,000 farmers are heading to cities every day to make a living. [96] And, this is towards the most precarious work in the informal sector.

It is disgraceful to note that an overwhelmingly agricultural country like India doesn't have a proper national agricultural policy. The neo-liberal policies adopted by the successive Indian governments in the last two and a half decades promoted market forces at an unmatched rapidity. It has forced agriculture on to a purely commercial footing and integrated domestic agriculture into the world markets. The consequences have been terrible with farmers mired in huge debts and facing terrible situations that have given rise to

problems at multiple levels.

Acute distress caused by prices of crops crashing

The Mandsaur region like other parts of western Madhya Pradesh has seen prices of crop falling 60 percent below the corresponding prices for last year. In the state of Maharashtra, earlier this year, “millions of Indian farmers look set to switch from growing pulses and oilseeds after a government campaign to boost output became a victim of its own success by flooding markets with the crops.” [97] This has also been the case with most of the crops that has seen bumper harvest.

Local prices for oilseeds have plunged around 40 percent between October 2016 – March 2017, while lentils have dropped by nearly a third during the corresponding period. The almost withdrawal of the procurement at Minimum Support Prices (MSP) has been catastrophic. In this case, the government plans to buy a meagre 2 million tonnes of lentils at MSP prices against a record harvest of around 22 million tonnes in the 2016/17 crop year (July-June), up 35 percent from a year earlier. [98] Moreover, the prices offered by the government is 50,500 rupees against the previous year’s average prices of 110,000 rupees. Traditionally, agricultural crisis was attributed to the failure of crops due to droughts, flood or other natural catastrophe. However, it is being increasingly observed that bumper crops are also instigating such crisis.

The period that followed the implementation of the Structural Adjust Plans (SAP) witnessed rising input costs on one hand and dwindling produce price realisation on the other. The crisis started surfacing since the government planned to dismantle the measures that was built up, in stages, from 1947 to 1992-93 to safeguard the Indian farmers from the market fluctuations. This was also done without giving any adjustment time to Indian farmers. Such protectionist mechanisms, basically built on a combination of input price subsidies and output price support was not

always perfectly implemented. However, it had enabled the Indian peasantry to take up production of various crops in a comparatively stable price environment.

The implementation of SAPs not only saw the government slashing subsidies on major inputs, but also the withdrawal of procurement and distribution of farm produce. Subsequently, with the prices of farm inputs going up, private players took advantage of the situation and raised prices further. This was combined with the rise in rates of interests on institutional credits, the narrow window of such credits becoming narrower, forcing huge sections of the peasantry into the grips of private usury. And all these carried on with the inability of farmers to abandon cultivation in the absence of decent alternative livelihood sources.

The impacts of economic liberalisation with the abolition of agricultural subsidies and the opening of Indian agriculture to the global market has been severe. Small and medium farmers are frequently trapped in a cycle of unbearable debt, leading many to take their lives out of sheer desperation. This is currently a major human rights issue of epic proportions in the country and has impacted the peasantry in profound ways. The lives of the small and medium peasantry are entirely ruined. Their rights to life, water, food and adequate standards of living exists under the shadow of threat by market forces. It is scandalous that the government has taken no effective measures and the minuscule relief measures do not effectively address this issue as there is no attempt to deal with the broader structural issues that is at the root of this disaster.

Moreover, the suicide numbers fail to catch the enormity of the problems as entire categories of farmers are left out of the official listing since they do not possess land titles. This mostly includes women, dalits and indigenous people. In the case of Mandsaur and other parts of western Madhya Pradesh demonetisation and other faulty policies, like import of wheat and pulses, led to this fall in prices of farm produce despite a good harvest. It is reported that post-

demonetisation, traders are paying 2 percent less on cash transactions to farmers at grain mandis (markets).

Switch over to cash crops

The post-reform period also witnessed Indian agriculture turning towards cash crops. As there was a demand for cash crops like cotton in the international market, a sizeable part of Indian agriculture saw a government promoted shift from food crop to cash crop cultivation. However, excess production soon saw prices crashing making cash crops losing viability. Input costs sharply increased over the years since but the increase in market prices lag behind a long distance. These phenomena since the mid to late 1990s saw farmers suicides being recorded on a large scale.

A report produced by Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, New York observed that “The government has long been alerted to the cotton farmer suicide crisis, yet has done little to adequately respond. Cotton exemplifies India’s general shift toward cash crop cultivation, a shift that has contributed significantly to farmer vulnerability, as evidenced by the fact that the majority of suicides are committed by farmers in the cash crop sector. The cotton industry, like other cash crops in India, has also been dominated by foreign multinationals that promote genetically modified seeds and exert increasing control over the cost, quality, and availability of agricultural inputs.” [99]

Last year, a severe agricultural crisis took place in the South Indian state of Karnataka. The coastal and Malnad regions have been bright spots in the state’s agriculture economy for the past two decades. However, “Farmers have been shaken by a steep drop in prices of three major cash crops --- arecanut, coconut and coffee ---- which have fallen roughly by 15- 50% from the historic highs of previous years. While Karnataka is the largest producer of arecanut and coffee in India, it stands third in coconut production. The market turmoil has hit

arecanut and coconut right around harvest, when supplies are most abundant and grain prices are at seasonal lows." [Steep fall in prices of cash crops to hurt K'taka's agri economy:

The report by Center for Human Rights and Global Justice also observed that "(a)s a result of economic reforms, Indian cotton farmers were thrust into competition with the international market, making them extremely vulnerable to price volatility. As new economic policies integrated India into the global market, the resultant devaluation of the Indian rupee dropped prices and increased demand for Indian crops. To capitalize on this potential source of revenue, the Indian government urged farmers to switch to cash crop cultivation, and India quickly redeveloped its agricultural sector to be export-oriented. Cash crops, such as cotton, can lead to short-term revenue gain but are ultimately subject to high levels of price volatility.

India's sudden switch to cash crop cultivation led to an over-saturation of the global market with cotton exports, and, in turn, a depression of cotton

prices for these farmers." and, "(d)espite these problems, the Indian government has continued to encourage farmers to switch to cash crops. Though India is currently one of the world's leading cotton producers and exporters, like most cash crop commodity markets, the cotton market has become dominated by a small group of multinational corporations that exert increasing control over the cost, quality, and availability of agricultural inputs.

In addition, in a cotton market where a corporate middleman ferries farmers' products to the global market even those farmers who see high crop yields may not benefit from the prices their crops eventually fetch in the market. Finally, it is important to note that, although the focus here is on cotton, the general problems described continue to be a major concern for all Indian cash crop farmers for whom "investment in agriculture has collapsed," leading to increased "[p]redatory commercialization of the countryside." [100]

In lieu of

Trump's Cuba Rollback

10 July 2017, by Samuel Farber

On June 16, at the Manuel Artime Theater "named after a leader of the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion" in Miami's Little Havana, President Trump announced the partial repeal of the Obama-era policies aimed at normalizing economic relations between the United States and Cuba.

Trump gave the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) thirty days to develop rules ending unauthorized individual travel to the island. Only Cuban Americans with relatives still in Cuba and members of group tours, organized by companies with government authorization, will be allowed to visit.

In addition, Trump banned all business transactions with any entity associated with the Cuban military. This order will cover more than half of Cuba's economy, including many companies involved in the island's tourism industry.

The Cuban-American right has gotten much less than it wanted from Trump, but this partial repeal nevertheless represents for them a significant victory: a relatively small and local political force managed to end Obama's rapprochement policy, indefinitely postponing the end of the blockade and the normalization of relations.

conclusion

It is high time that the government declares a comprehensive National Agricultural Policy putting a halt to commercialisation of agriculture. It must also implement the recommendations of the officially constituted National Commission on Farmers. The agricultural policy of the country should be designed to assign farmers' rights to decent life and livelihood at the core of government policies and programmes. Otherwise, farmer's debt would increase in an unhindered manner pauperising a large section of the population.

Access to institutional credit for peasants must be prioritised facilities extended to all farmers including women, dalits, indigenous people irrespective of the fact whether they have land titles or not. Right to water including irrigation remains another vital issue. These combined with other social protection mechanisms could be the only way out of this insurmountable indebtedness that is plaguing the Indian peasantry in such epic proportions.

Cadtm

Warming Relations

The normalization process began in late 2014, more than fifty years after Eisenhower broke diplomatic relations with Cuba and initiated the economic blockade against the island, when Presidents Barack Obama and Raúl Castro announced the resumption of diplomatic relations between their respective countries.

Carefully avoiding any violation of the 1996 Helms-Burton Act, which strengthened and extended the economic blockade, Obama proceeded to sign a series of measures including

the removal of limits on the size of remittances that Cuban Americans were permitted to send to relatives and allowed the resumption of regularly scheduled commercial flights to Cuba.

Tourism remained formally outlawed, but Americans could visit without obtaining government authorization, provided they fit one of the twelve criteria Washington had formulated. One of those categories, traveling in "support of the Cuban people," covered almost anyone who, under normal circumstances, would have been considered a tourist.

As Granma, the Cuban Communist Party daily newspaper pointed out, Obama did not adopt other blockade-relaxing measures, such as permitting American citizens to pay for medical treatment in Cuba.

Although he stated on multiple occasions that the economic blockade was "outdated," Obama decided not to spend his political capital on the difficult task of persuading Congress to repeal the Helms-Burton Act. However, in the last days of his administration, he agreed to one of the Cuban government's long-standing demands by suspending the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966.

This law allowed any Cuban citizen to legally remain in the United States after arriving on American soil and to obtain full legal residence one year later. Immigrants would not have to prove they had been victims of political persecution, which rules covering political asylum usually demands.

The suspension of the Cuban Adjustment Act will likely remain in place given Trump's anti-immigration and xenophobic worldview, but it may turn out to be a pyrrhic victory for the Cuban government. For decades, unlimited emigration to the United States has constituted an important safety valve for domestic discontent.

Electoral Math

Unlike many of Trump's decisions, his repeal of these measures does not seem to be motivated by personal

grudges or business animus. As the New York Times reported, his corporation spent \$68,000 on a 1998 trip to explore business opportunities — a clear violation of American law and sure proof that the president, at least then, had no compunctions about investing in Cuba.

Trump explained his recent decision by invoking human rights abuses. But this excuse is laughable in light of his repeated assertion that American foreign policy should promote "national interests," not the defense of human rights. His praise of despots, from Rodrigo Duterte to Vladimir Putin, and evidence that he won't let repression get in the way of a good deal further illustrate his disregard for this issue.

Instead, Trump based his decision on a purely electoral calculus aimed at winning support from the Cuban-American right, led by Senator Marco Rubio and Congressman Mario D  az-Balart, whose father and grandfather supported the Batista dictatorship.

Both these Republican politicians hail from Florida, a hotly contested state where Cuban Americans account for over 5 percent of the electorate. The Cuban-American right has considerable political power, as the many elected officials who come from its fold demonstrate. It also has a substantial influence on major media outlets in South Florida, including radio and television stations as well as the El Nuevo Herald, the Miami Herald's Spanish-language edition. But its influence has been deteriorating for some time.

According to exit polls, a little over half of the Cuban-American electorate voted for Romney in 2012, and a similar percentage supported Trump in the 2016 elections. A much higher proportion of younger Cuban-American voters went Democrat.

Further, the results from the heavily Cuban-American twenty-seventh congressional district in Florida, represented by Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the most senior Cuban-American congressperson, suggested a remarkable change in the community's politics.

Ros-Lehtinen won reelection with a 54.9 to 45.1 percent margin, but Hillary Clinton defeated Trump by twenty points, the highest majority in any of the twenty-three Republican congressional districts she won last November.

The second highest Clinton victory in a red district came from Florida's twenty-sixth district — another majority Cuban-American area, represented by Carlos Curbelo. There, Clinton prevailed 57 to 41 percent.

These votes suggest a tendency toward ticket splitting, where support for Ros-Lehtinen and Curbelo does not necessarily signal agreement with their right-wing politics. Votes for these representatives may instead demonstrate gratitude for their offices' assistance in accessing social services or perhaps a sense of loyalty to a fellow Cuban.

Support for the Cuban-American right may continue to decline as more recent immigrants acquire citizenship and register to vote. These exiles, who come from much poorer backgrounds than those who arrived in the sixties and seventies, seem more concerned with their relatives' welfare in Cuba than with exile politics.

Moreover, as Alex Portes has indicated, the Cubans who have come to the United States since 1980 — and who constitute a growing majority in the community — are barely distinguishable in socioeconomic terms from other Latin American immigrants. Indeed, public opinion polls show that a substantial majority of Florida's Cuban American population supported the agreement Obama and Castro signed.

Asymmetrical Forces

A growing number of American capitalists and most of the business press now support easing the Cuban embargo. The US Chamber of Commerce has for some time pushed for the full resumption of economic relations.

As the New York Times reported on

June 5, Engage Cuba, an organization of business groups, economists, and Cuba experts, estimates that reversing Obama's policies would cost the American economy \$6.6 billion and affect more than twelve thousand American jobs. Rural communities that rely on agriculture, manufacturing, and shipping industries, as well as Florida, Louisiana, Texas, Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi – all of which supported Trump in the 2016 elections – would be hardest hit.

Agribusiness is therefore unlikely to welcome Trump's punitive measures. After all, as Granma pointed out, these companies have made more than \$5 billion from agricultural exports to Cuba since 2001, when Congress granted an exception to the blockade. This policy change made the United States one of Cuba's principal sources of imports, and the figure would have risen much higher had Congress not stipulated that delivery could only take place after the American companies had been paid in cash.

