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Why did Chile take 28 years to decriminalise abortion?

31 August 2017, by **Mattieu Dejean**

Michelle Bachelet and Chilean feminists had to confront every kind of conservatism during two and a half years of parliamentary debates, often violent, so that, on 21 August, abortion was partially decriminalized in Chile. The Constitutional Court validated the law decriminalizing abortion, which had already been approved by Parliament at the beginning of August, after rejecting the appeals filed by the right. From now on, voluntary interruption of pregnancy (abortion) is allowed in cases of risk to the life of the pregnant woman, non-viability of the foetus and rape, after 28 years of total prohibition.

"Some members of the right continue

to say that in a case of rape, one should consult the rapist"

It is one of the most emblematic measures of President Michelle Bachelet's (centre-left) term of office, which ends at the end of the year. Last week, she supported this "historic demand for the vast majority of women and young people." According to her, this law, which allows women to freely dispose of their bodies "without the threat of imprisonment or social stigma, is the minimum that Chile owes its women." But despite the support of 71 per cent of Chileans for this partial decriminalization, in a country where 120,000 clandestine abortions are carried out every year, this social conquest has met with

much resistance.

"The most reactionary background of Chilean politics came to the fore in parliamentary debates on this law," says Franck Gaudichaud, a lecturer in Latin American studies at Grenoble-Alpes University, who coordinated the book *Chili actuel. Gouverner et résister dans une société néolibérale* (éditions. L'Harmattan). Sessions were interrupted by the intervention of evangelical groups, and some members of the right continue to say that in case of rape, the rapist should be consulted on whether or not he agrees with abortion because he is the father ".

During these debates, a senator of the UDI (the party of Pinochet) stated:

"There are people in Chile who are in prison because they have planned abortions, yes, and it is right that they are in prison!"

The weight of Christian Democracy

If Chile was still one of the six countries in Latin America that totally prohibit abortion (there are about twenty in the world), it is because the legacy of General Pinochet's dictatorship continues to weigh heavily on Chilean politics. The law punishing abortion by prison sentences was in fact adopted in 1989, the last year of the dictatorship, by Admiral Merino, one of the authors of the coup of September 11, 1973, "in order to anchor even further conservative Catholicism in the institutions," according to Franck Gaudichaud. And the transition to democracy in 1990 did not reverse it:

"Since the transition, there have been big feminist mobilizations in favour of the right to abortion, but also great resistance from the Catholic Church, the parliament, the right and the Christian Democracy (DC), explains Franck Gaudichaud. The DC has been involved in all government coalitions, from the Concertation (the centre-left

coalition that ruled until 2010) to the current New Majority of Michelle Bachelet, of which it is an influential component. "

The conservative influence of the Catholic Church in Chilean society is still very strong, although the majority of Chileans are not practising Catholics. Thus in 2004 Chile was one of the last developed countries to recognize divorce. It took all the determination of Michelle Bachelet - a divorced woman, a pediatrician by training and an agnostic - and that of deputies like Camila Vallejo (Communist Party) to get to have this law, which remains limited, adopted.

A still uncertain social conquest

This law is all the more limited because the Constitutional Court has validated conscientious objection by doctors, surgeons, and possibly even the entire medical team. The president of the College of Physicians, Izkia Siches, thus expressed concern that this extension of conscientious objection is an "obstruction" to the application of the law.

"There will be a battle for the delimitation of conscientious objection, says Franck Gaudichaud. Some say it could be institutional, and a clinic as such could refuse to carry out abortions. The clinic of the Catholic University, one of the most important ones in Santiago, has also indicated that it will do everything it can to prevent abortions being carried out on its premises ".

The future of the right to abortion in Chile is also uncertain because of the political situation. Indeed, the presidential election of 19 November could bring to power a new majority hostile to this right. "Everything indicates for the moment that Sebastian Piñera (a right-wing politician, president of Chile from 2010 to 2014) would win the election, so there reason to be worried," says the researcher. Another right-wing candidate, Antonio Kast, said his first step if elected would be to repeal the law. Autonomous feminists in Chile, who demand the right to free abortion, are keeping their guard up.

This article was published on August 22 by the French magazine *Les InRocks*.

The "populist moment"

30 August 2017, by **Daniel Tanuro**

The principle of the sovereign people has become a hollow formula: there is no more sovereignty, therefore no more debate between left and right. The defense of the interests of the financial oligarchy is ensured by a caste which reduces political problems to technical problems, to be decided by experts. In this context, the relationship between the principles of equality (the left) and freedom (the right) is unbalanced to the disadvantage of the left. The people, for Mouffe, is not a given sociological reality: it is a political construction that depends on the delineation of the boundary between the "them" and the "us". For her, the mode of this political

construction constitutes populism.

Today, there is a "populist moment" because we can see everywhere deep frustration and a "popular" aspiration to democracy, so to sovereignty, and thus a rebalancing of equality and freedom. These feelings are mainly captured by right-wing populism, but this situation is not inevitable. "Right-wing populism re-establishes popular sovereignty, but not equality" - particularly because it ethnicizes social problems. It therefore builds a "we" that reduces democracy instead of expanding it. This is its Achilles heel. The left can and must develop a left populism, the only way to fight

right-wing populism. To do this, Mouffe recommends not to speak of "fascism" or "the far right": "It is a way of not seeking to understand," she said. "It must be recognized that the demands which are the basis of right-wing populist movements are democratic demands". Marine Le Pen gives answers to the victims of "happy globalization". Left-wing populism, for Mouffe, is distinguished from right-wing populism by saying that the opponent is neo-liberal globalization, not immigrants.

Poor Gramsci!

Marxists distinguish between "class in itself" and "class for itself". The difference lies in consciousness. Class itself is a sociological datum. "Class for itself" is constituted by the experience of struggles, self-organization, the extension and the unification of struggles, which enables the proletariat to go beyond its demands in order to lay the foundations of a complete revolution of social relations and relations between humanity and nature. But Mouffe insists: the construction of a people is not the constitution of the "class for itself". It is a "much more transversal" process, which centralizes "heterogeneous demands" from "different social sectors". Which ones? Mouffe cites feminism, LGBT movements, ecology... But this is not the substance of the affair. The bottom line is that transversality is necessary because we are no longer in Fordist capitalism: "Today we are all under

the domination of financial capitalism, including the sociological sectors that belong to the right." It is therefore a matter of "reformulating the socialist project in terms of the radicalization of democracy". This requires the political crystallization of demands coming also from sectors of the employers. This crystallization requires a charismatic leader who mobilizes passions, for there are not only arguments: in politics the affective factor is important. Right-wing populism has clearly understood this, and left-wing populism must do the same.

is, in a very condensed form, the essence of the political theory that a part of the left today is fascinated by. Under a modern and radical exterior, it is very old wine in new bottles. The point of departure is false: it consists in separating finance capital and capital in general, whereas the two are inextricably intertwined. For Mouffe and her followers, the enemy is not capitalism which exploits labour

and destroys the environment, but globalized capital that empties "popular sovereignty" of its content. The result is a "citizens' insurrection" to restore ... what? The "democracy" and the "sovereignty" of before the neoliberal turn, with its "balance" between the left and the right within the framework of the nation. Mouffe is explicit: referring to Syriza and Podemos, she considers that populism must enter the institutions to transform them. Such are, for her, the conclusions to be drawn from Gramsci's analysis of the conquest of hegemony. Poor Gramsci! He must be turning in his grave because what Mouffe proposes is what social-democracy claimed to be doing... and which has transformed it into social-liberalism.

The quotations are taken from the debate between Chantal Mouffe and Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

*Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [LCR-La Gauche](#).*

Baba Jan's review plea: GB's top court urged to rectify 'floating error' in verdict

29 August 2017

On Wednesday, Amjad Hussain, one of the counsels of Jan, presented arguments against the June 2016 verdict of the Supreme Appellate Court (SAP) verdict and the Chief Court verdict.

The SAC had handed down 40 years imprisonment to Jan and 15 others on charges of sedition and violence under Anti-Terrorism Act, setting aside the Gilgit-Baltistan Chief Court (GBCC) judgment. A three-judge bench of the Chief Court had acquitted Jan in 2013.

However, the SAC bench had pointed a 'floating error' in the chief court judgment.

The bench observed that Justice Muhammad Alam, one of the three

judges of the Chief Court bench had conducted the judicial inquiry of August 12, 2010, incident occurred at Hunza. Therefore, he was not supposed to sit on the bench that acquitted Jan and others.

Jan's counsel contended that due process was not followed in handing down the life sentence to his client. This floating error should have been rectified during the final verdict of the SAC in June last year. He also argued that this anomaly cannot be kept in the record of the court.

He urged the SAC bench to remand back the case to the chief court for retrial to rectify the 'floating error' and make the judicial inquiry report part of the case.

Chairman of the Supreme Appellate Court, Justice Shamim Ahmed after the argument, said he will decide the case on merit after going through the case record and sought the senior lawyer's help in rectifying the anomaly.

The SAC is likely to hear the case after Eid.

Baba Jan, a member of the Federal Committee of the left-wing Awami Workers Party (AWP), has been behind bars for the last over five years serving a 40 years sentence.

Background of the case

On January 4, 2010, a massive landslide hit Attabad village of Hunza killing 20 people. The landslide that brought down huge boulders and mud blocked Hunza river and created a 23km lake that submerged several villages and displaced hundreds of people.

After months of lukewarm government response to the disaster, Baba Jan organised the internally-displaced people (IDP) to demand the long-delayed payment of compensation for the loss of their dear ones, land, orchards and houses.

On August 12, 2011, the displaced families held a peaceful protest on KKH at Aliabad town of Hunza during a visit of the then Chief Minister Mehdi Shah to Attabad. Police in a bid to disperse the protesters opened fire on IDPs, killing Sherullah Baig and his son Sher Afzal. The incident sparked protest throughout the region, resulting in damages to several government buildings and a police station.