Tellingly, Trump's secretary of agriculture Sonny Perdue expressed his support for resuming relations during his confirmation hearing this March. He encouraged Congress to increase access to the Cuban market for American agricultural goods and to pass a measure allowing private lenders to finance agricultural exports.

His testimony came as little surprise: when he was governor of Georgia, Perdue headed an agricultural delegation to Cuba, as have numerous Republican and Democratic politicians, particularly from Southern, Midwestern, and mountain states.

With only eleven million people and a territory the size of Pennsylvania, however, Cuba doesn't rank anywhere near the top of American priorities. The United States is far more interested in working with China and other former communist countries in Asia and Europe.

But its proximity, natural resources, and educated labor force make Cuba attractive not only for agricultural companies, but also for the tourism industry. Other American firms want

to overhaul Cuba's poor telecommunications infrastructure or make deals with the island's promising pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries.

Cuba's relatively small economic importance accounts for the asymmetry between the forces that support and oppose reopening economic relations with the island. Support for normalization is widespread – it includes big business, politicians from both parties, and the public at large – but it is also shallow.

None of these groups care enough about Cuba to go to war with Trump over it. And while the opposition to ending the embargo is quite narrow – limited to the right-wing Cuban-American power bloc in South Florida and New Jersey – it runs deep. Maintaining the embargo ranks as the Cuban-American conservatives' top priority.

This explains, for example, why D  az-Balart promised to support Trump's health care plan in exchange for a hard line on Cuba. This could turn out to be a costly gamble, considering how unpopular the efforts to repeal Obamacare have become, especially in a district like his, which depends on government-provided medical benefits.

Notwithstanding their relative weakness, however, the forces hoping to normalize relations with Cuba seem to have limited Trump's willingness to push through right-wing demands.

Meanwhile, a number of bipartisan bills have been introduced in the House and Senate to liberalize trade with Cuba, particularly in the agricultural sector. Another bill, perhaps the most promising one, concerns the right to travel to the island.

Republican Senator Jeff Flake of Arizona and Democratic Senator Patrick Leahy from Vermont have proposed the Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act, which would eliminate restrictions on tourist visits to Cuba. So far, fifty-five senators from both parties have endorsed the bill.

The Impact on Cuba

Trump's aggressive Cuba policy will undoubtedly negatively affect the island's economy, particularly its booming tourist sector. The year after relations resumed, 161,000 Americans visited Cuba – almost double the number who went in 2014. The numbers increased even further in 2016, when almost two hundred thousand Americans traveled there.

With tourism increasing from other countries as well, Cuba had a record four million visitors last year. (But as prominent Cuban economist Carmelo Mesa-Lago has noted, it is impossible to determine the country's net profits from this growing industry, since a substantial proportion of the goods needed to support tourism, including food, are imported.)

The travel boom, unfortunately, hasn't alleviated the other economic pressures the island faces.

The crisis in Venezuela has hurt the Cuban economy, as the supply of oil fell sharply. The sale of professional services – including doctors, nurses, teachers – helped boost revenue after the sugar industry's dramatic decline, but now it shows signs of weakness as well. The profits from nickel, an important Cuban export, have declined with global commodity prices.

As a result of these developments, Cuban GDP growth in 2016 was negative 0.9 percent. Trump's policies will likely push growth even further down.

Productivity is low, and Cuba does not have enough capital investment to improve and replace its stock. Trump's ban on American investment in entities associated with the military will directly impact this aspect of the economy.

Further, the government's inability to establish the promised single currency after ten years of preparation has contributed to a climate of economic uncertainty.

State employees' real wages still sit

substantially below the levels reached before the Soviet bloc's collapse in 1989. As a result, approximately 65 percent of the population relies on remittances from family members and friends abroad.

While Trump's new measures have left the flow of remittances open, the economic decline in foreign investment and tourism will further reduce the island's standard of living.

Unfortunately, Raúl Castro's economic policies will likely only worsen matters. Ever since he assumed power — provisionally in 2006 and formally in 2008 — Raúl has moved the country toward the Sino-Vietnamese model of state capitalism. Under this system, the government retains a monopoly on political power through one-party rule. It also controls the economy's strategic sectors, such as banking, while sharing the rest with private capital, both domestic and foreign.

But this has been a very contradictory

road where the Cuban government has tried to "have its cake and eat it too," accompanying many of its economic liberalization changes with restrictions that limit their effectiveness in order to keep its political control of the island.

Against US Imperialism

The fact that Donald Trump has cynically manipulated human rights discourse to justify his economic aggression does not lessen the harsh reality of the Cuban state's regular violations of civil and political liberties.

The current government has largely stopped Fidel Castro's practice of sentencing nonviolent dissidents to long-term prison terms. Instead, as Amnesty International has pointed out, they hand out fewer and shorter sentences, intimidating the opposition

with thousands of short-term arrests every year.

This change — along with other important measures, including the emigration reforms of 2012 that considerably eased the movement of citizens in and out of the country — goes along with Raúl's strategy to liberalize the economy and society without democratizing the state.

Trump's newly announced measures increase the likelihood of a serious economic and political crisis and contribute to a siege mentality. This will do untold harm to the Cuban people and only strengthen anti-democratic forces on the island.

The Left should fully support the normalization of economic relations with Cuba not only because of these practical considerations, but also because we stand for the self-determination of all nations against encroaching US imperialism.

Source *Jacobin* 20 June 2017.

Theresa May's Katrina: Grenfell Tower and the Election Outcome that Wasn't Supposed to Happen

8 July 2017, by **Kim Moody, Sheila Cohen**

Despite this, one working class neighbour was disappointed that Corbyn had failed to lead Labour to victory and become Prime Minister. In fact, of course, Tory Theresa May's lackluster "victory" and Corbyn's unexpectedly effective campaign was such good news for Britain's beleaguered left that the election outcome was hailed with cheers and clenched fists. Still, the unlikely reality of a bearded, unashamedly socialist (of sorts) MP winning the affection of working class voters countrywide calls out for further investigation.

The big media story is the

"Youthquake" in which the turnout of voters 18 to 34 rose from 41% in the 2015 election to 53% this year. Two-thirds of 18-to-24-year-olds voted for Labour, inspired by Corbyn's honesty and radicalism. It isn't just that they voted in larger numbers and proportions for Labour and its left program, but that the swelling number of activists among them, many members of the Corbyn-supporting group Momentum, stormed many marginal constituencies (election districts) to canvass for Labour. Indeed, they broke the older practice of focusing on known Labour voters and invaded areas and front doors of many working class people who had

previously not voted, had voted for Brexit, or even voted for the right-wing United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP).

Mass training sessions for Momentum activists were led by veterans of the Bernie Sanders campaign. To this was added Sanders style mass rallies of thousands during the final month before the election. Corbyn was everywhere. Mass grassroots campaigning and radical ideas long missing in mainstream British politics won votes for Labour that the experts, the media, Labour right-wingers, and Blairites said Corbyn could never attract. For example, young activists

played a big role in winning Canterbury, a town that had been Tory since 1918, albeit by the slim margin of 187 votes.

The Workers Come Back

Even more important but less well known was a sizable return of working class voters that Labour had lost largely due to 13 years of the “Third Way,” pro-market, austerity politics of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

Polls taken a month before the June 8 election showed support for Labour at a disastrous 24% for skilled manual workers and 25% for the less skilled and unemployed. By the time of the election, after a month of mass canvassing and rallies, the poll showed the skilled workers had moved 13 points to 38% for Labour, while the less skilled moved 20 points to 45%. Given that some working class people continue to vote for the smaller regional parties such as the Scottish National Party, Sinn Féin, the Democratic Unionists in Northern Ireland, or Plaid Cymru in Wales, this means that the rise in Labour Party/Corbyn support actually comes close to being a majority of the two major-party vote among the skilled and a clear majority among the less skilled workers.

The UKIP vote, which had previously attracted significant white working class support, collapsed from nearly four million in the 2015 election to just under 600,000. It is also clear that Labour’s relatively radical manifesto/policy statement—calling for nationalizing the railways and utilities, building more council or social housing, an end to austerity, and a halt to the creeping privatization of the National Health Service—attracted working class voters.

In many working class areas this meant an increased Labour majority. In Hartlepool in the northeast, a largely working class town that voted 70% for Brexit, where UKIP came in second with over 11,000 votes in 2015 and thousands of steel jobs were lost just two years ago, Labour more than doubled its majority from about 3,000 in 2015 to 7,600 this year. Corbyn drew 10,000 to a rally in the rain. UKIP’s vote fell to 4,801. Similarly

enlarged Labour majorities occurred across the country.

More important, of course, was the gain of some 30 seats, many in the heavily working class Midlands and North with largely white populations that had gone Tory in past elections. For example, Derby North is an East-Midlands manufacturing town where the largest employers are Rolls Royce and Toyota and the population is about 87% white. It went Conservative in 2015, but returned to Labour this year with a majority of over 2,000. Bury North, which covers three old Lancashire mill towns and is about 88% white, went Tory in 2010 by 2,200 votes, but voted Labour in 2017 by a majority of 4,375.

Tory Meltdown

Tory Prime Minister Theresa May had called this “snap” election believing she could increase the party’s majority in Parliament. Although the Conservatives got the most votes and seats in Parliament, May’s highly personalized and repetitive campaign was a disaster that cost them their previous majority of 12 seats. May had tried to make the election all about her “strong and stable leadership” to negotiate Brexit, but Labour’s left program undermined that strategy. Nor did the three terrorist attacks on the UK in the previous three months boost the Tories’ chances of gaining a bigger majority.

As a result, the Tories are now cobbling together a deal with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), which has 10 MPs, enough to give the Tories a slim working majority on major issues. The DUP is a right-wing, Ulster loyalist party that opposes abortion and same-sex marriage. Some of its leading figures are also climate change deniers.

Aside from UKIP, the other major loser was the Scottish National Party (SNP), which lost 21 seats due largely to SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon’s emphasis on a second independence referendum. The Tories gained 12 seats in Scotland, Labour 6, and the Liberal Democrats 3.

The Grenfell Tower fire

Just six days after the election, a 24-story council high-rise went up in flames. Grenfell Tower housed 600 mostly poor tenants, many of whom were people of color. The outside cladding that had recently been installed by a string of private (corner-cutting) contractors was not fireproof and became the conduit that turned the entire building into an inferno within 30 minutes.

The tenants’ association along with many experts had long argued that these 1970s high-rises were unsafe. Fire alarms didn’t work, there were no sprinklers or fire extinguishers, and these buildings had only one stairwell and no evacuation plan. The material in the cladding used on Grenfell Tower has been banned in U.S. construction since 2012. By the weekend the estimate of the dead and missing were between 58 and 70.

Located in Kensington, one of the richest boroughs in Britain, the poor neighborhood in its midst instantly became the symbol of class and race inequality. Firefighters and health workers responded rapidly, people from the neighborhood and beyond rushed to the scene with food, clothing and bedding for the survivors, but government at all levels appeared paralyzed. The local Kensington Council made no effort to coordinate food and clothing distribution or to locate shelter for displaced residents. Survivors could not get information about friends and relatives either in hospitals or trapped in the building. Sorrow turned to anger.

Jeremy Corbyn visited the scene talking to residents and demanding answers from the authorities. London’s Labour and Muslim mayor Sadiq Khan came flanked by police, but at least stayed to respond to the angry crowd. Theresa May finally appeared the next day but ignored residents and spoke only to emergency staff. She returned on Friday to speak at a meeting of residents in a church, but when the audience turned angry she fled. The *Guardian* newspaper termed her

response to this horrific tragedy "Theresa May's Hurricane Katrina" (June 16).

An enraged crowd stormed the Kensington Council headquarters, but no councillors were to be found. Eventually they marched to the prime minister's residence at 10 Downing Street but got no answers. At all levels government did what it does best: promised inquiries and commissions. Eventually for survivors will come some money and housing, maybe nearby, maybe not.

As this was being written on Saturday morning, angry crowds were still milling around the area and the government has shown itself incapable of responding to the concerns of residents and their supporters. This may be one more nail in the coffin of

the Tory government.
Growing Shift to Labour; And Then?

In the wake of the election, even before the Grenfell Tower disaster, over 35,000 people had joined the Labour Party. A poll taken two days after the election asking how you would vote if the election were held that day actually showed Labour getting 45% of the vote. Given that third parties take up nearly a fifth of all votes, this would mean a clear majority of votes for Labour. The same poll showed that 49%, including many Tories, thought May should resign. What must that opinion be now!

Given the shaky nature of the Conservative/DUP alliance, the inevitable difficulties in the Brexit negotiations, the problems May will have in continuing austerity, and now

her own Katrina, it is entirely possible that another election will take place well before this government serves out its five-year term. While the Labour Party is on permanent campaign footing, it is still deeply divided despite Corbyn's new prestige and his support among the members.

Given the ferocious opposition of "The City" (the powerful financial services industry) and capital in general, if that happens and Labour wins, it will be a test not only of Corbyn and the party's activist base, but of "parliamentary socialism" itself. Stay tuned.

June 21, 2017, This article was written before the evening attack on a London mosque.

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Perspectives after the censure motion

7 July 2017, by **Josep María Antentas**

1/ Interesting in itself, the motion of censure also has the additional appeal of provoking an avalanche of diverse interpretations whose analysis is almost or as suggestive as itself. The manner of reading it and evaluating its consequences reveals a whole conception of politics. In his famous *18th Brumaire*, Marx called parliamentary cretinism the disease "which holds those infested by it fast in an imaginary world and robs them of all sense, all memory, all understanding of the rude external world". Not only is parliamentary cretinism a way of acting politically, it is also a way of understanding and analysing it. And, certainly, *analytical cretinism* is a widespread specialty among political commentators who do not see beyond the corridors of the institutional world. Any serious analysis of the motion of censure, however, must scrutinize it in terms of its long-term impact and the strategic and tactical re-alignment of the forces of the left. Reducing the focus to the parliamentary arithmetic is too

simplicistic.

2/ What happened in the motion itself, during the parliamentary debate, was as could be expected: the representatives of Unidos Podemos played a good role. Iglesias' authority, only threatened by his own oscillations and errors of register, is well-known. And he did not fail this time. Podemos parliamentary spokesperson Irene Montero perfectly demonstrated her own. The PSOE did what it could, but it still benefits, at least to some extent, from being in an interim phase in which Sanchez's new leadership has not yet begun to find its feet. In this sense, the Podemos motion was more lethal to the PSOE when it was announced, putting Susana Diaz and the coup managers on the ropes, than when it finally developed. And the PP was dedicated to the only thing it can do: to be rooted in its own history and to maintain an unmoved course. The accumulation of cases of corruption and the shattering of its organization in Madrid have placed it in a difficult situation but, for the moment, it

remains the best systemic support and the main guarantor that the political agenda of the great nuclei of economic and financial power is fulfilled. The lamentable and much commented on, performance of its spokesperson, Rafael Hernando, represents the perfect synthesis of the limitless authoritarianism and reaction that the PP embodies, and which begins to take on caricatural tones.

3/ The motion marks a milestone in the trajectory of Unidos Podemos which basically has two divergent ways to trace its future: either emphasizing a parliamentary closure above its activity, focusing its policy on permanent media coups and an endless dance with the PSOE, or trying to transcend the spaces of institutional politics to strengthen its presence in society and try to condition the parliamentary aspects from its intervention in this area. It is not a question of a Manichean opposition of "parliament" and "street", but rather of defining how the two sides of political activity are

related and where its centre of gravity is located. The challenge for Podemos is not to be reduced to a media apparatus and a parliamentary group that floats in the media-institutional space with nothing below, without solid anchorages in society beyond voting, social networks and mass media.

4/ 15M and “No nos representan”, and Podemos with its initial discourse against the “caste”, marked a moment of rejection of the whole political system and parties, although this answer always was, in particular in the Podemos moment, stronger in form than in content. But after the elections of December 20, 2015, the paradigm slid towards “bringing down the PP” and forming an alternative government. This was due in part to three unavoidable realities: fatigue with the resilient and endless government of the PP, the insertion of Podemos in the dynamics of parliamentary politics after its arrival in the institutions, and the decline of social struggles. The bottom line, however, is that the goal of getting rid of the PP can be focused from two points of view: in a perspective of constituent rupture and a break with the neoliberal model, or in a more conventional way of putting together a “progressive government” with imprecise tasks. The latter has, unfortunately, been the option of Podemos since it embraced a policy of a unitary approach to the PSOE disconnected from concrete programmatic debate. The result has been both a dangerous express rehabilitation of the PSOE as an instrument of change, and in addition, since the return of Sánchez, the stagnation of Unidos Podemos in a public dispute with the PSOE without clear political content.

5/ The challenge for Podemos is having a tactic of unity towards the PSOE without generating the fiction and confusion of belonging to the same political space, and in which political-programmatic discussions occupy the decisive place. If Podemos seals its strategy around denouncing corruption and the need to set up an alternative government with uncertain content and a weak programme,

basically this makes things easier for the PSOE. On the contrary, Podemos must fight to maintain and introduce into the political agenda the great debates on economic, social and energy policy. It is in this field that the big differences can be marked with the PP and the “new PSOE” of Sanchez can be forced to either assume concrete positions contrary to neoliberal logic, or admit to their imposture. If the framework of the debate is only corruption and democratic regeneration and a light programme, between the “new PSOE” and an Errejonized Podemos (albeit without Errejón) in imitation of Ciudadanos, the PSOE wins. This is particularly the case with a Podemos whose leader who is more credible in a contentious register than in the role of statesman. If the debate, however, remains in the realm of criticism of the model and the proposal of consistent alternatives, Podemos looks better than the PSOE. Unidos Podemos can do a lot to try to get things going one way or the other. But the decisive question will be the revitalization or otherwise of social struggles, and, in particular, the dialectic established between these struggles and Unidos Podemos, and the latter’s ability to condition the political debate with programmatic proposals that emanate from, and reflect, the major themes of social conflict.

6/ Authority. This is the buzz word in the ranks of Unidos Podemos and its periphery on the way to appearing as an alternative government. A fundamental idea, no doubt, but it can be interpreted in different ways. It would be a mistake to equate “authority”, as unfortunately tends to happen, with governmental respectability according to conventional criteria and under the weight of the long historical phantasm of Eurocommunism. Authority in programmatic elaboration? Something fundamental without a doubt, but that does not necessarily have anything to do with decaffeinating the programme and cutting it in the pattern of what is acceptable by the “markets”, but with detailing thoroughly and deconstructing a battery of measures

that point towards another model. Communicative and discursive authority? Of course. But this is not to seek the condescending approval of opinion makers and representatives of what is officially correct. It implies beginning by transmitting an image of honesty and conviction in what is said. There Corbyn is light years ahead of Iglesias, victim of his own innumerable discursive oscillations and sudden changes. Organizational authority? This of course involves dismantling the machinery built in the first Vistalegre and ratified, with a few touches, at the second. Authority, well understood, implies above all thinking strategically and, therefore, going beyond permanent tactics.

7/ Finally, the political debate over forming an alternative to the PP inevitably meets with the great destabilizing issue that is Catalonia and the process of independence. There the new PSOE has quickly grown old. Unidos Podemos has maintained a dignified democratic position regarding the referendum announced for 1 October although it has anti-strategically reduced its meaning. Its main weakness is the difficulty of integrating the Catalan process into a strategic state-wide perspective of rupture with the 1978 [post-Franco] regime. This is undoubtedly very difficult. Maybe impossible. Consequently, the Catalan question is still seen more as a “drag” to be overcome than as an issue compatible with a state-wide strategy.

Unfortunately, the position of the Catalan allies of Unidos Podemos, Catalonia in ComA9, does not serve in this sense to spur the articulation of a more audacious position. Its formalist passivity seems to have discarded any attempt at a federalist-independentist synthesis around the slogans of the Catalan Republic and a Catalan constituent process, and to have rejected the search for a complementary relationship between the unilateral path and the formation of state-level alliances. With this approach, the strategic debate, inside and outside of Catalonia, has lost depth in favour of superficialities that do not contribute to advancing at complex moments.

Tories in crisis- Corbyn's Labour Party in the ascendancy

6 July 2017, by **Veronica Fagan**

On April 18 2017, when British Prime Minister Theresa May called an unexpected General Election for 8 June, she expected that the outcome would strengthen her position. In fact it has done exactly the opposite. Now there is the very real prospect of a Corbyn-led Labour government, elected on a radical socialist manifesto, being swept to office within the next year. The election result was a stunning triumph for Corbyn and a significant defeat for May.

And this possibility has huge implications for the left across Europe and beyond. Britain is not a peripheral country. It is a major economic power with imperialist pretensions which was at the forefront of promoting neoliberalism. A left social democratic government coming to office on the basis of a radicalised mass movement would inevitably have a major positive impact on the British and European working class. So why did May make the gamble she did? She knew that the Brexit negotiations between Britain and the rest of Europe were scheduled to start on June 19. Since the referendum the previous summer in which the country voted to leave the European Union, the historic divisions inside the Tory Party on this question had lain dormant.

Although May herself quietly supported Remain, once she replaced David Cameron who resigned as Prime Minister hours after last summer's results, she packed her Cabinet with hardline anti-Europeans. Her Conservative Party sought to undermine the growing support for Nigel Farage's UK Independence Party by adopting its policies and its approach; through the UKIPisation of the Tory Party.

But that did not mean that everyone inside the party was reconciled to that

approach and she knew that these divisions would become more apparent during the forthcoming discussions with Brussels - in the media and potentially even on the floor of the House of Commons where she had only a slender majority. She wanted to consolidate her position before the negotiations got going.

The Tories held Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn in contempt and had every reason to believe this approach was shared by the majority of Labour MPs. Ably aided by the mainstream media, the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) with the exception of a smack group of stalwart Corbyn supporters has been trying to undermine and demonise him ever since he was elected in September 2015.

The assault on Corbyn reached its pitch after the European referendum in June 2016, when 172 out of 229 Labour MPs passed a motion of no confidence in the Labour leader in a secret ballot. In the ensuing Labour leadership election over the summer, Corbyn was re-elected easily by the Party membership as a whole.

May and the Tories however knew that the majority of the PLP remained hostile to the Labour leader. The Labour right never missed the opportunity to make this clear on the airwaves and in print. But the Tories massively underestimated the role that Corbyn's political ideas and the huge movement to propagate them would play during the election campaign. The Tory lead of 22 points in the opinion polls when the election was called evaporated as Corbyn's policies were debated across the land.

The Prime Minister lost her narrow majority. Now there is a hung Parliament in which the Tories can only govern with the support of one of the most reactionary parties in Europe

- the Democratic Unionist Party.

This party with its long legacy of support for Loyalist terror groups is also deeply misogynist - completely opposed to women having access to abortion for example, and homophobic (having voted against equal marriage. They have already extracted a huge cash price of £1 billion from the Tories but there is strong concern from feminists and LGBTIQ groups that this will not be the only price they will demand. [101]

Labour's manifesto

The primary reason for the extraordinary General election result was the excellent campaign run by Corbyn's Labour Party, centred on a bold manifesto which called for

• Increased tax for the richest 5% and for businesses;

• Renationalisation of the railways;

• Abolition of tuition fees;

• More funding for the NHS and the reversal of key aspects of neoliberalism and similar demands in other areas. [102]

It is not a revolutionary or anti-capitalist set of demands but, in the actual political situation in Britain, its approach was exactly what was needed.

It broke with the neo-liberal consensus in British politics going back more than 30 years. At the centre of the debate that it ignited was the line that Corbyn and his supporters had used inside the Labour Party including during the two leadership elections - that austerity is a political choice and one we reject. And it was the same approach that had led to the massive surge in Labour Party membership

during the two leadership elections fought by Corbyn as well as to his victories.

At the same time a great deal of effort went into costing each pledge in the manifesto and to showing how the necessary money could be raised from taxes on business and on the top 5% of earners. This was a conscious decision, erecting a defence against the response from both the media and the Tories that these were unaffordable promises.

All this was in stark contrast to the Tory manifesto, where, as Shadow Defence Secretary Emily Thornberry quipped, the only numbers are page numbers! [103] In attacking Corbyn's Labour, the Tories claimed the Labour manifesto was based on 'a magic money tree'. But miraculously they are able to find a huge sum to seal their rotten deal with the DUP. [104]

The Tories also packed into their slim manifesto offering further attacks on every section of the population e.g. rescinding the ban on foxhunting and on creating new grammar schools. [105] But it was the various attacks on older people - from which their core support has come for many decades - that showed their unthinking arrogance most clearly.

They proposed that the winter fuel allowance - a one off payment of £200 paid to everyone over 65 to help with increased heating bills - should be means tested. They responded to the growing crisis in social care by saying they would impose a tax on people who need care in their own home in which the value of their homes would be taken into account. And they said they would water down the triple lock which guarantees that state pensions will rise by a minimum of either 2.5%, the rate of inflation or average earnings growth, whichever is largest. They were confident that they could do this and retain their lead in the polls.

The Labour manifesto for the General Election transformed the situation from one where discussion was dominated by personal attacks on Corbyn, to one where politics pushed its way through. Everyone was talking about what sort of society they wanted

to live in - and this moved discussion significantly to the left - to Corbyn's advantage and May's dismay.

There are questions where **Socialist Resistance** does not agree with the Labour manifesto.

Probably our biggest criticism is that it has nothing to say about the massively undemocratic First Past the Post voting system for Westminster. In the 2015 General election, it took a staggering 3.9m votes to elect a Ukip MP and 1.1m to elect a Green MP. It took 299,000 to elect a LibDem, 40,000 to elect a Labour MP, 34,000 to elect a Tory MP. In contrast it took only 26,000 to elect an SNP MP. Ukip came third in the total votes cast but was left with only one MP while the SNP won 56 seats with less than half the votes of Ukip. The fewer MPs a racist party like Ukip gets the better. But nothing is gained by rigging the election against them rather than defeating them politically - particularly when it is rigged against the left as well.

We think there needs to be a campaign for proportional representation inside the Labour Party and more generally across British society. Labour would generate a lot of support - and a lot of political credibility - if it undertook to end this situation once and for all.

We also think that there are serious problems with the Labour Party's stance on Scotland. We support the right of the Scottish Parliament to hold a second independence referendum in Scotland. Our supporters in Scotland would campaign for a Yes vote in such a referendum and those in England and Wales would argue for support for such a position - as we did in the last independence referendum. [106]

The Unionist approach of the Labour Party in Scotland combined with its right wing trajectory over decades has led many former Labour voters - indeed members and activists - to switch their support to the SNP. The Corbyn surge has been much weaker in Scotland than elsewhere in Britain - though the campaign and the manifesto did have a positive impact this time. But there still needs to be a

fight to change the overall approach of the Labour Party on both sides of the border on the question of Scottish independence.

Free movement?