In September 2011 Jan along with over 200 people were booked under the Anti-Terrorism Act. Most of them were exonerated from sedition and rioting charges and released except Jan and his five comrades. They were tortured and denied medical treatment for 16 days and sent to jail.

In the meantime, Chief Court judge Justice Muhammad Alam conducted a judicial inquiry into the killings of the protesters that was never made public until today. And the police officer responsible for the killing of the father and son IDPs was exonerated and promoted.

On June 26, 2012, the SAC accepted the bail plea of Baba Jan, but new charges were filed against him under the ATA relating to the incident of rioting in Gilgit Jail that happened on April 26, 2012.

On July 2, 2012, the court granted bail to two of the Hunza Five – Amir Ali and Rashid Minhas.

On July 20, Jan and Iftikhar were whisked away by JIT from Gilgit Jail that sparked massive protests, campaigns by his party supporters and intellectuals such as Noam Chomsky and Tariq Ali throughout GB, Pakistan and abroad forcing the security agencies to bring them back to the jail. Jan was finally granted bail in 2013.

In 2014, an Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) gave its final verdict sentencing Jan and 11 others to 71 years each in prison for ‘terrorism’ and ‘arson’. He surrendered himself to the police after the verdict.

In May 2015, Baba Jan contested elections from behind bars for the Hunza-VI constituency of the Gilgit-Baltistan Legislative Assembly seat, on AWP ticket. Despite the fact that he could not personally take part in electioneering, hundreds of people, mostly students and women in droves participated in Jan’s rallies and the Hunza Valley witnessed an unprecedented enthusiasm and political awareness among the people.

Ultimately, right-wing conservative Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) candidate Mir Ghazanfar, from the centuries-old royal family of Hunza, used millions of rupees in handouts, administrative muscle and pre-poll rigging tactics to ensure his victory, while Baba Jan stood a close second, defeating the candidates of mainstream parties.

In April 2016, when Ghazanfar

vacated the seat to assume the post of Gilgit-Baltistan governor, the authorities again did not take any chances with Baba Jan; his candidacy was rejected by the Returning Officer at the ruling party’s objection.

In June last year, the Chief Court upheld his conviction and sentenced him to a further 40 years imprisonment. To keep him out of the electoral fray, the SAC upheld the conviction of Jan and 11 others paving the way for his disqualification to contest by-election from Hunza-VI.

Justice delayed is justice denied

Jan filed a review plea in the SAC in August 2016 which was admitted for hearing in October but fixed no date for hearing till May 25. Concerned about the incarceration of Baba Jan and other political prisoners in jail and delay in hearing of the review plea, the AWP organized a countrywide and international campaign on May 23, two days ahead of his case hearing to build a pressure on the GB government, judiciary and Islamabad to release him. The protest demos held in Karachi, Quetta, Lahore, Hyderabad, Larkana, Sanghar, Toba Tek Singh, Multan, Islamabad-Rawalpindi, received tremendous response from party workers, other progressive forces, trade union activists, academics, rights campaigners as well as from abroad.

At least 18 left-wing parliamentarians from France, Germany, Ireland, Switzerland, Tunisia, Malaysia and over 400 prominent individuals from 49 countries signed a petition asking the GB government and Pakistan government to release Baba Jan.

Who is Baba Jan on [Youtube](#).

Source [High Herald Asia](#).

The "crisis in the Gulf": understanding the

25 August 2017, by **Gilbert Achcar**

During the reign of Emir Hamad Ben Khalifa Al Thani, the emirate of Qatar adopted an approach that was not very different from that adopted by Kuwait after the latter declared its independence from Great Britain, in June 1961. The declaration had outraged the Republic of Iraq, which demanded that the emirate be returned to it as part of its territory. But Kuwait took advantage of the tensions between Iraq - led by Abd el-Karim Qasim (July 1958 to February 1963) - and Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt, to get the Arab countries to accept the independence of Kuwait, which benefited, moreover, from the protection of Great Britain. To discourage the annexationist ambitions cultivated by its Iraqi neighbour, Kuwait subsequently adopted a policy of Arab neutrality, maintaining good relations with the two poles in what was called "the Arab Cold War", namely Egypt and the Saudi kingdom.

Similarly, as is well known, Qatar historically had a tense relationship with its Saudi neighbour, especially since it declared independence from Britain in 1971. After taking power, Emir Hamad pursued a policy that sought to compensate for the small size of the emirate by strengthening its ties with the two principal axes of regional conflict as they emerged after the large deployment of US troops in the Gulf: the United States and the Republic of Iran. Qatar has also succeeded simultaneously in hosting (and funding) the most important regional air base in the United States (Al-Udeid) and in cultivating cordial relations with Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah. The policy of good relations with opposing forces has also manifested itself in the establishment by Qatar of diplomatic relations with Israel, while supporting Hamas.

During the reign of Emir Hamad, however, Qatar did not limit itself to cultivating good relations with

different forces as did Kuwait, which remained neutral and passive. Qatar also used its considerable wealth to play an active role in regional policy, notably by sponsoring the Muslim Brotherhood. The Saudi kingdom, which had sponsored the Brothers since their inception in 1928, had cancelled this support, especially because of their opposition to the US intervention in the crisis between Kuwait and Iraq in 1990. The weight of Qatar's political role increased significantly with the establishment of the Al Jazeera television network, which found a wide echo among the Arab populations by giving voice to Arab voices of opposition, in particular the Muslim Brotherhood.

The political course of Qatar in the face of the 2011 uprisings

When the volcano of the Great Arab Uprising erupted in 2011, Qatar was able to play a major role because of both its sponsorship of the Muslim Brotherhood and the role of the TV channel Al Jazeera. As a result, the two poles of conflict that have dominated the Arab world since then - the old regimes (in the sense of the established ones) and the Islamist fundamentalist opposition led by the Muslim Brotherhood - also gained support from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). While Saudi Arabia supported the old regimes throughout the region - with the exception of Libya where it remained neutral and Syria where sectarian (in the religious sense) elements led to an alliance between the regime of Bashar Al-Assad and Iran - Qatar supported the uprisings, especially where the Muslim Brotherhood was involved, except in the case of another GCC member, Bahrain, for obvious reasons

(a popular uprising took place in Bahrain in February 2011 and since then repression has been unceasing). The conflict between the emirate and the kingdom became evident from the beginning of the Arab Spring, Qatar's support for the Tunisian uprising contrasted with the political asylum granted by Saudi Arabia to the deposed president of Tunisia, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

The Obama administration saw Qatar as a means to avert the danger of a radicalization of the Arab uprising that would have threatened American interests. The United States therefore bet on both sides, sometimes supporting the old regimes along with the Saudis (as in Bahrain) and sometimes attempting to contain the uprising along with Qatar through the Muslim Brotherhood and its allies (as in Tunisia and Egypt). But Qatar's role in encouraging Washington to adopt a policy of seduction with regard to the uprisings aroused Saudi Arabia's indignation and scandalized the United Arab Emirates, which designated the Muslim Brotherhood as public enemy number one. The pressure exerted by the two Gulf countries intensified when the bet on the Muslim Brotherhood suffered a setback: in other words, when President Mohammed Morsi was overthrown (in July 2013) by the Egyptian army and the Muslim Brotherhood was violently repressed. It was during this period that Emir Hamad decided to resign in favour of his son Tamim, the current emir; Gulf pressure reached its first peak in 2014, to force the new emir to change course.

After this peak, it seemed that the Gulf conflict had come to an end. But the agreement of the three Gulf states to support the Syrian opposition against the Assad regime strained relations between Qatar (and with it the Muslim Brotherhood) and Iran. Later, Qatar participated in the military campaign

against the alliance established between Ali Abdullah Saleh (in power from 1990 to 2012) and the Houthis in Yemen. This was in the context of the accession of a new king to the Saudi throne, which seemed to demonstrate that agreement was possible between the members of the GCC. This trend was reinforced by the Saudi Arabian search for a time of a Sunni consensus against Iran, including the Muslim Brotherhood. This coincided with the tension between Riyadh and Cairo. This course corresponded perfectly with the policy of the Obama administration.

Nevertheless, the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States has modified the equation. The new president is favourable to a policy of confrontation and opposition to both change and revolution in the Arab region. He is also very hostile to Iran and is defining himself as a close friend of Israel. According to a correspondence from its ambassador to Washington, some of his main

advisers want to put the Muslim Brotherhood on the list of terrorist groups, in agreement on this point with the United Arab Emirates. This fundamental change in the equation has led the United Arab Emirates to reconcile with al-Sissi in Egypt. Together, accompanied by the emirates and Bahrain, they have launched the current frenzied attack on Qatar with a view to imposing a radical change in its policy.

This last episode reflects almost completely the retreat of the Great Arab Uprising and the counter-attack against the uprising launched by the old regimes throughout the region, supported in most countries by the Gulf axis and by Iran in Syria and Yemen. But a new wave of revolution will inevitably arise sooner or later (and its warning signs are already visible in Morocco and Tunisia). When it breaks out, no one will be able to contain it, and Riyadh and Abu Dhabi may well regret having eliminated the role of Qatar in this domain.

PS. On June 20, 2017, at a press

briefing by State Department spokesman Heather Nauert, the Trump administration is having "doubts" about the reasons given by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and their allies, mainly because of the "support for terrorism" by Qatar, which triggered a serious air and naval blockade. Is a change in attitude by the US administration being announced? As Al Jazeera reports in English, it would be unwise to forget that the United States has the Al-Udeid military base. It is home to more than 100 operational aircraft and more than 11,000 US and allied military personnel. The BBC, on 15 June 2017, announced the purchase by Qatar from the United States of fifteen F-15 combat aircraft for a sum of 12 billion dollars. A little more than for the hawkers. Qatar's ambassador to the United States, Meshal Hamad al-Thani, welcomed the statements of the State Department, adding in a tweet: "We are confident in the ability of the United States to resolve this crisis."

Feminism at Work

24 August 2017, by **Lynne Williams**

I have been a committed feminist since early in life, but these politics were reinvigorated when I began working as a technician in a predominantly male workplace. Being a feminist in theory is much different than being a feminist when some guy is shaking the 18-foot extension ladder you are working on; it requires a different relationship to your goals.

In my early years, though I did face real material struggles, my feminism was largely ideological, for me it took place in arguments and was often about being right. In my work as a rank-and-file activist, my socialist feminism has become more defined and concrete. It is about building solidarity among my coworkers which is not only "right" but also actively builds the kind of solidarity it takes to

enforce and reproduce socialist-feminist politics.

It means, for example, confronting the ladder shaker but also building a network of fellow activists who simultaneously confront the ladder shaker and make it impossible for other ladder shakers to do their thing without answering to the collective.

Approaching organizing in the workplace this way is an essentially socialist-feminist strategy: 1) understanding that gender does not only happen when sexism or heterosexism happens but in every moment that adherence to gender roles trumps class solidarity; 2) understanding gender and the ways it is used to organize society and the work we do; 3) understanding that gender is not only about liberal

demands for individual equality but also about radically redefining the potential for individuals to be fully liberated; 4) understanding the centrality of our gender roles to developing radical class consciousness, leadership and movement; 5) finally, it is about including the tradition of socialist feminists' insights and politics into our strategies as organizers.

1. Gender does not only happen when sexism or heterosexism happens.

Gender is not only an issue at work for queers and women. We need to be explicit about this in order to keep every discussion from being only about individual people's struggles (which are real and deserve attention) to also include the politics and culture

of the workplace as a whole.

Gender As Health Risk

One way that gender affects all workers explicitly at my job is around workplace safety issues. In an almost entirely male workplace, organizing around workplace safety involves having a complicated understanding of gender politics and a specific set of skills for navigating them.

Specifically, the guys I work with will often not work safe unless there is another issue at stake. We will do job actions which rely on enforcing safety regulations only if somebody is suspended for something else, being off the job for example. Safety issues on their own, and not as a strategy for slowing productivity, are ignored. Working safe is essentially for “wimps.”

This “macho” attitude persists while safety issues at work are huge. I work in manholes, where the safety issues range from risk of immediate injury to longterm health risks from exposure to dusts and gases. My co-workers essentially police each others’ masculinity and effectively enforce management’s approach to on the job injuries, claiming they are always the employees’ fault.

Management actively denies what union activists know, that the hazards exist at work because of how work is organized, that workers themselves do not create these hazards. Nonetheless management successfully claims that we’re not careful enough while climbing rusty ladders, lifting 300-pound manhole covers, or driving trucks without working turn signals. Hyper-masculine workplace culture affirms management’s claims.

My co-workers say injured workers aren’t strong enough or smart enough to navigate these hazards. Consequently the union membership has no active demands or positions around safety. All of the union’s gains regarding safety equipment and procedures have basically become a nuisance or seen as compromising masculinity.

Management makes safety equipment available for liability reasons and uses safety violations as a way to discipline workers. In my workplace safety, previously a union victory, has become a tool of management.

Because of this dominant workplace culture, organizing for more effective and widespread safety measures at work is also organizing against some of this staunchly hetero-normative masculine behavior. Convincing people that “unsafe for one is unsafe for all” does not compromise their individual worth, only management’s increasing productivity demands.

Organizing with the goal of redefining what is valued on the shop floor, not hypermasculinity but collective engagement in class struggle, is essentially a socialist-feminist project: a project that strengthens the collective power of all workers, regardless of gender identity, by undoing the centrality of those individual gender identities to how we work, how we relate to the union, how we define the union, and ultimately to what we think is possible in the world.

What we as socialist feminists believe is that it is possible, necessary, to live a life in which you are not constantly struggling to meet the standards of oppressive gender roles, and that individual struggle must not interfere with our collective project of building working class power.

Gender, Social Organization and Liberation

2. Gender is used to organize society.

Understanding gender roles plays such a central role to organizing in my workplace because hypermasculinity is such a big part of the dominant culture there. In reality, there is actually extreme variety in gender and sexuality, and every worker’s relationship to those identities gets lost in this dominant culture.

Though I want to recognize and understand this workplace culture, I do not want to essentialize any aspect

of gender or sexuality. Some of the people I work with are not as macho; there are some women, there are macho women, there are serious union activists who derive their macho pride from yelling at the boss and not from working unsafely, and there are much more passive characters, etc.

I am trying to say that the diversity of the working class, which is truly infinite, is not made apparent by the dominant cultures in our workplaces and our unions. These cultures are often a response to how work is organized, which is not by the class, or to how union life is organized, which is not often enough by the class. Therefore, gradually chipping away at the homogenous and destructive force of patriarchy and homophobia in these places makes the way for real and lasting change.

The more and more we organize together and have each others’ backs at work around safety issues, the more the very terms of how to be a successful “guy” at work change. This strategy also makes more space for people who are not “guys.” The more successes we have as a shop, the more solidarity there is.

After months of organizing with this socialist-feminist understanding at the core, my whole shop is getting closer to working safely for our own sake. Increasingly, there is not as much to prove as before, and what was perceived as a defense of gender is not as necessary.

What we are now defending is our collective rights to a safe workplace, reclaiming that tool from management. We have had only some success with this at my shop, but the amount of convincing it takes to get people on board has decreased drastically, which is a sign that solidarity has increased.

3. Gender is about radically redefining the potential for liberation.

Some of the success of the feminist movement has been the creation of rules for behavior and legal recourse for people who encounter discrimination and hostility on the job. These rules are valuable and are the

consequence of a very real and brave fight by people of color, queers and women on the job.

Without a politicized union membership, however, these rules do not get integrated into the core of what solidarity looks like. And without anti-racist, feminist and queer organizing in the workplace, there is not the collective commitment to confront these violations of union solidarity. Management, afraid of lawsuits, essentially enforces these rules around sexism, homophobia and racism.

It is our job as activists, especially in the workplace, not to allow these victories of the movement to be turned into the very things that undo our movement. We need to redefine the terms of what it means to be union, what it means to be human. It is our job to intervene effectively in all of these manifestations of racism, sexism and homophobia on the job. It is also our job to do this in a way that builds solidarity and doesn't simply scold offending union members, which is precisely how management undoes our solidarity.

This is the difference between a socialist-feminist approach to building a collective that can demand and enforce the rights of all union members, and a liberal approach to simply safeguarding individual rights.

A socialist-feminist approach is not only more effective in terms of building lasting structures and relationships to preserve the essence of feminist, queer and anti-racist demands, but it makes more sense. It creates situations where we are asking people to step up and have each others' backs, not to step down and get out of the way because they just don't get it. It demands that people be their best for the sake of their coworkers, for the sake of the union. It builds relationships and responsibility to the collective.

When building one-on-one relationships, which are the building blocks of bigger organizing, socialist-feminist politics is decidedly different from liberal politics and it makes a difference when you're talking with people on the job.

People hate "liberals" — partly due to racism and sexism and homophobia and seeing liberals as representing minorities only — but I think all of that masks the fact that people really hate liberalism because it has failed to change the world in ways that make a difference for the class.

Liberal politics depend on the class for support but work in opposition to the class, privileging individual mobility and individual citizenship. Radicalism places all of these individual struggles in the context of how capitalism alienates us from each other and ourselves. People "get" radicalism because radicalism accounts for all of people's struggles under capitalism. They want to support each other and be supported — "an injury to one is an injury to all" — and if we don't support each other we're all more vulnerable.

Placing workplace struggles in this context is a radical project. Understanding how gender plays a role in alienating people from each other and themselves is a socialist-feminist project. Socialist feminism is also an approach to organizing because it understands the role gender plays in developing the class conscious of workers as well as understanding the personal as political. And this is radical.

There's a personal and emotional connection that people have to feel to trust each other, to take risks on the job, to undo the privileges of whiteness, maleness, heteronormativity, being a productive worker — organizing is fundamentally building trust, about caring for and about each other, about creating a place where the class takes care of each other for common struggles against all of the effects of capitalism.

These personal politics play out while organizing around workplace issues and in informal social interactions away from work. Occasionally people go out, drink, open up to each other, and we as human beings who struggle with the ways capitalism organizes our lives on and off the job share our stories with each other about our needs for respect and care, our needs to respect and care.

We don't necessarily build on these conversations upon returning to work the next day. But we share an understanding that we are in this together because of our struggles, not in spite of them, and challenging each other to be fuller people is part of our project as a class.

In all of this formal and informal conversation, issues of gender, sexuality, race, the war, how we organize our personal lives, relationships and work are constant. Being a socialist feminist helps to understand what people say, and why they say it.

When people talk about stuff they want to assert the value of the choices they have made in life, the sacrifices that they've made. And people are brilliant, insightful, creative and sincerely trying to understand this mess capitalism has made of our lives. They are interested in engaging with and arguing about all of these issues and desire for these struggles to be taken seriously.

As radicals, as socialist feminists, we do take all of these personal struggles seriously. It is at the core of what we believe. The effects of capitalism on our identities and how we organize our lives are sometimes traumatic.

We do not reduce our politics to only these personal struggles, but we incorporate them into our understanding of the world and our approach to organizing. This is appealing to people. This is socialist feminism.

Becoming Organizers

4. Our gender roles are central to developing radical class consciousness.

If this can be seen as one of our goals in the workplace, and in the world, we need to approach it as activists. We need to earn the respect and trust of our coworkers, our community. This is no small task. Our approach to being good organizers is also derived from our socialist feminist tradition. We integrate our understanding of the

centrality of our gender roles in developing political consciousness with our methods for building democratic movements. Individual identities are fragmented under capitalism, there are unrealistic standards for living under this gendered order, and the wholeness of our humanity takes a backseat to surviving under capitalism.

I experienced this myself when I started at my job. I kept looking for opportunities to talk to other workers as a worker about the contract, the wages, working conditions, union, and management, but instead found people most interested in personal life “theirs and mine.”