The issue on which there has been most debate and dissent on the left is on the question of Labour's attitude to the European Union and in particular freedom of movement - and beyond that more generally the question of migration.

Despite rumours to the contrary Jeremy Corbyn campaigned tirelessly for a Remain vote in the EU referendum. He didn't appear as part of the official Remain campaign because he didn't want to be seen to be campaigning alongside the Tories and big business - something that had certainly damaged Labour in the Scottish independence referendum.

But afterwards it was essential that Corbyn made clear that he recognised the result of the referendum - to do anything else would have been undemocratic.

But Labour had another problem. While the majority of Labour voters supported Remain, the majority of Labour MPs were in constituencies where Leave had a majority. In order to prevent a Tory landslide at the next General election, Corbyn needed to win the support of many of these people. The Labour manifesto, with promises of public services for the many not the few, was critical to doing this, but so was being clear from the beginning that Labour accepted the results of the referendum. Some argued that Labour should have voted against the triggering of Article 50, the process that would start the discussions with the European Union - but this would have been wrong as well as electorally damaging.

This is what the manifesto says in relation to EU nationals currently living here:

"A Labour government will immediately guarantee existing rights for all EU nationals living in Britain and secure reciprocal rights for UK citizens who have chosen to make their lives in EU countries. EU

nationals do not just contribute to our society: they are part of our society. And they should not be used as bargaining chips.”

The latter point in particular has been made countless times by Corbyn both before the General Election and more recently in reaction to Theresa May’s “offer” to the European Union. It is a good position.

Interestingly Shadow Brexit Secretary Keir Starmer went further. In taking apart May’s position he criticised the way that existing income threshold of £18,000 prevents some British nationals bringing family members to live in Britain. He was asked if he was saying that EU citizens should have more rights than British nationals. No he replied, we would review that policy when we are in government.

Of course the debate does not end there. There is the question of what EU migration to Britain will be permitted after Britain leaves and how that fits into overall migration policy. Here the manifesto is less precise but implies that freedom of movement would be replaced by a Labour government (probably for all migrants) with freedom of labour i.e. that people could move with a job. This is accompanied with strong rhetoric against the whipping up of racism by the right e.g. “Labour will not scapegoat migrants nor blame them for economic failures”.

It is not perfect; there is for example a tension between the essential argument that migrants are people and the use of terms such as “managed migration” which dehumanises them, but it is definitely going in the right direction.

Socialist Resistance supports a No Borders position but that doesn’t mean we think such a position is one that will easily win mass support – especially just a year after the poisonous EU referendum where racism and anti-migrant sentiment was legitimised by the media and many mainstream politicians.

It is completely understandable that EU nationals and campaigners for migrant rights are passionate about this question but we think it is more

effective to think concretely about where the Labour Party is in relation to where we would like it to be, as well as how to move it further in our direction. That means recognising that the current position expressed in the manifesto is not at all bad. It means proposing positive measures such as inviting antiracist campaigners as speakers and discussions about how to challenge racist ideas on the doorstep.

We criticise Labour politicians or anyone else who we think is giving succour to racism. There have been statements from pro-Corbyn MPs that we think do that, for example Shadow Secretary of State for Education Angela Rayner made comments that migration is responsible for falling wages. It is not true – the problem is usually lack of trade union organisation – but it is a myth constantly repeated by the right.

But we are confident that other key Labour figures – Jeremy Corbyn who came from his first leadership election to speak at a pro-migrant demonstration, John McDonnell who has fought against immigration detention and Dianne Abbot who has written and campaigned extensively for example – have a different view which they are fighting for inside the Labour Party.

Labour’s campaign

The nature of the Labour Party’s campaign was significant. In the 7 weeks between 18 April and 8 June, Corbyn spoke at 90 rallies in more than 60 towns and cities across Britain, under the slogan “for the many not the few.” They were huge meetings attended by thousands – sometimes on beaches or parks because there was no indoor venue large enough for the crowds that he was attracting. The message was that campaigns such as those in defence of the NHS, trade unions and the activists were an essential part of the campaign.

In every area of Britain thousands of activists were pounding the streets talking to voters about Labour’s offer. Many who had joined the party since the 2015 General Election, including those who flooded in to back Corbyn had not got that involved in the day to

day rhythms of the party. But now they came out, understanding that blocking a landslide for the Tories was vital.

The trade unions and campaigns, particularly those around public services also played a significant role. In particular the teaching unions (none of which are actually affiliated to the Labour Party) ran a wonderful campaign around funding for schools. Parents and school students joined in and many schools displayed banners showing the cuts that the Tories were imposing – forcing them to spend time fundraising or appealing to parents to pay for books and stationery.

All of this was in massive contrast to the Tories and Theresa May. Where the Prime Minister held meetings these were for handpicked members of her party. One was held in a factory before the workers arrived, another in a community centre which had lost government funding. Photos began to leak out of how small numbers were cropped into what looked like a crowd. And May also refused to debate head to head with Corbyn or other party leaders in the media.

There was another significant loser on election night alongside the Conservative Party – media magnate Rupert Murdoch also had an extremely long face. [107] Both Corbyn’s team and left wing pressure group Momentum did an excellent job on social media which had also been central to Corbyn’s internal election campaigns. Fewer and fewer people depend on newspapers or mainstream TV stations for news. Less than half the readership of Murdoch’s Sun even turns out to vote.

The national campaign from the Labour Party apparatus, which Corbyn does not control, was defensive and unresponsive. People were generally encouraged to work in their own areas even where Labour already had a sizeable majority. Some additional resources were put into places where Labour MPs had scraped in last time, but even when the opinion polls shifted against the Tories, their marginal seats were not targeted.

Momentum did an excellent job over the heads of the apparatus to break

that conservatism and direct people to campaign and generated a huge response. [108]

Local campaigns also varied. Some MPs hardly mentioned the Labour Party, let alone Jeremy Corbyn in their material and sought to run on their individual record as local advocates. Some of them had swallowed the myth that radical policies would be a vote loser; others wanted to continue their feud against Corbyn. But the election results have forced many to publicly eat humble pie and praise Labour's campaign as well as the result. Don't hold your breath that this represents a real change from many of them, but Corbyn's position as leader is more secure than ever.

From that point of view there are still two Labour Parties, the one which supports Corbyn and the one which is controlled by the right of the PLP and the apparatus. But the election campaign has swung the balance of forces further in Corbyn's direction than ever before.

British General Elections usually result in a political hiatus as a new or re-elected government beds in and translates its manifesto into a new legislative programme and activists take a rest after the campaign. This time the reverse has happened.

Jeremy Corbyn has played a key role in this. At his eve of poll rally in his home borough of Islington, North London, when it was clear that the result would better than either the Tories or his right-wing opponents inside the Labour Party hoped, he urged his supporters to keep campaigning.

Grenfell: murdered by neoliberalism

Only a few days after the General Election another event happened that further underlined the transformation in the fortunes of the two main parties and their leaders by the result - a huge fire in a tower block of council flats in north west London, Grenfell Tower in which at least 78 people died.

Millions watched in horror on their TV screens as the twenty-three storey building burned from the outside with extreme rapidity. This took place in the royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (K+C) - the richest local authority in Britain - but one in which the Tory administration has been at the forefront of cost cutting and privatisation. While the Royal Borough has many well-heeled residents, this was certainly not the case for the tenants of Grenfell. It was no surprise to anyone who knows North Kensington that the first person to be confirmed dead after the fire was a Syrian refugee.

This was an entirely preventable tragedy created by neoliberal deregulation in which working class people were sacrificed on the bonfire of austerity. John McDonnell has rightly asserted that people were "murdered by political decisions". [109]

Those decisions include the reduction in building regulations which allow developers to build or refurbish estates on the basis of profit not need, not only through using dangerous materials but failing to include emergency lighting, adequate fire exits or sprinkler systems. They include the dismissal of health and safety regulations, including fire safety regulations, as "red tape"; these are therefore weakened both in law and through cuts to the workforce needed to properly oversee them.

The material used to insulate the tower, and many other blocks across Britain was flammable - but it was cheaper than other, less dangerous alternatives. Tenant's organisations on the estate had been campaigning over this and other safety issues for years - and had been threatened with legal action to try to shut them up. They had written in 2014 that the "improvement" works had turned the tower into a death trap [110] and "it is a truly terrifying thought but the Grenfell Action Group firmly believe that only a catastrophic event will expose the ineptitude and incompetence of our landlord," in 2016. [111]

As more and more information comes out about the events fury builds both

in north Kensington and beyond. The visits of two senior politicians were in this context emblematic. Prime Minister Theresa May went to Grenfell but didn't meet the grieving, injured or traumatised residents. Instead she had a private meeting only with members of the emergency services the morning after the fire. This echoed her behaviour during the election campaign where in contrast to Corbyn's mass rallies she held meetings with handpicked audiences of Tory supporters.

A few hours later, Jeremy Corbyn went down to Grenfell and met not only with exhausted fire fighters but with many residents who welcomed him with open arms. So too did the thousands of volunteers who had flocked to Grenfell with food, clothes and other essentials in a wave of solidarity not offered by the local Tory council.

So when Corbyn in a House of Commons debate on tragedy said "From Hillsborough to Grenfell the pattern is consistent: working-class people's voices are ignored," he was echoing the sentiments of millions. [112] Kicking out the Tories and electing a Corbyn government is the best way to prevent further Grenfells - though that will also mean tackling those many Labour-run local authorities who have also been managing austerity rather than fighting it.

It has become clear since Grenfell that other councils - including Labour controlled ones - and housing associations have used some of the same materials and practices as Grenfell. Camden Labour controlled council had several tower blocks that it evacuated. Initially we were told that this was because the same cladding had been used as at Grenfell - but it now seems that in addition all the fire doors had been removed during a recent 'refurbishment'. So listening to and responding to the concerns of both tenants and workers needs to be a lesson that Labour councillors take from Grenfell.

A Labour Government (impatiently) in waiting

The General election and the contrasting performance of Labour and the Tories has transformed the political situation in Britain. Many who previously made attacks on Corbyn either in the media or from the Labour right have been commenting that he looks Prime Ministerial.

Some of the worst aspects of the Tory manifesto were dropped in the Queen's speech. [113] The cover for this was that the DUP opposed things like ending the triple lock, but the battering their expectations took at Corbyn's hand must also have been a factor. There is now a real debate even in the mainstream media about whether austerity should be ended.

Theresa May does not seem to be currently under threat as leader of the Tory party - but only because there is

no obvious alternative. Polls show that another leader would be even less popular against Corbyn than she is. After all Corbyn's Labour has challenged the whole austerity brand rather than just its current figure head. But when former Tory Chancellor George Osborn (now editor of London's Evening Standard) refers openly to her as a dead woman walking, the precarity of her position is very obvious. [114]

Labour are driving the advantage home by putting an amendment to the Queen's Speech calling for an end to the public sector pay freeze and for extra funding for fire and police staff. While it is unlikely that this amendment will be passed it keeps the debate on the fact that austerity is a political choice at the centre of debate. [115]

In the first Prime Ministers Question's [116] after the General Election on 28 June Jeremy Corbyn welcomed the fact that prosecutions had been announced earlier the same day over Hillsborough and then focused on the lessons of Grenfell and

the steps that need to be taken both to support those involved and to prevent the reoccurrence of such a tragedy, not only in high rise housing blocks but other buildings where similar materials may well have been used.

There is a new confidence amongst Labour Party members, prepared for the next General Election that could come at any time as the Tory crisis deepens - one which Labour stands a real chance of winning on a platform of radical demands.

The activists that have flocked to join the Labour Party since the General Election in 2015 have much in common with the people who have joined parties like Podemos in the Spanish State, to fight for a different kind of society. There are reasons particular to the history and structure of the British Labour movement which means that there such a revolt was more likely to go through a social democratic party, rather than by creating an alternative party. The victory of a Corbyn government would be a big step forward for the left in Britain, across Europe and beyond.

Crisis between the reactionary monarchies of the Gulf

5 July 2017, by **Joseph Daher**

A few days later, Saudi Arabia and its allies published a list of "terrorists" supported, according to them, by Doha. The list contained the names of 59 people and 12 entities "linked to Qatar and in the service of a suspicious political programme of Qatar". Among them were officials or organizations from Egypt, Bahrain and Libya, such as the spiritual leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood and of a Sunni religious association, Youssef al-Qaradawi. The Gulf Arab states have not made any public demands concerning Qatar, but a list that has circulated includes breaking diplomatic ties with Iran, expelling all members of the Palestinian Hamas

movement and the Muslim Brotherhood, freezing all the bank accounts of Hamas members, ending support for "terrorist organizations" and ending interference in Egyptian affairs.

The Emir of Qatar, Al-Thani, assured the world that his country could hold out "eternally" despite the severe air and maritime restrictions imposed by its neighbours and the closure by Saudi Arabia of its only land border, through which transits 40 per cent of its food supply. The rich emirate also said it was in a position to guarantee its delivery agreements for liquefied natural gas (LNG) and oil, which

provide more than 90 per cent of its revenues. A week after the outbreak of the crisis, Qatar once again rejected all the accusations and declared its determination not to give way under pressure. Qatari Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad bin Abdel Rahman Al Thani, on a European tour to "inform" the "allied and friendly" countries of the crisis, denounced the "unfair" and "illegal" measures imposed on his country by Gulf countries and Egypt. The minister also denied the allegations of support for the Muslim Brotherhood movement and did not understand why it was necessary to break off political relations with Hamas, since it was a

resistance movement and not a terrorist group as the Saudi Foreign Minister said. Qatar is nevertheless seeking international support to break its isolation and has called for an "open and honest dialogue" with Saudi Arabia to in order to emerge from this crisis.