I mistakenly thought this focus on being workplace activists, focusing on what material demands we had in common, had to happen at the expense of my other identities, which were not heteronormative and therefore, I mistakenly thought, were distracting from our commonality as workers. I was struggling with how to integrate my sexuality and gender identity with my identity as a workplace activist. I was worried about making my sexuality an issue, but people seemed to be more fixated on obsessing about their own sexuality and gender than about mine.

The people I worked with were, in a funny way, more socialist feminist than I was, integrating their work and after work lives, being moved completely by both experiences. They challenged me to do the same, to be myself comfortably. Coming out ended up making me closer to people, not more alienated as I wrongly suspected. I was challenged by my coworkers and my broader politics to understand the workplace as being about more than work, as being about our whole experience in life.

One of the ways my socialist-feminist politics played a role in how I handled coming out at work is that I started out understanding that everyone has experience as a gendered and sexual person “and everyone in some way or another struggles with these identities, and with insecurities. So I didn’t see myself as unique or different from the straight men I worked with in that way. It also forced

me into the unfamiliar place of knowing myself to be the “one” in “an injury to one is an injury to all” and the less familiar place of allowing the “all” to be my coworkers.

When I realized that being more of who I am on the job was the key to being able to establish trust and solidarity, it brought me back to my socialist-feminist politics in a way. As an activist, I took what I perceived as a risk to let people know more about myself. Coworkers respected this honesty and saw it as respectful, and together we effectively established a deep trust. This interpersonal politics is part of our socialist-feminist understanding of what is political, but also a socialist-feminist strategy for organizing.

Understanding that we are all in all of our struggles together, a socialist-feminist organizing approach, led me to be a more effective organizer around those workplace issues I had initially focused on and continue to work on, now with the benefit the trust and support of my coworkers. This support goes both ways and contributes to the developing of leaders and activists on the shop floor. When I intervene on somebody’s behalf, they intervene on mine. We tap each other for support, and stand together on the shop floor.

Integrating a broader understanding of what moves people, a socialist-feminist strategy for organizing, leads to developing a culture where individuals are more willing to take risks as activists around shop floor issues, ranging from the way work is organized, safety issues, discrimination, the humiliation of being constantly managed, denied bathroom breaks, and the unbelievably long list of things that workers struggle around every minute of the day at work.

Building trust and developing relationships is necessary for organizing around workplace issues. But this process does not only happen because of “typical” issues. Our broader struggles under capitalism contribute to our ability and interest in fighting, to developing a consciousness that sees all of our personal struggles as connected, to

see how these struggles affect all of our fights. Socialist feminism provides us with the political framework for organizing towards this goal.

5. The tradition of socialist feminism is included in our strategies as organizers.

There has been a lot of focus on socialist-feminist process in building socialist organization. And I do think it is important to be explicit about this as a political process and decision. But I also do not want to overlook the fact that socialist feminist process is good organizing: listening more than talking, caring as a task and a goal, seeing consciousness as a kind of process in which everyone is equally responsible and engaged.

Socialism has a tradition; socialist feminism is part of that tradition. In my time as a rank-and-file activist I have learned so much about what moves me and my coworkers, how to effectively organize collective action, how deep and broad the range of things we struggle with under capitalism, as workers in our lives and at work. And I have also learned how enormously lucky I am to be aware of this larger tradition of struggle and thought.

Sometimes we assume that people’s lack of interest or commitment to these traditions is deliberate. I have learned that people are unaware of these traditions. The left has not been widely present in the workplace for a long time. Some labor leaders see the middle class as our goal, and while demanding more of the share of wealth we produce is not a horrible goal, we know as radicals it doesn’t touch the sheer inhumanity of capitalism.

Sharing this tradition and the lessons of these politics is an important part of organizing, sharing the potential for a different world, a different world that is informed by all of our insights into the failure of capitalism as a way of organizing life. And going about it in a way that understands people’s alienation from the processes of struggle itself is more effective organizing. At least it has been for me in modest shop floor activities. Building bigger more lasting

organization with this foundation is a longer-term project.

There are many more opportunities to learn from this socialist-feminist approach to organizing because capital is constantly reorganizing our lives and work in ways that further alienate us from ourselves, each other and the very process of political

change. For all the above reasons, I think a socialist-feminist process is the most effective way to build the power and collectivity needed by the class. And for the reasons above, I think the workplace is an important place to implement this strategy.

Only conscience resistance will

effectively undo the institutionalization of gender roles and the obstacles they create for building-class conscious movements. Gender roles are institutionalized and interfere with building collective struggles, interfere with collective goals and identities. Socialist feminist process and goals are aimed at developing this conscious resistance.

A Split at the Top: The Bourgeoisie Begins to Abandon Trump

23 August 2017, by **Dan La Botz**

While some top Republican leaders have taken a stronger stand against Trump in recent days, several major corporate leaders have deserted him. They have done in part because of his flirtation with fascism, but also because Trump and his administration’s embarrassing tweets, the constant circus, the Korea war scare, the Russian imbroglio makes it impossible for the Republicans to advance their pro-business agenda. If the relationship between Trump and corporate leaders continues to unravel, this could lead to a more rapid collapse of the Trump presidency than had previously seemed possible.

After the Charlottesville events, many Republican Party leaders criticized the president and some condemned him. Virtually every Republican leader issued a statement against white supremacy, from speaker Paul Ryan of Wisconsin to former presidential candidate Mitt Romney.

Others spoke out against Trump himself. Senators Ben Sasse of Nebraska, Jeff Flake of Arizona and Marco Rubio of Florida often disagree with Trump, but the critics also included prominent conservatives such as Sens. Orrin Hatch of Utah and Cory Gardner of Colorado. Hatch said, “We should call evil by its name. My brother didn’t give his life fighting Hitler for Nazi ideas to go

unchallenged here at home.”

At about the same time, a number of major business leaders broke with the president. Four CEOs resigned from presidents Manufacturing Advisory Council. The first to do so was Kenneth Frazier, CEO of Merck Pharmaceuticals and one of America’s most prominent black executives. Three others joined him: the CEO of Intel, Brian Krzanich, the CEO of Under Armour, Kevin Plank, and the president of the Alliance for American Manufacturing, Scott Paul.

Frazier wrote on Twitter, “Our country’s strength stems from its diversity and the contributions made by men and women of different faiths, races, sexual orientations, and political beliefs. America’s leaders must honor our fundamental values by clearly rejecting expressions of hatred, bigotry, and group supremacy.” The following day, Inge Thulin, CEO of 3M resigned, and so too did Campbell Soup CEO Denise Morrison. Some CEOs who stayed on the council expressed fear of reprisal should they resign.

Trump’s other business group, the Strategy and Policy Forum began to discuss the possibility of disbanding, and Stephen Schwarzman of Blackstone Group LP planned to inform Trump, but before he had the opportunity, Trump announced on

Aug. 16 that he was abolishing both of his business councils.

Other businesspeople were also critical of the president. Javier Palomarez, the president and CEO of the US Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and a member of Trump’s Diversity Council, criticized Trump, calling his response to Charlottesville “shallow, belated and feckless.” “Denouncing white supremacy without equivocation and without reservation should have been a no-brainer for President Trump.”

As the New York Times noted:

Many more chief executives spoke out against racial discrimination and white supremacy, including Timothy Cook of Apple, Lloyd C. Blankfein of Goldman Sachs (neither of whom sits on a presidential advisory council) and Jamie Dimon of JPMorgan Chase (who does).

General Electric issued a statement saying that it had “no tolerance for hate, bigotry or racism,” but said that its chairman, Jeffrey R. Immelt, would remain a presidential adviser.

All of this is reflected within the White House in the struggle between Chief of Staff John Kelly, a former Marine Corps general, who is allied with the president’s daughter Ivanka Trump and her husband Jared Kushner, and

another former general H.R. McMaster, who is Trump's National Security Advisor, against Steven Bannon and other "alt-right" advisors to the president.

There have been renewed calls for Trump to fire White House aides Steven Bannon, Stephen Miller, and Sebastian Gorka. The Hispanic Chamber of Commerce issued a statement saying, "If the president wishes to maintain any credibility with

the Hispanic community and other minority communities, he needs to purge his administration of all those who disparage diversity and inclusivity. Firing Steve Bannon is the first step" and a needed step to begin the process of healing the bad feelings this administration has engendered." Rupert Murdoch, the acting head of the conservative Fox News, also called upon Trump to fire Bannon.

The big banks' abandonment of Trump"Blankfein of Goldman Sachs and Dimon of JPMorgan Chase"may signal the beginning of the end of the president's tenure. JP Morgan Chase's advertising slogan is "So you can..." And when Chase turns on a politicians, the slogan might be rephrased as "So you can't..." With Goldman and Chase giving up on him, Trump may be all washed up.

August 16 2017

An Orientation Toward Local Independent Political Organizations (IPOs)

22 August 2017, by Solidarity

The contradictions of this moment will be sharply felt. Mass layers of people are discontent and want alternatives to neoliberal politics including the Clintonite Democratic Party. Many will be drawn toward progressive Democrats and Democratic Party primary challenges. Some of these efforts will likely be fruitful in the short term, but we can't expect them to lead to anything transformative in the medium to long term, and the pressure on organizers to remain within the orbit of the Democratic Party will be immense despite the sharp criticisms many have of the party.

The Green Party has grown and been somewhat revitalized but remains marginal, with its victories limited to scattered and minor local seats. It is simply not seen as a serious alternative by the great majority of people joining the resistance, and no interventions from small socialist organizations are going to change that. Nor is the construction of a new mass party of the working class in the cards for us in the immediate future (at any rate, not through any effort of Solidarity or the forces around us).

Arguments about deprioritizing elections and building movements are similarly unlikely to be persuasive in

the era of Trump and the violent incompetence of Republican dominance"and serious socialist strategy cannot forever dodge the question of elections and state power in any case.