Since the campaign to isolate Qatar, Iran has been sending tons of food products over the last week to the Emirate of Qatar. Tehran sent five planes loaded with 90 tons of fruit and vegetables, and 350 tons of fruit and vegetables were also loaded onto three small boats. Turkey, for its part, has accelerated the dispatch of troops, increasing the number of its soldiers in the emirate from 100 to 3000, something planned for a long time. Turkish President Erdogan also said on June 13th that the measures of isolation against Qatar are in violation of Islamic values.

This crisis is causing embarrassment to many foreign countries, including the United States, despite statements by US President Trump at the outset of the crisis supporting the Saudi position against Qatar, which is home to the largest US air base in the region, with 10,000 troops and the US military command headquarters in the Middle East. This base is crucial for the struggle of the international coalition led by the United States against the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. Diplomatic efforts involving Washington, Paris and Kuwait have been intensified in order to contain the crisis in the Gulf.

Puffed up by Donald Trump's recent visit to Riyadh, where the US president fully aligned himself with the Saudi doctrine seeking to stem Iran in the region, the Saudis are taking advantage of this to deal with any state in their own camp that does not completely follow their political line. Qatar has been pursuing its own regional policy for a long time, reinforced by a coup in 1995 by Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani,

which annoyed his Saudi neighbour. But it was the different political strategies in the context of the revolutionary processes in the region that began at the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011 that was most important. These differences, between Saudi Arabia and its ally, the United Arab Emirates, on the one hand and Qatar on the other, created more and more tension and finally led to an unprecedented crisis. Saudi Arabia and its allies have generally supported the former regimes against any form of protest, with the exception of Libya and Syria (because of its alliance with Iran, where they supported the most reactionary forms of opposition to the regime), while Qatar supported the movement of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic fundamentalist movements against the former regimes, with the exception of Bahrain, where Qatar and the rest of the Gulf monarchies opposed the popular revolt.

A first crisis had already broken out in 2014, with the recall of the ambassadors of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain from Qatar in March of that year on the pretext that Doha was threatening regional security. The crisis was resolved by an agreement between these states, but Qatar did not respect its promises, such as the cessation of support for the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic fundamentalist movements in the region, as in Syria and Libya. That is why Saudi Arabia and its allies today demand a "political commitment" from Qatar, including respect for promises made during the initial crisis in 2014, as well as a "road map" with "clear mechanisms" for its implementation. There was, however, a form of appeasement between Qatar and Saudi Arabia after Saudi Arabia's King Salman, who was less hostile than his brother Abdallah to the Muslim Brotherhood, came to power in January 2015. In the name of the unity of a "Sunni camp", as opposed to a "Shiite camp" led by Iran, Riyadh

arbitrated the conflicts between Doha, Abu Dhabi and Cairo, while Qatar participated in the coalition led by Saudi Arabia in Yemen. The continuation of the independent policy of Qatar finally exhausted the patience of the Saudi kingdom.

In this political crisis between reactionary states, we must of course denounce the political opportunism and the lies of Saudi Arabia and its allies in their campaigns of isolation and pressure against Qatar. These states are dictatorships which repress any form of opposition. The reactionary Wahabi ideology is promoted by the Saudi kingdom throughout the world, inspiring jihadist, Salafist and Islamic fundamentalist groups. However, this reality must not lead us to a form of idealization or a rose-tinted view of the Emirate of Qatar, which is also a dictatorship promoting the same reactionary Wahabi ideology.

Despite these political differences, all these dictatorships have a counter-revolutionary agenda by their support for former regimes and fundamentalist Islamic forces. All these monarchies are in total opposition to the objectives of the popular uprisings for democracy, social justice and equality and seek only to strengthen their political interests through support to different actors. Riyadh and Doha both support imperialist, neo-liberal and authoritarian policies, treating the great majority of their workers as modern slaves, particularly the foreign workers. Not to mention a dissemination of a religion-based discourse filled with hatred, while promoting a retrograde view of society and of women's rights.

Faced with this crisis between reactionary states, we seek the fall of their elites and the liberation of the peoples of the region.

June 13th, 2017

[SyriaFreedomforever](#)

The Longest Occupation

4 July 2017

Unlike some of his predecessors, of course, Trump paid no lip service to human rights or democracy, both of which he despises — as do his Saudi royal hosts, who understood perfectly that the way to treat him is with limitless pomp and flattery. The audience also included the rulers of Bahrain, perpetrators of brutal violence and repression against human rights and democracy protest, and certainly emboldened by Trump's proclamation of an "anti-terror" alliance targeting Iran.

Trump isn't particularly good at dressing up imperial power politics in flights of rhetoric about universal human values, and to his credit he doesn't make much effort to do so. But underlying the visuals of Trump's performance in the Holy Lands are underreported and longstanding realities of the region. President Barack Obama understood these dynamics, of which Donald Trump knows next to nothing, yet in the end this makes little difference.

In important ways today's Middle East has been shaped by the transformational events of the June 1967 war, six days when Israel smashed the military power — and more important, the image — of its Arab neighbors Egypt, Jordan and Syria. The story that Israel was responding to Arab aggression has long since been refuted by serious historians. In fact, the Israeli leadership deliberately provoked the war with Egypt, confident that it enjoyed military supremacy and would win overwhelmingly.

Still, that myth of Israel's "miraculous defensive victory" remains fixed in much of the popular imagination, especially and crucially in the United States. [117]

Israeli euphoria and Arab humiliation would set the stage for the following 50 years: Israeli military occupation of

those parts of historic Palestine that weren't originally conquered by Israel in 1947-48; Israel's emergence as a first-rate military power and strategic imperialist ally; the radicalization and ultimate defeat of Arab nationalism and the left; the emergence of militant Islamic fundamentalism to fill the resulting vacuum, with all its tragic consequences.

Inside Palestine, 1967 was followed by the emergence of a powerful national liberation movement, the rise and ultimate defeat of the Palestine Liberation Organization; two massive Intifadas, followed by an illusory "peace process" and the unending tragedy that the Palestinian people are living today under strangling Israeli occupation and a repressive, corrupt "Palestinian Authority;" Israeli society's own long slide toward self-destruction.

It's impossible to unpack all this within a short space, but researcher and activist Jeff Halper appropriately poses the central question of the post-1967 era:

"How does Israel get away with it? In a decidedly post-colonial age, how is Israel able to sustain a half-century occupation over the Palestinians, a people it violently displaced in 1948, in the face of almost unanimous international opposition? Why, indeed, does the international community tolerate an unnecessary conflict that not only obstructs efforts to bring some stability to the wider Middle East, a pretty important geo-political region in which the United States and Europe are fighting a number of wars, but one that severely disrupts the international system as a whole?" (Jeff Halper, *War Against the People. Israel, the Palestinians and Global Pacification*, 1)

The answer of course has something to do with the supply and global control of oil, the power of the U.S.

domestic Israel lobby and particularly its Christian fundamentalist component, which of course also played a big role in the ascendancy to the Oval Office of that well-known moral conscience of the nation, Donald Trump. But Halper uncovers a deeper reason for the persistence of the occupation and its international toleration.

The Occupation...provides a testing ground for the development of weapons, security systems, models of population control and tactics without which Israel would be unable to compete in the arms and security markets...(B)eing a major military power serving other militaries and security services the world over lends Israel and international status among the global hegemonies it would not have otherwise. [118]

Global Matrix of Control

This insight helps explain a number of phenomena that might seem puzzling. How did it happen that Palestinians in the West Bank reached out to Black Lives Matter activists in Ferguson, Missouri, with expressions of solidarity and practical instructions on dealing with the toxic gas attacks the police had unleashed?

Within Trump's inner circle why is Steven Bannon, known for his alt-right connections and anti-semitic view of Jews as whining global cosmopolitans lacking proper nationalist loyalty, entirely sympathetic to the Israeli state and proud of having established a sizeable Breitbart bureau in Jerusalem?

For that matter, how is it that the Saudi kingdom that has exported the extreme Wahhabi fundamentalist ideology to places where it wasn't indigenously rooted (Afghanistan,

Pakistan and Indonesia among others), a source of seed money for al-Qaeda and ISIS movement, and a sponsor of sermons where Jews are routinely described as descendants of pigs and monkeys, is completely untroubled by Trump's embrace of Israel?

It starts making sense when you understand that "officers in the different police forces dealing with the Ferguson protests, who chose a confrontational approach backed up by heavy military equipment, were trained in Israel" (Halper, 265). This connection explains why the organization Jewish Voice for Peace, a rapidly growing organization that drew a thousand participants to its recent national meeting in Chicago, is launching a campaign to expose and stop this "deadly exchange" of militarized police techniques [119]

It becomes clearer when you recognize that for Bannon and even the notorious Richard Spencer, the model of a world constructed of "ethno-nationalist states" has plenty of room for a "Jewish state" behaving in that manner. Finally, the Saudi rulers understand that \$3.8 billion annual U.S. military aid to Israel "primes the pump" for the arms sales package to Saudi Arabia hailed by Trump in Riyadh. And U.S. military aid to Egypt, where the presidentialist dictatorship has crushed the democratic popular aspirations of 2011, is second only to the subsidy of Israel.

Behind the scenes, the Saudi and Israeli governments have seen their interests converging in the campaign against Iranian influence. That's why, with weaponry and refueling support supplied by the United States, the Saudi air force is continuing its intervention in Yemen's civil war. In the destruction of that country, millions are facing starvation and the United Nations fears that 150,000 cases of cholera will develop in the next six months.

In short, post-1967 Israel has not just developed a fiendish "Matrix of Control" (Jeff Halper's term) over the Occupied Palestinian Territories. It has become a central player in the global generalization of that method to an overall securitocratic "war against the people" wherever there are

potential or actual threats to power and privilege. Compared to the United States, of course, Israel remains a junior partner in this global war, but it's a highly consequential one.

This course hasn't been cost-free, of course. Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon from 1982-2000 took a significant military toll and ended with its first strategic defeat, at the hands of the resistance led by the Hezbollah militia. Two subsequent invasions and repeated Israeli bombings and assassination raids have failed to prevent Hezbollah's growing power in Lebanese politics or to curb its apparently sophisticated arsenal of missiles in the south.

Most importantly, Israeli society itself has been transformed since 1967, from a relatively egalitarian one "for its Jewish citizens, not the 20% Arab minority" to the second most unequal among the world's wealthy nations. (One guess as to which is number one: U-S-A!) Israel has had its own three decades of neoliberal restructuring, creating a concentration of wealth at the top in high-tech and among a few plutocratic families. Meanwhile large pools of poverty persist especially among Mizrahi Jews (of Arab and north African origin).

Its politics today are dominated by nationalist, extreme rightwing and religious parties, a configuration in which the execrable prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu faces greater threats from his right flank than from the remnants of the once-dominant Zionist "left."

Netanyahu's demand that the Palestinian leadership (and the world) "recognize Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people" is not only a deal-breaker for peace, but a huge threat to what remains of Israeli democracy. In the Knesset (Israeli parliament) today, the one actual meaningful democratic force is the "Joint List" of Arab-dominated parties, Communist, Palestinian nationalist and Islamic, demanding equal right for Palestinians in Israel as "a state of its citizens" rather than a Jewish-supremacist religio-ethnstate claiming to represent the Jews of the world.

Trump and Resistance

Let's return briefly to Trump's performance in Riyadh "leaving for a separate discussion his giving the political and literal finger to the United States' European allies, and walking away from the climate agreement when humanity faces a civilizational crisis of environmental collapse. It was in some ways as breathtaking as it was presidential.

He assured the assembled rulers of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain etc. that "we are not here to lecture you," and declaimed the absence of democracy "in Iran. In fact, Iran just held an election. The population didn't get to choose the candidates, who were vetted by the theocratic mullahs who control the state and the judiciary. But given the choices presented to them, Iranians voted overwhelmingly for the "moderate" president Hassan Rouhani who promised openness and social relaxation.

Responding to Rouhani's re-election, Trump and his Secretary of State from Exxon, Rex Tillerson, wasted no time in issuing pronouncements of snarling menace that can only undercut him in the face of Iran's militarist hardliners. And the congressional Democrats, true to their own nature, hopped on board a piece of legislation to impose new sanctions on Iran (although not blocking Boeing's lucrative airplane sales already in the pipeline).

Whatever happens to Trump's presidency won't be decided by his antics in Riyadh, Jerusalem or Brussels. It will end if, and at whatever point, he becomes a liability rather than an enabler of the savage rightwing Republican political agenda. But it's important that the resistance to the Trump regime "which has only intensified after his withdrawal from the international climate agreement" take up the issues of war in the Middle East, and Palestine in particular.

Fifty years after the 1967 war that transformed the Middle East, tragically, even minimal justice for the Palestinian people "self-

determination, equal rights inside the Israeli state, and the 1948 and 1967 refugees' right of return "is not presently in sight. It is illusory to imagine the situation turning around in the short term. But not so long ago, much of the progressive and even the peace movement were afraid to touch the issue of Palestine. That's no longer the case, and in these horrendous times it's an important positive sign.

In April and May, more than a thousand Palestinian prisoners heroically waged a 40-day hunger strike that forced important concessions from Israeli authorities on issues of family visits and prison

conditions, including education for children in detention. The international outcry in support of the prisoners' demands played a significant role.

The Movement for Black Lives has come out forthrightly for Palestine, even when foundation funds were cut off. Students for Justice in Palestine, the U.S. Campaign for Palestinian Rights, Jewish Voice for Peace and other forces are continuing BDS (boycott/divestment/sanctions) actions in the face of threats and state-level legislative campaigns to discredit and even criminalize them. And the popular outpouring after the

murderous stabbing by a white supremacist in Portland, Oregon shows that decent people recognize Islamophobic attacks as a threat to us all.

In the current maelstrom of imperialism and regional wars, Israeli military supremacy, Islamic fundamentalism and the destruction of whole societies and even civilizations in Iraq and Syria, the very possibility of any positive outcome sometimes seems remote. But in today's popular struggles and international solidarity lie the seeds of hope and revolutionary transformation. [120]

[Against the Current](#)

Constitutional change: symbolism won't cut it

3 July 2017, by **Diane Fieldes**

The focus is still on changing the constitution. But instead of symbolic recognition, the statement calls for "a First Nations Voice enshrined in the constitution". In addition, it demands a "Makarrata Commission [121] to supervise a process of agreement making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history".

A constitutional amendment will be proposed by the Referendum Council to the government later this month. It will not address any of these demands. It is not meant to.

Wiradjuri leader Jenny Munro was one of 19 elected delegates who, with other anti-Recognise activist observers, walked out on the second day of the conference. She said, "It's not a dialogue, it's a one-way conversation ... the Noel Pearson road map [122]... is about validating their (the Crown's) sovereignty on our land".

The history of the call for constitutional recognition tells us a lot about its intentions. It originated with

John Howard in 2007 promising a referendum to insert a tokenistic preamble within 18 months. This symbolism came just months after his government had launched a massive attack on Aboriginal people in the form of the Northern Territory intervention.

Just as subsequent Labor governments continued and intensified the humiliations of the intervention, so too did they persist with the fig leaf of a multi-million dollar constitutional campaign, ultimately called "Recognise".

Suggestions from the "expert panel" set up by Julia Gillard in 2010 did include some form of treaty process and self-determination, and later the idea of a clause prohibiting racial discrimination. All of these were dismissed, either with the excuse that they would fail at referendum or, by 2015, because the government opposed them.

It was in response to growing hostility to Recognise amongst Indigenous people that conservative Indigenous

figure Noel Pearson began to promote the idea of amending the constitution to enshrine an Indigenous "voice to parliament". Most importantly, to make the proposal palatable to business and the Liberal government, this voice would be advisory and have no real powers. As with Kevin Rudd's apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008, any mention of reparations was excluded.

Yet despite all these concessions, because it rejects purely symbolic recognition, the Uluru Statement has received a very lukewarm (at best) response from politicians, Malcolm Turnbull warning that "constitutional change would be very difficult" and Bill Shorten [123] only saying that we "owe the (Uluru delegates) an open mind".

Others have been less restrained. As we mark the 25th anniversary of the historic [124] that finally ended the legal fiction of terra nullius, we should recall that this recognition of reality was met by a vile racist campaign about "Aborigines taking over your

backyard” from government ministers, academics, business leaders and the media.

Today, it is Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce decrying the idea that Indigenous people might have a few rights, or Liberal Party MP George Christensen proclaiming that any constitutional change will give “one

group special privileges that no other group in the country has”. John Roskam, executive director of the right wing Institute of Public Affairs, adds to this atmosphere, claiming that the “moral force (of the Indigenous body) would be very significant, in effect making it difficult to override it”, describing it as an “effective veto” on matters such as the NT

intervention.

The hostility is to any idea that significant change is needed instead of symbolic words in the constitution that will change nothing for Aboriginal people.

June 4 2017

[Red Flag](#)

The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner

2 July 2017, by **Josep María Antentas**

But I'm not going to win because the only way I'd see I came in first would be if winning meant that I was going to escape the coppers after doing the biggest bank job of my life, but winning means the exact opposite.

“Alan Sillitoe, *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*

On April 8, Catalunya en Comú, a new Catalan party, officially launched under the sponsorship of Barcelona mayor Ada Colau. The new project aims to turn the successful electoral alliance between Barcelona en Comú (Colau’s own party), Podem (the Catalan branch of Podemos), Initiative for Catalonia Greens (ICV, a Green party with Eurocommunist origins), and United and Alternative Left (EUiA, the Catalan branch of Izquierda Unida, the Communist Party of Spain’s electoral front) into a single party. Already, the alliance won the Spanish general elections in Catalonia on December 20, 2015 and on June 26, 2016, producing high expectations for this new formation.

Unfortunately, Barcelona en Comú, ICV, and EUiA split with Podem over the group’s organizational model. As a result, Podem decided at the last minute not to join, and the party’s debut felt half-hearted. But the factions will likely overcome these problems before the Catalan parliamentary elections at the end of this year. At the very least, Podem and Catalunya en Comú will form a joint

list.

Only then can we consider the process of creating the party concluded and clearly evaluate the results. For now, however, we can assess Catalunya en Comú’s founding congress, especially its procedural and strategic choices; we can also analyze Barcelona en Comú’s history, since Colau’s local formation is the dominant force in the new party.

Despite the alliance’s previous successes, very few substantial discussions of the new party have emerged. Almost no one has analyzed the new formation’s underlying politics, perhaps as a consequence of its poor theorization. The attacks coming from the independence movement represent the only exception; it sees Colau’s new party as competition and wants it to clarify its position on Catalan independence before the referendum planned for next September.

When we dissect the Commons “as Colau’s group is informally known because of its attachment to the idea of the commons” we must do so without falling into sectarianism (which a part of independence movement relies on) or flattery (which many who are drawn into an expanding political space borrow). Neither helps us advance the strategic debate in general nor rupturist positions in particular.

Electoral Fatigue

The new political project arrives at a moment when the expectation of political change “which began with the 15-M movement, the independence movement, and Podemos” still exists, albeit in weakened form. Above all, Catalunya en Comú appears in a moment of political fatigue following the long Spanish electoral sequence, which began with the European elections of May 2014 and culminated in the general elections of June 2016. This feeling is intensified in Catalonia, whose own political sequence is bookended by the regional elections of November 2012 and September 2015.

The proliferation of campaigns and the acquisition of institutional responsibilities after left-wing victories in cities like Barcelona have eroded and absorbed militant energies. The ongoing political crisis and the integration of new political actors have also diminished the movement’s early enthusiasm. As large-scale social struggles have largely died down, a certain sense of routine has returned to daily life.

The new political party represents the culmination of the Catalan left’s reorganization “whether it uses the term “left” to define itself or not” which the political earthquakes of 2011 and 2012 generated. But the Commons is trying to do this in a

climate of exhaustion, making it harder to mobilize new activists. Despite this, we cannot deny the important electoral space that the new party may hold.

Since 2012, Catalonia has witnessed an eruption of new political projects and militant politicization. First, in the November 2012 parliamentary elections, the pro-independence and anticapitalist Candidatures d'Unitat Popular (CUP) won 3 percent of vote and claimed three seats, around which activist and anticapitalist groups "unrelated to the independence movement" organized some support committees. Although CUP did not implement any specific strategy to surpass its boundaries, it did experience a significant linear progression.

Then, in April 2013, Benedictine nun Teresa Forcades and economist Arcadi Oliveres launched the sociopolitical movement Procés Constituent, which aimed to unite a new majority and open Catalan politics to greater democracy through a constituent process. It created an important dynamic of self-organization, staging massive rallies and assemblies throughout Catalonia. The group's desire to win the elections, rather than merely open a small crack in the political system's left flank, drew many supporters and was a strategic novelty.

The next January, Podemos appeared. Despite its relative weakness in Catalonia, it triggered another round of politicization and self-organization with another round of new local branches. In the summer of the same year, Ada Colau launched Guanyem (later renamed Barcelona en Comú) with the goal of presenting a candidature for Barcelona's municipal elections in May 2015. Synthesizing and improving on the scheme Procés Constituent and Podemos used for their launches, Guanyem prompted a new wave of organization from below.

From Above or From Below?

Things look very different today. In a certain sense, the Commons

represents the most important political process of any to date, but the dynamics that accompany it now lack momentum. This situation reflects both the overall political context and Barcelona en Comú's conservative strategy. Colau's party seemed at times to be afraid of being overtaken by its alliance mates, nor did it know how balance inter-party negotiations with opening a dynamic from below.

Colau's group has played a leading role in building a new party. However, given the different political context, they adopted a more conservative approach in Catalonia than in Barcelona. While they were complete outsiders before, Colau's group is managing an important merger of four parties and the party has experienced significant strategic mutations since 2015.

Building the party from the four organizations featured mostly in-group debates with little strategic content, a situation aggravated by Podem's ultimate withdrawal. As a result, Catalunya en Comú includes members of the founding parties but has not generated a new wave of politicization or attracted unorganized people.

The attendance numbers from the founding assembly eloquently express this: 5,540 people voted (online or in person) out of the total 6,805 registered and validated members. About 1,500 people attended the congress. These figures aren't bad, but they do not demonstrate strong support from below.

The new party has as much electoral space as it does militant fragility. In this way, Catalunya en Comú shares a structural weakness with all the new political tools that emerged after 15-M. Indeed, the split between electoral power and militancy has plagued left-wing movements for a long time.

In his study of the anarcho-sindicalist National Confederation of Labor (CNT) in *Class, Culture and Conflict in Barcelona (1898-1937)*, Chris Ealham explains:

One of the great paradoxes of the CNT was that, despite its huge membership in the city, the number of union

activists was relatively small. The majority of cenitistas participated little in the internal life of the unions, attending union meetings rarely, if at all, and paying union contributions only sporadically.

This gap appears throughout the history of workers' and popular organizations, although its precise magnitude varies. The disproportion between organized power and mobilization capacity manifests itself in the post-15-M political formations in two ways: as a contrast between organized militants and the electoral force, and between that electoral force and the party's capacity for social mobilization. As a result, the new parties tend to have enormous electoral weight but poorly organized militants and a low capacity for mobilization.

Many factors have contributed to this situation, including the weakened labor market, the complication and pluralization of life paths, the transformation of cultural and collective identities, the individualization of social relations, and the role of mass media and social networks. We are in an era, no doubt, of liquid militancy, to borrow Zygmunt Bauman's well-known metaphor.

Faced with this situation, a party can adopt two attitudes. One, it can refuse to recognize the problem and even build its strategy on denying the very concept of militancy: the Podemos leadership has followed this path with its bureaucratic utopia of a [party without militants](#). On the other hand, a party could develop mechanisms that foster political participation and stimulate organizations from below, rethinking models of militancy and creatively combining new technologies with conventional methods: the Anticapitalistas inside Podemos have tried to do just that. Liquid Bolshevism? Perhaps not, but at least an attempt to face the challenges of engagement and commitment in the present.

Catalunya en Comú does not seem concerned about organizing from below, although this comes more from their practice than from any conscious decision. Formally, the new party wants to organize as many people as

possible. Some of its leadership likes to quote the London Corresponding Society's motto: "That the number of our Members be unlimited." As E. P. Thompson explained, this slogan signifies the end of any notion of exclusivity in politics. At least in principle, Colau's core team would like to go beyond electoralism and build a strong organization. Unfortunately, the party's conception and prevailing political activities do not give any systematic attention to organizing from below.

The founding congress left many uncertainties. Attendees did not address many of the strategic and programmatic debates. It appeared as a potential electoral colossus with a rather conventional organizational structure, a weak militant base, and a limited platform that evades the Gordian knots that any program of social transformation must face. The specter of the Commons turning into "Eurocommons" appears on the horizon.

None of this is intended to discount the importance of electoral strategy. Today, elections play a decisive role in politicizing a large segment of society and express the political system's crisis of legitimacy [whereby, quoting Gramsci,](#)

At a certain point in their historical lives, social groups become detached from their traditional parties. In other words, the traditional parties in that particular organizational form, with the particular men who constitute, represent, and lead them, are no longer recognized by their class (or fraction of a class) as its expression.

After 15-M, any political and strategic understanding of the crisis necessitated grasping electoral opportunities and devoting the maximum possible effort to this terrain in order to definitively destabilize the traditional party system.

That said, real or potential success in elections often coexists with (relative) failures in all other spheres, generating an electoral hypertrophy of political strategy. A thin red line separates electoral audacity from electoralism, and it is very easy to

cross it without even realizing or wanting to. Avoiding this shift requires conscious effort and the dedication of human and organizational resources to the non-electoral and non-institutional fronts, which prevents these activities from fully absorbing a party's militants, cadres, and internal discussions.

Several of the new party's leaders have insisted that they will not limit themselves to elections and have framed the Commons' project as a broader struggle for hegemony, which necessarily goes beyond electoralism and party politics. But such statements still only count as general proclamations rather than strategic proposals. While the party has made its electoral strategy clear, it hasn't released its plans to take root in society and help to build alternative social powers. Neither the party's theory nor practice has settled the dialectic between self-organization, mobilization, and electoral-institutional work.

The Commons and the Party

Unlike Podemos, where leaders developed crude theories about building an electoral war machine, Catalunya en Com^ú has engaged in little theoretical reflection about the kind of organization it wants to become. Surprisingly, Colau's party has put little emphasis on the need to create a new kind of party. In fact, the core group has undergone a very rapid conceptual and organizational standardization.

Barcelona en Com^ú, created for the 2015 municipal elections, offers an excellent case study of the new party's strategic and organizational ideas. Of course, the new Catalan party does not represent an expansion of the already existing formation. The balance of power between Colau's group and the other, more traditional forces of the Left "in particular ICV" is spread more evenly throughout Catalonia than it is in Barcelona. As a result, the Commons will likely become a political-organizational synthesis between Colau's group and the ICV, meaning that it will

experience a mix of the problems that both new and traditional parties face.