We need an approach to electoral politics that can:

- Win meaningful victories (both in terms of winning office and of winning strategic reforms);
- Attract important layers of activists and give them an electoral vehicle that is widely seen as serious AND that remains structurally independent of the Democratic Party;
- Build organization(s) that mobilize people, bridge gaps between social movements and electoral politics, and provide a grassroots base the means by which to hold candidates and elect officials accountable.

Richmond Progressive Alliance member and Richmond councilperson Jovanka Beckles speaks, fist raised, at an RPA event, standing next to fellow RPA member and former Richmond mayor Gayle McLaughlin.

For reasons alluded to above, the conditions don't yet exist for the creation of a new national party that meets these criteria. But the conditions do exist to make this possible on the local level. Local independent political organizations (IPOs), of which the Richmond Progressive Alliance (RPA) is probably our most successful model, have already proven useful tools for achieving all of these strategic goals. These organizations can unite people across strategic differences, from progressive Democrats to diehard third party activists (and they are not mutually exclusive with the goals of some comrades to continue building the Greens or other existing formations). Similarly, they can allow labor unions and other key forces that are unable or unwilling to fully break from the Democratic Party a way to nonetheless engage in electoral work that pressures and challenges Democrats from an independent position.

A careful outline of the parameters of

these type of groups and which we would or would not support would perhaps be useful but is beyond the scope of this text. Such an outline would be further complicated by differences in state and local laws around elections, ballot lines, and so on. But broadly we should at least support efforts that do all of the following:

Run viable candidates who may have endorsements from one or more parties, but who run formally independently from the Democratic Party;

- Accept no corporate money;
- Are rooted in social movements and grassroots organization, providing movements a vehicle to engage in elections, popularizing key demands, and gaining a foothold in local government from

which to fight for them;

- Provide some mechanism(s) by which the grassroots base can determine the program of candidates, rather than just choosing which candidates to support, and hold elected officials accountable to that program;
- Build organizations which, even if primarily oriented toward elections, maintain year round activity and organize outside of just the electoral context.

Finally, a network of such local IPOs might lay the foundation for new state and national organizations/parties of the scale and level of seriousness that we need, with a grassroots base in local communities of a type difficult or impossible to achieve through calling

for the wholesale creation of a new party.

This document was approved by a large majority at Solidarity's 2017 Convention. It was co-signed by the following members of Solidarity (other organizational affiliations of each comrade listed here for reference only, and not to indicate that these organizations endorse all the ideas in this document):

Aly Baldree (Green Party of Kansas City - Kansas City, MO)

Robert Caldwell (Left Elect - Dallas/Fort Worth, TX)

Steve Early (Richmond Progressive Alliance - Richmond, CA)

Alex Fields (2017 City Council Movement - Knoxville, TN)

Matthew Luskin (United Working Families - Chicago, IL)

Joanna Misnik (Chicago Socialist Campaign - Chicago, IL)

August 14, 2017

"The revolution will not be NGO-ised": four lessons from African feminist organising

21 August 2017, by **Valérie Bah and Felogene Anumo**

31 July 2017

As African feminists, we face multiple systems of oppression including the effects of colonisation, neocolonisation, white supremacy, militarism, the globalisation of capitalism and neoliberalism. Yet our movements are more vibrant and radically political than ever before.

We've subverted the erasure of women and gender nonconforming people from historical records. We've influenced public perception and policy. We're grappling with the NGO-industrial complex and the depoliticisation of our movements.

Recognition of the need to reconstruct solidarity across borders and generations is growing.

Our heterogenous social movements vary so much across regions, character, and impact that they almost resist categorisation. But there are crucial lessons we can - and must - learn from decades of transformational organising on the continent. Here are four:

1. Memorialise

**your champions,
but remember
your
â€˜anonymous'
leaders too**

One of the functions of patriarchy is to erase women and gender nonconforming people from historical records. In light of this, creating and amplifying alternative archives becomes a radical act of resistance.

Spaces like the African Feminist Forum ([AFF](#)) have created opportunities for feminists from across Africa and its diaspora to connect and learn from one another, including the giants on whose shoulders we stand. The AFF recently launched a video series called "Voice, Power, and Soul", putting faces and voices to vibrant movements on the continent.

The AFF series includes reflections from prominent African feminists, as well as from others who are less widely-known outside of their activist circles. This is important because documenting notable people can risk erasing the collective power of lesser known figures.

There is now growing recognition of the role of students and youth activists, gender nonconforming people, artists, peasants and sex workers. From student-led protests in South Africa to feminist mobilisation against the 'Kill the gays' bill in Uganda, to resisting autocracy in Egypt, fierce feminist leadership is mobilising across the continent.

2. The revolution will not be NGO-ised

The proliferation of NGOs and over-reliance on them as vehicles to carry forward feminist projects has in many places de-politicised what should be a transformative agenda. The political instrumentalisation and institutionalisation of movements through NGOs is subject to growing concern and critique.

An example is the focus on the (debatable) necessity of men's participation in African feminist movements. This has shrunk resources

for feminist movement building, and has compromised hard-won safe spaces, as women are pressured to include men in their organising.

Seeking transformative change, some African feminists are rejecting more traditional models and structures and are organising through informal and community-led collectives like [Ikhtyar](#) and [HOLAAfrica!](#). The Internet has also become a huge tool to mobilise people and elevate voices in powerful new ways. If you don't believe us, check out the [#Afrifem](#) hashtag on Twitter.

3. You can't take the politics out of the struggle

From the 1990s, African feminists have taken movement claims from the streets to national decision-making bodies and beyond. They've negotiated with government representatives to commit to progressive conventions such as the "Maputo Protocol" on the rights of women, adopted by the African Union in 2003. Progressive campaigns have increased public and political attention to gender equality.

Now African feminists must grapple with state cooption of movement agendas and tools. Feminist scholar Awino Okech argues that a depoliticised focus on "gender" in international development has failed the African feminist movement as it aims for inclusionary politics rather than radical transformative gains. Women and feminist leaders joining government, only to end up as muted voices against state aggression, seems to be a deliberate consequence of "gender mainstreaming".

African feminists have begun to recentre and repoliticise gender and development to its radical roots – and build new foundations for solidarity by politicising African feminism, speaking to commonalities without denying differences.

We saw this, for example, in the demands of young feminists in South Africa: [#RhodesMustFall](#) but [#PatriarchyMustFall](#) too. This created space for students to critically situate issues such as black feminism, pan-Africanism, gender and sexuality within campaigns to decolonise the education system and reframe education as a human right, not a commodity.

4. Intersectionality, all day, every day

African feminist movements are robust. But ideological, generational and tactical differences have created divisions. In some cases, young, poor, trans, queer and sex worker movements have found themselves alienated from older, middle class, cisgendered, straight, and white-collar movements that enjoy more space and mainstream validation.

Deep intersectional organising and challenging intersecting systems of oppression like patriarchy and cis-heteronormativity is crucial to demonstrating solidarity and seeking transformation. We can no longer separate our struggles and this should be reflected in our strategies and demands which should intersect with various oppressions that feminists face. Liberation of one group of society should never be the basis of oppression of another.

Source [Open Democracy](#).

We need a large movement from below!

20 August 2017, by Joseph Daher

You have just written a book about Hezbollah. Why, in your opinion, was it necessary to reengage in this topic?

When I started in 2010, I thought it would be necessary to study Hezbollah and other Islamic fundamentalist movements because there many questions were still unanswered. You had different point of views regarding movements such as Hezbollah or the Muslim Brotherhood. Whether they were termed fascist, as conservative study centres would suggest, or as an Islamic brand of liberation theology as we witnessed in South America. I opposed both understandings. Another point of view I departed from: analysing it as a political party according to its political program, policies, and the social origin of its leadership and cadres. You cannot consider it progressive, but instead as a reactionary and sectarian political party, supporting a capitalist economy. It is a gradualist [1] Islamic fundamentalist movement with an ideal of establishing an Islamic State. Although this is not possible under the current conditions in Lebanon.

This perspective on Hezbollah, though, was not present in my opinion: a holistic analysis, also looking at the political economy of Lebanon and the evolution of Hezbollah in relation to neoliberal policies that resulted in social differentiation in the population, also among Lebanese Shiites. Subsequently, Hezbollah's ideology can't be explained isolated from its political context and dynamics, whether being local, regional or international.

Finally, I wanted to bring forward thoughts of the Lebanese Marxist Mahdi Amel [2], especially from his book "In the sectarian state" regarding his analysis on issues of sectarianism, behaviour of the Islamic bourgeoisie during the civil war, and finally also the concept of "community class" and his criticism of it.

As you just mentioned, there are still some parts of the left which consider Hezbollah as being progressive. What's your take on that?

Well, if it's enough to struggle against Israel and to scream "Death to America!" in order to be considered progressive, we should even consider Al-Qaida and Osama Bin Laden as progressives. That's ridiculous. Imperialism is a system, it's not limited to one or two countries in the West. It's a global system in which the US today is still the main imperialist force. But you have other global imperialist forces such as Russia, China, France, Great Britain, etc. and regional powers like Israel, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt to some extend in the MENA region. Putting this aside, the analysis of political parties can't be based solely on their foreign policies. The right to resist against a foreign occupier, against an authoritarian regime, must be supported. But that doesn't mean that you support this political party ideologically and programmatically. You can't put aside the women's issue, the social issue, and other contradictions and discriminations in the society.

Regarding their politics, in your book you described Hezbollah as being neoliberal and charitable at the same time, how do these go together?

In various religious fundamentalist movements across the world there is this coalition between moral conservatism and neoliberalism. And if you think about it, it makes complete sense. When you have a strong state providing social services to large sections of the popular classes, a political party has less space to building a clientelist basis based on the provision of their own services. That's why they demand privatizations and other neo-liberal policies. Charity gives them a channel to transmit their ideology and build a mass popular basis. Because, if you want to receive certain services, most of the time you must follow the norms, laws and practices of the provider. That's exactly what Hezbollah is doing in Lebanon.