Since its founding, Barcelona en Com^ú has been working as a non-theorized and unacknowledged electoral war machine and as a complementary organizational device to Colau's city government, which, despite its limitations, has gone much further than any conventional left-wing administration.

The party was formally structured following Ada Colau's victory in May 2015, but its role was never clearly defined. Before the election, it had a clear objective: channel all its militant energy and political capacity into the campaign. Afterward, however, Barcelona en Com^ú made no serious attempt to maintain any real drive from below or to stimulate militancy.

In contrast to Podemos, the leadership did not trample the rank-and-file members. Instead, the party became a frozen electoral war machine, waiting to be activated on subsequent occasions. It functioned as a complement to the city government, where many of its active members took positions. Despite this institutionalization, a remarkable number of neighborhood activists have held on. Unfortunately, their militancy has not played a clear role in the party's dynamic.

The party's tasks both in power and in society more broadly have remained unclear. It has adopted a subordinate position toward the government, directed by the prevailing logic of autonomy from the party. While a certain level of independence is necessary "we cannot imagine that every municipal action can or should be discussed and supervised by the party" Barcelona en Com^ú made subordination the normal relationship between party and government.

Meanwhile, it failed to establish social functions and developed a weak relationship to the city, with no clear plans to intervene in communities and social movements. The party's structure and apparatus became fragile because the bulk of the cadres worked for the city.

It has not acted as a counterweight to

the government but as its subordinate complement. Nor has it acted as an instrument of non-institutional political intervention in order to foster social and community organization. As a result, Barcelona en Comú has related to the city through its executive function rather than through the party itself. Neither monitoring the government nor engaging with neighborhoods, the party had no clear *raison d'être* and lost momentum.

Although it adopted a fairly reasonable formal structure, Barcelona en Comú has many organizational shortcomings. The governing bodies have experienced serious dysfunction, often turning into spaces with little deliberation or where issues are not seriously discussed at all. Further, the relationship between members and the party's higher bodies tends toward a top-down unidirectional structure in which militancy receives little real space for policy discussions. Interesting, Barcelona en Comú inherited these deficits from two opposing logics: first, from traditional parties' hierarchical structures and, second, from social movements' horizontal informality.

The interaction between a party's formal and informal structures determines its actual organization. Barcelona en Comú didn't simply attach its informal logic to a formal one, as in many other parties. Instead, thanks to core activists' political culture and experience in social movements, informal structures have taken on a life of their own. Leaders encourage informal undermining of formal structures – a kind of formalization of informality – which works against the institutional hierarchy derived from local government. This organizational form results in a paradoxical combination of the well-known tyranny of structurelessness (as described by feminist writer Jo Freeman) and of the hierarchic decision-making system of delegation in which the government prevails over the party. The government's vertical organization, the formal bodies' relative weakness, and the strength of informal relations define Barcelona en Comú's political-organizational culture.

Most of the problems the party faces would be shared with any organization that had achieved such overwhelming electoral and political successes in such a short time. Relations between government and party are always complex, not to mention the challenge of establishing the role of a party that is in government. The same goes for internal democracy and membership participation in decision-making. We should therefore not attribute these issues exclusively to the leadership's choices – to do so would be rather demagogic and superficial. What is disturbing is not that these setbacks exist, but rather that the leaders do not perceive them as problems. Non-problematization of serious deficiencies has become the real problem.

This is what we may call the problem of non-problematization.

The Gaps in New Politics

Merging organizations always produces complications. Addressing all interests is not easy, and doing so can often damage democratic procedures. We should not be surprised by the new party's obstacles and mistakes: it would be absurd to expect a clean process in which everything comes together perfectly with little friction.

Beyond these inevitable difficulties, however, the substantive decisions regarding the new party's organizational model do reveal internal democratic fragility. Taken with the lack of pressure from below, these decisions indicate that Catalunya en Comú will orient itself toward parliament and the party machine.

We can already detect four main shortcomings of the adopted organizational model.

First, the leadership structure has serious flaws. While a thirty-two-member executive commission is charged with making decisions, the 120-member national coordination committee has poorly defined functions and may end up playing a

merely advisory role.

Second, the party used an open-list, majority system to elect both bodies, but it restricted the number of candidates per list to ensure that at least some seats would go to minority groupings. By electing those candidates with the most votes, the party could not ensure that each list wins a number of seats equivalent to its members' votes. In addition, the majority bloc could easily maneuver the lists: sponsoring friendly minority groups would block critical minorities and smash opponents.

Another problematic aspect, although less serious, comes from the decision to allow the whole membership to directly elect the executive committee. This isn't an undemocratic procedure, but it does reinforce the smaller committee's symbolic power. Better to elect the larger leadership body – in this case the national coordination committee – by direct vote and then elect the executive from within that body. That system would allow the broader committee to benefit most from the legitimacy of direct election.

Finally, the decision to name Colau's list En Comú Podem, the name used by the alliance in the Spanish elections of December 20, 2015 and June 26, 2016 that was the forerunner of the new party, poses a problem (En Comu Podem was the name of the alliance in the elections of December and June that is the forerunner of the new party). Colau and her inner circle instrumentalized a name that belongs to everybody, including internal minorities, not only to the members of the main list vying for leadership roles. This choice reflected a more fundamental problem in the party's launch: the lack of clear criteria when organizing the founding congress. The party only set the main rules at the very last minute, creating a somewhat improvised feel.

Despite these problems, the new Catalan party is not falling into the same traps Podemos has. Four positive aspects demonstrate improvements on Pablo Iglesias's project.

First, Catalunya en Comú does not have a bureaucratic-populist state of

exception that seeks to uncover and squash anticapitalist dissent. Second, despite the party's democratic limits "which its leaders themselves voluntarily promoted" several of its leaders share a democratic trajectory and mood; third, the party has so far avoided Podemos's model of warlike rhetoric, preferring a healthier political culture that seems to combine the movement approach with a bureaucratic-institutional structure. Finally, Colau's new party has taken up Podemos's politics of spectacle in a more nuanced way. Catalunya en Com  's founding congress featured actual decision-making, rather than a show of adrenaline (like those of [Vistalegre](#)). That said, it did lean toward spectacle at the expense of profound debate.

That Catalunya en Com   has not reproduced all the excesses of   igo Errej  n's bureaucratic-electoral war machine is, however, little consolation. We shouldn't evaluate the new party on the basis of Vistalegre's bureaucratic-populist dystopia but on the potential and expectations of the 15-M movement. From that point of view, we cannot assess Colau's new project positively.

Six years after the memorable days of May and June 2011 "and three years after the onset of the Spanish political system's crisis, marked by Podemos's emergence" we cannot help but come to a bitter conclusion: the new political projects that have appeared, often grouped under the confusing label "new politics," are not only undemocratic but in some respects worse than the old politics.

This is a blow to 15-M's legacy, which is falling into the abyss of the new politics' organizational and strategic gaps. While Podemos's structure and political culture are already fully crystallized, the situation in Catalunya en Com   still remains provisional. A new congress on organizational issues should be held before the end of the year, where members can debate not only the approaches to party structure but discuss something much deeper: the soul of the party and its core leadership.

Losing by Winning

Although some of the key figures in the Commons share a radical political trajectory, they are a clear minority in the leadership bodies. If we were to ask how many members of the executive committee would feel comfortable at an event like 15-M, in a movement like the Platform for People Affected by Mortgages (PAH), or among the so-called "tides against cuts," we would find the answer discouraging. (Obviously, being a true activist does not guarantee anything; many of those who today more or less embrace realpolitik were activists in the past.) If we asked how many leaders feel politically or intellectually concerned about the Russian Revolution's centenary or the 150th anniversary of *Das Kapital*, the answer would be equally demoralizing. (Again, empathizing with October 1917 in itself means nothing and in fact fits perfectly into a bureaucratic culture that promotes fossilized strategies linked to twentieth-century imaginaries.) If we dared to ask how many leaders would join 15-M and care about 1917, the answer would be devastating.

We can analyze this situation in terms of strategic dissonance, borrowing Leon Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance, which postulates that when individuals have contradictory thoughts, they set up mechanisms to recover a perception of internal coherence in order to avoid psychological distress. Critics of this approach have emphasized its overly psychological character, arguing that it renders complex social processes as individual contradictions.

Taking that into account, we can understand strategic dissonance as the result of the leadership's strategic options and the context in which it operates. In the case of Catalunya en Com  , that includes a strong electoral and institutional space, a large segment of reformist currents inside the party, low militant capacity from below, and a momentary retreat of social struggles. In this scenario, the party risks making a virtue out of necessity and solving the dissonance by reducing its initial ambitions. This would imply a shift from voluntary,

self-contained radicalism to an internalized and rationalized moderation.

The few leaders and party cadres who maintain radical positions will experience increasing loneliness as the marathon drags on. Radical impulses might be exhausted before the party reaches the finish line, consumed by the long march through institutions and electoral campaigns that leave no oxygen for emancipatory impulses.

Alan Sillitoe tells us about this kind of solitude in his 1959 novel, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*. The story focuses on Colin Smith, a juvenile delinquent from a working-class background. Thanks to his athletic abilities, he finds himself choosing between life as a successful athlete and maintaining his outsider status. On the day of the big race "the Borstal Blue Ribbon Prize Cup For Long Distance Cross Country Running (All England)" Colin allows himself to be beaten in the last few meters. He does this to exact revenge on the reformatory's director, who wanted someone from his center to win the prize. Colin's decision is his way of rejecting the hypocrisy of a society that rejects him. Looking at the possibility of a better life, he decides to remain in the loneliness of the long-distance runner: "They aren't going to get me on this racing lark," he says to himself. "They aren't going to get me on this racing lark, this running and trying to win, this jog-trotting for a bit of blue ribbon, because it's not the way to go on at all, though they swear blind that it is." To adapt or to be faithful to yourself; to accommodate or to remain not like them. Colin opts for the latter.

The situation's intrinsic complexity, both on the personal and on the political level, comes from the fact that being true to oneself should not require staying in (social and political) marginality, but rather leaving it without losing self-identity. Colin does not have this option. This third choice implies understanding victory and defeat differently than both the director of the reformatory "who sees success as joining the elite" and Colin "who sees remaining in the margins as the only way to be true

to himself. By voluntarily losing the race, Colin wins because he humiliates the director and shows his rebelliousness. In the end, however, he also loses: his personal revolt against social conventions pushes him into a struggle that he has already lost. He must permanently flee a hostile society in which he is nothing more than cannon fodder.

The possibility of losing by winning is the main strategic lesson that parties such as Catalunya en Com^u or Podemos should consider, so that they do not fall into it. In this case, they risk losing not thanks to their stubborn fidelity to themselves, but because they would adapt in order to

be more like the powers that be. Unlike Colin, they would lose by winning: winning elections at the cost of political denaturalization, winning after no longer being themselves, winning to stop being themselves.

From Colin Smith's story, we know that winning comes from accepting the genuine loneliness of the long-distance runner. Leading an institutionalist and moderate political apparatus will never count as victory. On the contrary, the anticapitalist struggle "in which the rewards often hide beneath the sacrifices and where it is sometimes necessary to run against the stream, always without resignation" strives for this

kind of success.

"I knew," Colin tells us, "what the loneliness of the long-distance runner running across country felt like, realizing that as far as I was concerned this feeling was the only honesty and realness there was in the world and I knowing it would be no different ever, no matter what I felt at odd times, and no matter what anybody else tried to tell me."

To win without changing oneself and to change the world "this is our particular dialectic of the loneliness of the long-distance runner.

[Jacobin](#)

On the 20th Anniversary of the Handover

1 July 2017, by **Au Loong-Yu**

Robin Lee: Thinking back to the handover, what were your expectations at the time and how do they compare with the situation in Hong Kong today. Were you expectations met?

Au Loong-Yi Yes and No. In 1997 there was already a split between the pan-democrats and the social movement because the pan-democrat parties refused to organise any actions or demonstrations to remind the Chinese Communist Party that we wanted Hong Kong people to run Hong Kong and that we wanted a democratic handover. The pan-democrats refused to do anything like this though. And so the other social groups "this involved over a hundred groups such as trade unions, community, groups, church groups and so on-organised a coalition to stage a demonstration to demand that sovereignty should be returned to the people. We deliberately held a demonstration at midnight on 31st June in 1997, to symbolise that we would fight for democracy beyond British colonial rule. There were some small clashes with the police but they were not big. Although many people

were very discontent with the behaviour of the pan-democrats and it was good that an independent demonstration was organised, there was a failure to act and move beyond this single action to build more progressive and radical parties beyond 1997. It was a one off thing. One of the organisers of the demonstration recently talked to me and said that she regrets that they did not do more twenty years back. She now thinks that Hong Kong political activists should have had a deep split from the pan-democrats twenty years ago, rather than doing it now which is a bit too late.

A more interesting reason why this coalition was not sustainable is that it fell into the Communist Party's trap of its tactic to defer the showdown or crackdown. Before 1997 many people were of course feeling very insecure and did not know whether the Communist Party would finish off Hong Kong's political freedom very quickly. In retrospect, I think the Communist Party was very clever not to do anything drastic at all in the first stage of the handover. Even though immediately after 1997 there was a

provisional unelected legislature that was imposed on Hong Kong people, this provisional legislature was also quite self restrained and it didn't implement Article 23 of the Basic Law (which stipulates that Hong Kong must make into law the safeguarding of national security as defined by Beijing) straight away, as most of us had feared, and so the Communist Party in retrospect adopted a deferring tactic. The problem is that many Hong Kong activists became hypnotised by this kind of tactic and so they thought, "ok the CP is not too bad and so there is no urgency to be more radical, to be more organised and to be more assertive", and this explains why there was no talk of reforming the democratic movement and starting a new more radical democratic party at all. There was no discussion ever.