As you mentioned, there is a debate, whether you could define Islamist groups as fascist. In your book, as you just described, you would render them differently. You have mentioned Marvin Olasky,

who has been a close advisor of George W. Bush, as being the "Western" and Christian counterpart of Hezbollah. Could you further elaborate on this?

I think we must be very careful with the term fascism. Fascism is a specific phenomenon in history that can repeat itself, obviously. But when you analyse fascism, it was, at first, a mass movement of the petty bourgeoisie that followed an important crisis. The main objective was taking over the state and crushing the labour movement. All of this within an imperialist state. Religious fundamentalist movements have not been created in this kind of processes at all. If you go back to history, the Muslim Brotherhood was founded in the 1920s to re-establish the caliphate in response to the end of the Ottoman Empire, British occupation, and the development of secular ideologies, ideas, and movements.

Besides, there are completely different dynamics. Fascist movements want to create the "new man". The religious fundamentalist movements, on the other hand, want to take people back to a "Golden Period", that is the Islamic caliphate as it was at the time of the prophet Mohammed. This is not very similar.

In addition, you should be careful because often the term is simply used to criminalize an organisation and to imply that we can fight them just by outlawing them. An example would be some sections that came out of the Stalinist left that justified their alliance with authoritarian regimes in the fight against the "fascist" Muslim Brotherhood. The result was that the democratic space was shut down for everyone. The Islamic fundamentalist forces suffered a lot from the repression, but in the end the left as well. More recently we saw this with Egyptian President al-Sisi. Some sections of the left supported the Egyptian dictator against the Muslim Brotherhood and afterwards al-Sisi repressed everyone.

In addition, you had the bourgeoisification of what I call the "gradualist" fundamentalist forces. Meaning, that you have an increasing number of capitalists playing a role in

this organisation. So, there are a lot of differences between the two phenomena. And if you don't do the right analysis, you can't fight them. This also means that you should defend the right of everyone to organise, except the fascists. And it also means, we should defend the rights of the Muslim Brotherhood's members being imprisoned in Egypt today. We should demand the liberation of all political prisoners.

Lebanese politics are still very much shaped by sectarianism [3]. Could you briefly describe what it means and what Hezbollah's position is on that?

The current Lebanese sectarian system has its origins in the middle of the 19th century. It was a consensus between the local elite and imperialist forces. Sectarianism is very important to be understood as a product of modern times, not as something that has always been in the region or that people from certain denominations are necessarily affiliated with a certain party. Hezbollah's position towards the sectarian system has evolved over time. In the 80s, it was condemning it, saying it was Maronite [4] dominated. As a solution, they wanted to establish an Islamic state. This they uphold until today. But, they say, they won't impose it on the people, very well knowing that due to the demography of Lebanon it won't be possible without force. One third of the population is Christian, one third is Sunni, and one third is Shiite. And not all the Shiites want to live in an Islamic republic modelled on Iran.

So today their position is to say: "Although there are mistakes, we support the sectarian system as it is. We should reform it, but don't be hasty!" Every time we witnessed a popular movement from below challenging the sectarian system and its actors, Hezbollah was opposed to it. Hezbollah has actually become one of the main actors benefitting from and defending the sectarian system.

Why was it important for the left to fight the sectarian system and how has this relation looked like?

The sectarian representation makes it very difficult for any kind of leftist or

progressive force. Do they want to participate in it? Every time there was a cross-sectarian movement from below, it was broken by the sectarian elite forces, because it posed a threat to them. The question today is rather, how do you behave being part of the system, how can you build a mass movement challenging the system? The Communist Party participates in elections. If they would have someone elected, that would be very good to challenge the sectarian system also from inside the parliament.

But you would also agree that the only way to overcome the sectarian system would be cross-sectarian movements from below?

Yes. And to give you an example, every time you had a movement from below, and the uprisings of 2011 were the best example, walls of fears were broken down due to common experiences. Do you remember the Tahrir Square in Cairo when Christians protected Muslims while praying and the other way around? In the beginning of the Syrian uprising you had people chanting "Alawis and Muslims, we are one, Christians and Muslims, we are one and Arabs and Kurds, we are one". People by their common experiences and struggles can break sectarianism, racism, and other oppressive ideas. But the weakening and repression of popular movements brought again forward sectarianism and oppressive ideas. That's why we need a large movement from below.

Why did the regimes, like Saudi-Arabia, Qatar, Iran and Syria, use sectarianism so much as a tool of counter-revolution? Because it is a very important weapon for breaking unity among the people and divert the popular classes away from socio-economic and democratic dynamics, while mobilising them on a reactionary basis that does not challenge their own power and influence.

In your book you also showed that there was a debate inside the Lebanese left regarding what you called 'Community Class'. The notion that there could be an oppressed or an oppressive denomination, whereby it would be

sound for the left to engage in sectarian politics.

The concept of community class was born within an organisation called "Communist Action Organisation" equating a religious sect with a class, Christian Bourgeoisie, Sunni Middle Class and Shia popular classes. In a context where the bourgeoisie retained its power, by using sectarianism to subordinate the popular classes to its own interests, it was catastrophic. It only strengthened sectarian tensions. It doesn't matter if you're a Christian worker, you are a traitor because you belong to the bourgeoisie. If you don't break with the tools by which the bourgeoisie rules your society, but instead reinforce it, it's catastrophic. This ideology had a bit of influence, but nowadays no one would defend it anymore.

You just mentioned the 2011 movements. Also in the 2016 municipal elections in Lebanon a considerable amount of people didn't vote for the classical sectarian parties. For example, the Communist Party won a few towns in Hezbollah areas and in Iraq you have a large cross-sectarian and cross-ethnic anti-corruption movement. Would you say there's a new generation that doesn't want to engage in sectarian politics anymore?

I think, first, we shouldn't forget that we are living in very difficult times in this region. But as you said, the conditions that allowed for these movements are still present. This is where hope lies. And that the parties that came to dominate the political scene, whether being linked to the authoritarian regimes or Islamic fundamentalist forces, don't have answers to these questions, being social justice, democracy, emancipation and liberation of the people, because they are the two sides of the counter-revolution. So, what we saw in Lebanon with the movement "you stink!" and afterwards in the elections with an independent list in Beirut, "Beirut Medinati" is very interesting. In Iraq it was fantastic, a great movement and you still have smaller movements linked to it until today. Morocco today is witnessing

huge popular movements, where again you have calls for social justice and democracy combined with a national issue. The Amazigh[v], who are still oppressed, are claiming their identity and their rights. So, things are not

completely over, but we have to learn from our mistakes in order not to repeat them. We have to organise in different ways against the two sides of the counter-revolution to be able to present a true alternative to the people. But this means organising on a

mass level, providing people a real alternative, not just a small one.

Source Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung. The interview was conducted by Noël van den Heuvel.

On being revolutionaries one hundred years after the Russian Revolution

17 August 2017, by **Julia Camara**

??A few days ago, looking for materials to prepare for this opening rally, I came across the statistics of attendance at last year's camp. If we assume that the figures are the same this year, and that is more or less what usually happens, we find that three quarters of the people here today are under 28 years old. And this information, which may seem anecdotal, takes on all its importance if we consider that just 28 years ago the Berlin Wall fell. Those of us, like myself, who are in our mid-twenties, were born the same year that Fukuyama proclaimed the end of history and shouted to the world in 22 languages that ideologies were no longer necessary. The average age of attendance last year, less than 23, indicates that most of the 400 people here were born at a time that was no longer that of the "short twentieth century".? And yet here we are.

Revolutionaries without revolutions. Militants and activists born after the fall of the Berlin Wall, opening what is already the 34th edition of the Fourth International Youth Camp in a year, 2017, which is not just any year, but the centenary of the greatest hope for humanity that ever lit up the world. A century on from the Russian Revolution, one wonders: what does it mean to be a revolutionary today?

1917 was the year in which a workers' party, supported by the peasantry, took power to change the world. And many things have changed since then, but deep down everything continues

the same: plenty for the few; poverty, precariousness existence and sorrow for the many. In 2017, it is the logic of accumulation and dispossession that continues to rule the world. The destruction of the planet for private gain has not stopped, nor has the expropriation of the women's bodies, nor has reproductive work ceased to be made invisible or stigmatized through the imposition of heterosexuality and the sexual division of labor within the nuclear family. The ghettoization of racialized people within the so-called "First World" continues, as does the proliferation of imperialist wars and the plundering of resources in the world's subordinated regions. The ideological war has not ended, while the means of production remain concentrated in just a few hands. Many of these things, in fact, have got worse.

Those of us who were born after the fall of the Wall have grown being told endlessly that there was no possible alternative. What happened happened, simply and plainly, because it was impossible for anything else to happen. Capitalism is the only viable system. Liberal and bourgeois democracy, the only possible democracy. And, well, as everyone knows, Marxism is equal to Stalinism, and that is not going anywhere. But we know that history is never inevitable, and that the past is full of possible presents, which never came to be. We know that, one hundred years after the Russian Revolution, ideologies remain necessary. That the

ideal future promised by capitalism with a human face is not possible because, simply, capitalism with a human face is not possible. The central task for us today, as the heirs of those communists, women and men, who from the beginning fought Stalinism from Marxist positions and in the name of socialist democracy, is to reappropriate our past and free the living "from the weight of the dead of yesterday and the political corpses of today."

We are revolutionary, yes. And one of the reasons we are, is that 1917 cannot be forgotten. The promise of humanity, universality, and emancipation that appeared in "the ephemeral flame of the moment" is too tied to the interests of humanity for it to be forgotten. We are revolutionary out of loyalty to those who came before us, and out of loyalty to those who will come after. Because, as comrade Daniel Bensaïd said, being a political activist is above all professing loyalty to people we do not know.

We are revolutionary, yes. Because we know that it is possible to assault the heavens, and that there must be an alternative to this murderous system which devours us to reproduce itself, and condemns us to the most absolute of miseries. We are revolutionary because we struggle in the day to day against all types of oppression, but also and especially because we try to prepare ourselves for the great leaps. We are revolutionary because we love

life deeply, and we refuse with all our strength to believe that this is the only way it can be lived. 1917 was the year when the outcasts

of the earth rose up. In 2017 it is our responsibility to keep pushing for the world to change its basis. Life is

beautiful. It is up to us to rid her of all evil, oppression and violence, so that the generations to come can live it to the full.

Solidarity with Activists and Victims in Charlottesville

15 August 2017, by Solidarity National Committee

Anti-fascist counterdemonstrators gather in Charlottesville prior to the scheduled "Unite the Right" march. Photo by Joshua Roberts/Reuters.

While President Trump equivocates with statements about "violence on many sides" in Charlottesville, we stand unequivocally on the side of the anti-fascist activists who, refusing to allow the neo-Nazi demonstration to proceed unchallenged, outmobilized and outnumbered the white supremacists with their own mass counterdemonstration on the morning of August 12. We encourage comrades to join local actions in solidarity with the victims of Charlottesville and to seek opportunities to build or support local coalitions to resist the far right, both in the streets and in our community organizing.

As socialists, we believe that building a broad, diverse, mass movement against racism is key to defeating the far right. We cannot rely on the neoliberal center, and certainly not the police or other forces of "law and order" with their roots in centuries of white supremacist violence, to contain this threat. We need not only to outnumber the right, as we did in Charlottesville, but to be effectively prepared for community self-defense, and to organize a broad left around a program that offers a truly liberatory vision and centers the leadership of oppressed peoples.

In the short term, a Gofundme fundraiser has been initiated by members of DSA to help with medical expenses for those injured in the attacks, regardless of political affiliation. We encourage comrades

who are able to contribute.

Milwaukee Solidarity with Charlottesville leaflet 8/13/17

Stop Racist Violence!

Solidarity with the Anti-Racist
Protestors in Charlottesville

The deadly violence unleashed on anti-racist protestors during a rally in Charlottesville, Virginia on Saturday, August 12 represents an alarming escalation of far right, Klan and Nazi violence and demands the most vigorous response.

This evening's memorial to the killed and injured is an excellent step in that direction. As we remember our fallen comrade, Heather Heyer we recall the words of martyred IWW militant Joe Hill before his murder by the state of Utah on trumped up charges in 1915: Don't Mourn, Organize. Tonight we do both.

Milwaukee Solidarity stands in solidarity with the IWW comrade killed and the scores of injured, including members of DSA and the ISO. Their sacrifice in the struggle against racist violence and white supremacy reminds us of the key role that socialists and revolutionaries play in the struggle against racism and for a better world.

The violent, far right forces that assembled in Charlottesville to protest

the removal of monuments glorifying confederate heroes have been emboldened by the rhetoric of billionaire President Trump. Following the massacre Trump denounced the "bigotry of many, many sides." Drawing an equal's sign between racists and anti-racists is intended to draw attention away from, and sanitize far right violence while smearing left-wing anti-racist forces as their moral equivalents. Trump's statement is also designed to obscure the ways that his rhetoric and that of members of his neo-liberal, capitalist government including white men close to the alt-right, and an attorney general who has worked hard to disenfranchise Black voters, has emboldened the open expression of vicious racist and anti-immigrant sentiment. The Democratic mayor of Charlottesville denounced the alt-right Nazis and Trump's comments. However, his police were ineffective in protecting the anti-racist protestors. We must demand protection for our right to protest but at the same time, we should have no illusions in the government of the 1%. We must be prepared to rely on ourselves to assure our right to protest safely.

The massacre in Charlottesville was an attack on all people of color, immigrants, and working people of all races, and demands the widest and most vigorous response. To be most effective, the struggle against racist violence should involve the broadest anti-racist, united front. Here in Milwaukee, we have the opportunity to build on the coalition formed in response to the police murder of Dontre Hamilton on April 30, 2015

and draw thousands of people of color and working people into the struggle.

Stop Racist Violence!

Demand Adequate Protection for Anti-Racist Protestors!

Contact Milwaukee Solidarity at: wcbreihan@aol.com.

Republished from **Solidarity**.

<http://www.solidarity-us.org/> and on face book

On the Russian Revolution of October 1917

15 August 2017, by **Alain Badiou**

I want to emphasise a point that seems to have been forgotten today, after the apparent triumph of capitalism at the global scale: the Russian Revolution of 1917 was an unprecedented event in the history of the human species.

In this regard, it is worth remembering that the history of humanity is rather short, all things considered. It amounts to about 200,000 years, which is not a lot as compared to the millions of years over which the dinosaurs dominated our planet. We can maintain that, over this short sequence, there has basically been just one fundamental "revolution": the Neolithic revolution. This revolution meant much more effective tools, settled agriculture, a stabilised notion of land ownership, pottery, the possibility of a food surplus allowing the existence of an idle ruling class, the resulting creation of the state, of writing, of money, of taxes, the perfecting (thanks to bronze) of military equipment, long-distance trade... All this dates from some millennia back, and we are still at this same point. Even if industrial production backed up by modern science has accelerated a lot of processes, the fact is that our world is still the world of rival states, of wars, of domination by a very narrow financial oligarchy, of the decisive importance of international trade, of the militarised predation of raw materials, of the existence of giant masses of several billion people who are almost totally destitute, and of a perpetual mass movement of poor peasants from all regions toward the packed-out metropolises where they take on subaltern roles.

Only very belatedly, at most a few centuries ago, did the question of states' economic foundations come to the heart of political discussion. From then on, we could argue, or even demonstrate, that the same oppressive and discriminatory social organisation could perfectly well make itself at home behind whatever state form (personal power, or democracy). That is to say, an organisation in which the most important state decisions invariably concern the boundless protection of private property, the transmission of this property through the family, and finally the maintenance of wholly monstrous inequalities, held to be natural and inevitable.

Then came revolutionary initiatives of a wholly different order to the ones that had only questioned the form of political power. The whole nineteenth century was marked by the "often bloody" failures of revolutionary attempts with such an orientation. The Paris Commune, with its thirty thousand dead on the cobblestones of Paris, remains the most glorious of these disasters.

So let us say this: in the conditions of the weakening of Russia's despotic central state, which had incautiously committed itself to the Great War of 1914 to 1918; in the wake of a first democratic revolution (February 1917) that had overturned this state; with a young working class coming into formation, very given to revolt and without any conservative unions to box it in; under the leadership of a Bolshevik Party whose organisation was in a sense implacable; and with a Lenin and a Trotsky who combined a

strong Marxist culture and a long militant experience haunted by the lessons of the Paris Commune; fusing all this in October 1917 there came the first victory, in all human history, of a post-Neolithic revolution.

This meant a revolution that established a power whose stated goal was the total overthrow of the millennia-long foundations of all "modern" societies: the hidden dictatorship of those who own the financial control of production and exchange. This was a revolution that opened out into the foundation of a new modernity. And the common noun of this absolute novelty was "and," in my view, remains "communism." People of all kinds around the world, from the worker and peasant popular masses to intellectuals and artists, recognised this revolution under the name "communism," welcoming it with an enthusiasm commensurate to the revenge that it constituted after the hard defeats of the previous century. Now, Lenin could declare, had come the era of victorious revolutions.

Whatever the later avatars of this unprecedented adventure, and whatever the present situation in which contemporary Neolithic cliques are taking matters back in hand around the world, the communist revolution of October 1917 remains our basis for knowing that at the temporal level of humanity's becoming, the ruling capitalism is, and will forever be, something of the past. That, notwithstanding passing appearances.

Verso

Making no concessions to the Palestinian people's rights

14 August 2017

The Vel d'Hiv round up resulted in the arrest, deportation and death of thousands of French Jewish citizens. The commemoration of this event was scandalous in several regards. A single foreign head of government was invited to the ceremony, in the person of Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu. This contributed to the despicable amalgam between Judaism and Zionism, and even gave the impression that in Emmanuel Macron's eyes Jews "are assumed to be necessarily all Zionists" are less French than everyone else...

Despite his formulaic and empty statements in favour of peace in the Middle East, in the course of one short sentence the French president proved that he totally sides with the Israeli hawks and their allies here in France. He is the first French head of state to adopt word for word the Israeli propaganda minister's Hasbara line of argument in the fight against BDS: "we will make no concessions to anti-Zionism, because it is the reinvented form of anti-Semitism."

Thus we get a clear view of the people who play the card of "importing" the Israel-Palestine conflict into France, and in what interests. Indeed, they do so by instrumentalising the commemoration of a state crime, a mass racist crime of French stock. The Jews deported from the Vel d'Hiv in 1942 have nothing to do with the "conflict," and their memory belongs to no one. Their use, here, does nothing but feed a certain confusionism that questions Jewish French citizens' true belonging "a confusionism which is very much fed by Netanyahu's own presence" and thus feeds anti-Semitism.

The French president has also offered Netanyahu a political opportunity to whitewash his regime of destruction of

the Palestinian people, and thus legitimize this regime. And this takes place on the back of the fate of the French Jewish victims of the round-up.

The colonizer-settlements are forgotten. The occupation is wiped away. The daily executions of Palestinians by the army, border police and settlers are denied, together with the Gaza tragedy, the thousands of political prisoners, the torture... This shows well enough how little Macron cares about the Palestinians' suffering and their demands.

The deliberately falsified use of the notion of anti-Zionism in order to delegitimize the Palestine solidarity movement in general and the BDS France campaign in particular, reducing them to silence, is unworthy of the image Macron wants to give of a "well-read" president.

Even just a dictionary is enough for us to tell the difference between the critique of a political ideology and the regime that applies it, and the anti-Jewish racism that is anti-Semitism. Macron is here following in the footsteps of all those who want to criminalise the struggles fighting for justice in Palestine and for Palestinians' rights.

Sacrificing the Palestinians' rights to imperialist projects for the Middle East was the policy of the great French and British colonial empires. From this point of view, we are on the move [En marche] backwards... That is at least what the near-concomitant invitations of Trump and Netanyahu to France upon two highly symbolic dates [i.e. following Trump's visit to Paris on Bastille Day] would suggest. Are we seeing the emergence of a new alliance that again dons the old habits of the neocons, which we thought had fallen out of fashion? Here we are far

from Macron's pretense of novelty.