This proved two things: on the one hand the Communist Party's tactics worked and on the other hand most of the political parties and social movements were too naïve. Many believed that Hong Kong freedom would be kept indefinitely. Even in 2003 when the Communist Party tried

to push the Hong Kong government to table the Article 23 national security bill, when 500,000 people took to the street and stopped all the traffic along major roads on Hong Kong Island in demonstration against it, the Communist Party retreated. Everything returned to normal and so this gave people the illusion that although the Communist Party was bad in what it had tried to do, it still retreated very quickly. This therefore actually reinforced the kind of illusion that two systems could be maintained.

Now 20 years have passed, it is interesting to see how we have become weaker. I think it is depressing to see how quite a lot of people expect a low turnout in the demonstration on the handover anniversary day. In general there is a feeling of pessimism among activists. Actually this pessimism has been becoming more and more serious since the Umbrella Movement. This is not only because we achieved nothing, but also because since the Umbrella Movement the Communist Party has been intervening more openly and more aggressively in Hong Kong. But the democratic camp doesn't know how to adjust its strategies and tactics and doesn't know how to react to the strengthening of intervention from Beijing. This is the problem now. Whereas 20 years back there was a certain kind of militancy in staging this demonstration, today, after 20 years, we are in a much weaker and much more depressing situation. This is the biggest contrast.

Robin Lee: You mentioned the Umbrella Movement in 2014 where thousands were involved in protests and occupation over many weeks to demand universal suffrage. Your comments earlier seemed to be quite pessimistic about this. Could you explain a little more about your thoughts on the movement and the impact it has had on Hong Kong politics since then? [125]

Au Loong-Yi I think in the long run the Umbrella Movement will prove to be very important even if it did not achieve anything, as I would characterise it as the first really massive movement which reflects a very popular yearning for democratic

self-rule and democracy. Surely the voice for a democratic Hong Kong, the voice for decolonisation accompanied by real autonomy and democracy has always been there for a very long time. In 1989 we had a very big solidarity movement with the democratic movement in Beijing, but this was also a very important watershed for political development here in Hong Kong. It represented another step forward and that we really want to support the Chinese democracy movement. But this movement was also limited by the fact that it was a movement in solidarity with China, while not a movement which also at the same time pushed forward democratic reform here in Hong Kong. After the end of the democratic movement in Beijing, ironically, the biggest movement here in Hong Kong in late 1989 and 1990 was about pressing the British government to give us the right of abode. It was not about how we needed and wanted democracy, or how we wanted to run our own government. The democratic parties pushed a very popular campaign to press the British government to do this and in the end the British government only gave passports to 50,000 families in Hong Kong before the campaign ended. The democratic parties were satisfied with this because actually in their hearts they only wanted the middle class to get the passports and didn't care if common people didn't get one.

At least in 2014 for the first time in the post-war era we had a real massive democracy movement. However in the medium term, because the movement came to nothing and because the students and social groups which supported the Umbrella Movement were so inexperienced and allowed the far right to attack them in the later stage while they were reluctant to defend themselves, we can see that political adaptation, if not capitulation, is to this far right. And so in the end, it was the localist far right which reaped the fruits of the Umbrella Movement. After the Umbrella Movement the far right were then able to smash the Hong Kong Federation of Students (HKFS), which had been the leader of the Umbrella Movement. In under a year, the far right localists did something that the

Communist Party could not do; it dismantled the HKFS through agitation and causing its affiliate college students unions to withdraw from it. Now we are witnessing one of the aftermaths of the defeat and most student unions are now in the hands of the localists. They may not be far right but they are nativists and don't give a damn about social justice or defending democracy and fighting the Communist Party, even if their rhetoric condemns the Communist Party. And so the far right localists destroyed one of the most important strong holds of the democratic movement, especially amongst the student arena. In the short run the impact of the Umbrella Movement is depressing.

Robin Lee: You mentioned the rise of localism and the far right since the Umbrella Movement. Could you explain more about the reasons for this? And is anything being done by civil society or social movement groups to counter this?

Au Loong-Yi Yes, we must recognise that objectively speaking there is a yearning for a localist sentiment. Actually in its very rudimentary form it is very mixed. It is a mixture of opposition to the Communist Party, a feeling of nostalgia, and also relates to the deteriorating situation at every level of society. You have worsening poverty and housing problems, a degenerating education system and so it is a mixture of many things and people are becoming more local oriented. This is a response to the kind of Hong Kong that the Communist Party and the ruling elites here want to turn Hong Kong into. In their eyes, Hong Kong shouldn't be a political city; it should just be an economic city. This is a typically colonial idea. The British government already thought that Hong Kong should just remain a free trade port and serve the British Empire. Anything beyond this was not Hong Kong's role. This always angered young people. In the 1970s this angered us as well. So we must recognise that there is a true resentment against this ruling class view of Hong Kong. We want a Hong Kong which serves us. On its own this is not necessarily a right wing view, it could be left wing.

The problem is that in Hong Kong there are no left parties at all, and all the pan-democrat parties are all centre-right. As a result, Hong Kong's so called laissez-faire regime has produced a very strongly competitive and social Darwinist mentality. Once this localist feeling begins to brew it is always easier for the right wing to capture it and steer it in a xenophobic direction.

But there is also a third element which is in play. From all the circumstantial evidence, it is clear that some of the outspoken localist and far right politicians are acting in collaboration with the Communist Party. The reports in Sing Pao demonstrate this. Sing Pao has always been a very conservative newspaper which supports the Communist Party. Since last year, however, it suddenly became a very vocal opponent of CY Leung (Hong Kong's Chief Executive). This breaks the rules of the pro-Beijing camp here that whatever their internal differences they must support the Chief Executive. But Sing Pao not only made accusations against CY Leung, it particularly made the accusation that CY Leung should be held responsible for the rise of the Hong Kong independence movement. It accused him of secretly supporting these people. It also further said that the China Liaison Office head also secretly has a role in supporting the independence movement. In addition to the Sing Pao accusations, there is also the fact that during last year's elections many very young people, fresh grads, suddenly got a lot of money to run very expensive election campaigns. In fact one year ago, in the district board election, we already witnessed some localists being sentenced to prison for election campaign fraud. During cross-examination they revealed that they were subsidised by the Communist Party to run elections against the pan-democrats.

And so it is this interaction of several factors at the same time that has given rise to the far right localists and has suddenly turned into an independence movement. You can also see that the rise of the independence movement gives a very good pretext to the Communist Party to attack Hong Kong autonomy by disqualifying two

independence movement Legislative Council members and now they are going on the offensive to pursue other LegCo members for the same reason.

Actually I see the xenophobia, far-right localist and anti-China sentiments as just the same thing. We must not forget that in Hong Kong lots of people identify as Chinese. Most of the people do not see their Chinese identity as necessarily opposed to their Hong Kong identity. And for young people? There is a big generation gap here and although young people do not necessarily identify as Chinese this does not necessarily make them anti-Chinese. Those who are explicitly anti-Chinese are the far right localists. Of course they are getting a hearing among certain young people. Because of the primitivism of political education here in Hong Kong many young people can't distinguish between being anti-Communist Party and anti-Chinese. But most of this sympathy towards the far right localists is not through joining their party; their party is very small. On the internet they look very big, but mind you on the internet there are also a lot of wumao dang (people paid to defend Beijing by posting comments on the internet). But based on what has been explicitly spoken on the internet and at rallies, we can safely say that this anti-Chinese feeling is merged with the far-right localists in general.

What has been done to challenge this? Unfortunately very little. The pan-democrats, they do sometimes try to counter this anti-Chinese mentality but they counterpose HK identity with their own Chinese identity. They are still embracing Chinese nationalism even if it is a weaker version. But this seals their fate as it totally severs their links with the younger generation. It collides directly with the aspirations of the young generation and so I think it is a self defeating attempt to try to counterpose Hong Kong identity with Chinese identity. The only sensible attempt is to respect the fact that many people see themselves as Hong Kongers, and see that this is not necessarily counterposed to Chinese identity. Counterposing the two identities is a false dichotomy in the first place. We must solve the dilemma by opposing

the Communist Party and defending Hong Kong identity and we must put this in a bigger democratic framework. This means we need a real democratic alternative. This is the only alternative that can counter the far right localists; combining the defence of Hong Kong autonomy and democratic transformation in China. The problem is that, amongst common people and activists here in Hong Kong, democratic aspirations are also very shallow. It is very difficult for them to conceive of a democratic strategy which can point us forward for the next two or three decades. Fortunately there are attempts to search for such a direction. We now have three pro self-determination LegCo members who are trying to explore a direction which is not xenophobic, while assertively opposing the Communist Party. But they are just in the early stage of exploration and it is very obvious that they can easily be pressed from the right and that they sometimes adapt to right wing localist pressure. And so it is still early to say how committed they are to a democratic self-determination strategy.

Robin Lee: How would you characterise recent demands for autonomy and self-determination?

Au Loong-Yi I think one of the bright sides of the picture is that there are growing numbers of people who listen to this self-determination call. I can still remember when we first proposed the idea 35 years ago and we were absolutely alone. This is because the pan-democrats are content with seeking universal suffrage within the limits of the Basic Law. But this is self-defeating. You will never get real universal suffrage within the Basic Law because the Basic Law gives the power of interpretation solely to Beijing. In one of the clauses it is very explicit that the central government can make the Chief Executive do anything through an executive order. So from the very beginning there has not been any real Hong Kong autonomy. The pan-democrats are just deceiving themselves when they think that they enjoy it. But because of this naïve mentality and conciliatory attitude towards the Communist Party, in the end the pan-democrat parties misled the Hong Kong democratic

movement for more than 35 years and it has ended up with nothing. Universal suffrage is not in sight at all. What is happening now is exactly the opposite and we are losing our autonomy fast. I would say that Hong Kong has already been taken over by the black hole of Communist Party rule. It is just an illusion that we see Hong Kong unchanged.

In the last five years people have been seeing the truth; that they have been deceived by the Communist Party and that there is no such thing as one country two systems or real Hong Kong autonomy. And so there are people who are now picking up the demand for self determination again. This does not necessarily mean independence; it is about giving us our own choice. The Communist Party is saying that anyone who calls for self determination is really calling for independence. This is not true, but people are scared too. So we can witness a very contradictory situation; on the one hand more people can see the need to fight for autonomy and self-determination but on the other hand, because of the absolute asymmetry of the relationship of power, many people are very pessimistic about winning anything at all. So I would say it is the best time and also the worst time to fight for self-determination.

Robin Lee: Reflecting on this, what are the major challenges now facing Hong Kong civil society and the democracy movement over the next twenty years? What is the outlook for the future?

Au Loong-Yi The biggest challenge for the democratic movement is firstly to find a solid social base. For the past 35 years we have been lectured that the Hong Kong democratic movement depends on the middle class. And so the pan-democrats are in absolute

complete consensus with Lipset and modernisation theory; that with modernisation we have the growth of the middle class and the democratisation of society depends on this growing middle class. The past democratic movement builds on this thesis. But this is a thesis which does not hold water and which has not been tested by real life. After 35 years the Democratic Party remains very small and actually remains very capitulatory and so it is very clear that they could not bring us forward anymore. This brings us to the question: which part of society should the democratic movement be based on? Unfortunately this question has not yet been seriously posed. But I think that it has to be answered very quickly.

It is very clear that the Hong Kong democratic movement can only find a social base in working people and the young generation. But the second challenge is that we are not going to find a politically ready strata. We are not going to find a solid base right now in the working people, in the unions or amongst young people. There is no such thing because for the past 35 years the so called democratic movement has actually just been an electoral movement. The pan-democrats never provided a serious political education, or mind changing advocacy. They have not been concerned about really going to the masses to build a democratic force which is deep rooted in the community. They only want votes and to woo electors when election time comes.

What the democratic parties and the electors understand about democracy is therefore very little. Among working people, students and so on there is a wish for democracy but they do not have a full vision of it. They can't understand basic things such as how democracy necessarily means that you

can challenge the present constitution. That is why we have a democratic movement which always revolves around a single issue. We don't challenge the Basic Law; we just want universal suffrage for the legislature and the Chief Executive. We never challenge the fact that both the Chief Executive and the legislature have no real power. The real power lies in the hands of Beijing or the Liaison Office. And so in the end we have a democratic movement which is misled and the common people and independent trade unions have little understanding. This is why it is not surprising to see that in certain independent trade unions there are also far right localists.

We have a difficult situation and the challenge is that this social space for the democratic movement has to be built from nothing. If there is a certain milieu who may be our potential constituency, for instance people from the trade unions, the problem is that they have no political education at all and they are old. One of the horrible things now is that the old trade union leaders are becoming more and more out of touch and so are not going to attract any more young people. As for the young people, the dismantling of HKFS can tell you how fragile the so called democratic students' movement is. There is no such movement at all. Even previously during the Umbrella Movement it was already very fragile. Although they were able to mobilise a ten thousand student class boycott, this was just a bubble. In the day to day occupation they can only mobilise four to five dozen students. They always lacked manpower. Now with the dismantling of the HKFS there are no organised forces at all. So the biggest challenge is how to build something from scratch. It is not going to be easy.

Source: [*Borderless*](#).