Doing something new "the only novelty today" would consist of finally putting national rights into practice, and in particular the rights of the Palestinian people.

Amidst the sombre political context that is taking shape with the advent of Macron, a landscape characterised by the removal of our social rights and our civil liberties, one further freedom is now to be stolen from us. Namely, the freedom to fight against colonialism and support the rights of the Palestinian people. But we will defend this freedom, like all the others they want to take away from us. We will defend it by strengthening our solidarity and thus our support for the call for boycott, divestment, and sanctions against Israel. We will do so until it complies with international law and the universal principles of human rights.

Signatories:

Ahmed Abbes, CNRS research director

Zahra Ali, academic, SOAS

Verveine Angeli, Union Syndicale Solidaires

Mounia Benaili, France insoumise local councilor in Juvisy Sur Orge

Tarek Ben Hiba, FTCT

Annick Coupé, ATTAC France

Sonia Dayan Herzbrun, Sociologist

Christine Delphy, feminist militant and sociologist

Driss El Kerchi, ATMF

Mireille Fanon Mendès France, Fondation Frantz Fanon, expert at the

UN	Boycott légitime' (La Fabrique)	Michèle Sibony, Union Juive Française pour la Paix
Gisèle Felhendler, Sortir du Colonialisme	Madjid Messaoudene, an elected representative in Saint Denis	Eyal Sivan, filmmaker, co-author of 'Un Boycott légitime' (La Fabrique)
Eric Hazan, Editor	Catherine Samary, Economist, Balkans specialist, alter-globalisation militant	Verso
Armelle Laborie, Co-author of 'Un		

U.S. Workers in the Late Neoliberal Era

13 August 2017, by **Kim Moody**

The Pressures, the Changes, the Potential

Since then, however, continued problems of profitability and competition have altered the structure of U.S. capitalism and the working class in ways that could lay the basis for renewed class struggle, as union activists, non-union workers, insurgent immigrants, and urban-based workers caught in low-wage jobs increasingly come face-to-face with deteriorating working and living conditions and with each other in new concentrations of labor on the edges of urban America.

On May 3, just a couple of days after tens of thousands of immigrant workers struck and demonstrated, a few hundred railroad workers rallied at rail yards across the country to demand a fair contract, defend of their medical benefits, and advocate for national single-payer health care. With bargaining stalled for months and the leaders of most of the several unions that represent railroad workers reluctant to act, the 40,000-member Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division of the Teamsters (BMWED) took the initiative to call these rallies on company property at major rail yards. This small, racially diverse union of track workers saw a rank and file reform movement in one of its divisions in the 1990s that still influences what is now a Teamster affiliate. In the 2017 Teamster

elections, its members voted 3-to-2 in favor of Teamsters United, the reform slate that challenged the Hoffa leadership and whose presidential candidate Fred Zuckerman came within a whisker of winning. This anomaly among rail craft unions advocates single-payer health care and endorsed Bernie Sanders in 2016.

There were workers at these rallies from other rail unions as well, including another Teamster affiliate, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, which also voted 3-to-2 for the Teamster reformers. Bringing these various rail union activists together was the rank and file, cross-craft Railroad Workers United (RWU). Founded in 2008, RWU's object is to bring together activists from the 13 unions that represent most of the 150,000 unionized rail workers to fight for unity, solidarity, democracy, and an end to concessions bargaining. RWU is also fighting the introduction of single-worker crews on North America's rail freight carriers—the rail boss's version of lean production. Not surprisingly, some RWU members also belong to Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) now that two rail unions are affiliated with the Teamsters. RWU, the rallies, the campaign for single-payer are examples of contemporary workers' self-activity that falls below the radar of the mass commercial media.

Why start this article with a report on a relatively small event when the nation was rocked by bigger direct actions by striking women on March 8

and striking immigrants on February 16 and May 1? The reason is to look at the potential relationship between the highly visible grass-roots movements among workers and those still below society's radar to see if there is the potential for something even bigger. Unlike the high-profile strikes of women on March 8 and immigrants on February 16 and May 1, which certainly got less press than they deserved, no mainstream media outlet that I am aware of reported the actions of the black, brown, and white men and women rail workers who invaded key points in North America's emerging just-in-time, digitally driven logistics network and even faced police intimidation at one Chicago yard.

There are plenty of other invisible worker movements and actions, but this one illustrates an interface between these unionized rail workers and tens even hundreds of thousands of workers, many of them immigrants, African Americans, and women as well, who work in the logistics networks that link production, transportation, express delivery, service, IT, call centers, e-commerce, and retail workers in today's just-in-time supply networks. Before examining this potential dynamic, we first must take a quick look at the dire state of organized labor.

Counterpoint:Busi

ness-as-usual Unionism

While millions demonstrated against the new president of the United States, and a few of the more democratic and progressive unions endorsed the May 1 event, some top union leaders knelt to kiss the ring. Trump, of course, courted these selected labor leaders. Building trades leaders, some of whom already had dealings with the billionaire real estate developer, were among his early guests, lured by the promise of tens of thousands of jobs in infrastructure projects. Sean McGarvey, head of North America's Building Trades Unions' division of the AFL-CIO, said of the meeting with Trump, "So far so good." Terrance O'Sullivan of the Laborers waxed enthusiastic: "It is finally beginning to feel like a new day for America's working class." Most other top union officials were wary or opposed to most of Trump's policies and proposals, but some, such as UAW President Dennis Williams, were drawn to his promise to rewrite the country's trade deals, notably NAFTA. Williams has gone a step further and proclaimed a new "Buy American" campaign—even though domestic car and truck production has reached an all-time high, in part on the backs of his depleted membership. This latter poisoned apple, we will argue below, ranks high among labor's self-imposed points of vulnerability.

Things have changed in the U.S. labor movement in the last decade or more, to be sure. Yesterday's civil war between the SEIU-led Change to Win federation and the AFL-CIO has cooled. The AFL-CIO has embraced some of "alt-labor" by bringing the New York Taxi Workers Alliance into the federation and giving it a national existence. More generally the AFL-CIO recognized the contribution of workers centers to actual and potential growth. Nurses unions have led a new militancy and progressive politics. Unconventional efforts to organize warehouse workers are underway. And the Sanders campaign shook labor's political routine for a time and gave many workers and local union activists a new vision of the

possible. But overall, the record tells a tale of continued decline and business-as-usual-unionism.

The crisis of organized labor in the United States, is, nevertheless, deep and is likely to get deeper in the face of increased political attacks on both public and private sector workers. Union membership is down again, having dropped another quarter-million members from 2015 to 2016, to 14.6 million members. Public workers have come under vicious attacks with their unions losing more than a half-million members since 2010. The level of official strike activity continues to decline, hitting about 112 work stoppages in 2016—at least as measured by the three government agencies that keep count. Real wages remain below their 1973 levels. Annual wage increases negotiated by unions ran at an average of 2.7 percent in the private sector—saved from further real decline only by the recently collapsing consumer price index. Surveys showed that in 2016, cost-saving changes were imposed in 79 percent of health insurance plans covered by labor contracts and in 24 percent of pension plans. Of course, there have been some wins, such as the strike by 39,000 Communications Workers at Verizon, many of the nurses strikes of the last several years, and the Chicago Teachers 2012 strike.

The economy has not helped. Recovery since the Great Recession of 2008-2009 has been sluggish with growth at less than 1 percent, while employment for private sector production and nonsupervisory workers only reached its 2007 level of 95.7 million by 2014, finally reaching 100 million in 2016. Despite falling unemployment, the reserve army of labor remained large as the labor force participation rate fell from 66.6 percent in 1994 to 63 percent in 2014, and for "prime age" men (25-54), from 84.4 percent to 80.9 percent over those years.

Beyond Lean Production

From the early 1980s to today, the neoliberal era has seen major changes

in the working class, the conditions in which most workers labor, and the very infrastructure of U.S. capitalism. While manufacturing jobs disappeared by the millions over this period, manufacturing output increased, so that by 2010 manufacturing production workers were producing four-times what they had in the 1950s and twice their production of 1983. While imports hit some industries hard, it was the twin forces of four serious recessions and rising productivity that killed most of these jobs. On the other hand, millions of "service" jobs were created as capital's needs for the social reproduction of labor-power and the maintenance of its vastly expanded built environment and transportation arteries called forth armies of low-paid workers—many of them immigrants. Overall, today's working class is far more racially diverse in most occupations than at the dawn of the neoliberal era. Today, about 40 percent of the nearly 30 million workers who produce, transport, move, maintain, or build things are black, Latino, or Asian—well over twice their proportion in 1980. In service-producing occupations it is over 40 percent.

By the 1990s most of these old and new jobs had become reorganized along lean-production lines, measured and intensified by programs such as Six-Sigma, statistical process controls, total quality management, and so on, all enabled by new technology. By the early twenty-first century these techniques had been supplemented or superseded by new electronic and biometric means of worker monitoring and job measurement that now reached beyond the factory to the hospital, warehouse, hotel, supermarket, and beyond. Sixty-seven percent of employers electronically monitor their employees, while one estimate reports that 80 percent of U.S. workers are monitored. Across both service and goods-producing workforces, those in semi- and unskilled work saw their break time reduced from 13 percent of the day in the 1980s to 8 percent in the 2000s, "filling up the pores of the workday," as Marx put it in *Capital*. Taken together, these changes created the greatest work intensification in U.S. history—far surpassing the now

quaint norms of Taylorism.

Service jobs, like those in manufacturing, became more capital-intensive as the nation's capital-labor ratio increased. Unlike those in goods production, concentrations of workers became larger on average in the service sector as the number of workers in workplaces of 500 or more grew from 16.5 million in 1986 to 24.7 million in 2008, and those in places with 1,000 or more increased from 10.7 million to 16.5 million over this period. On top of this, more and more new jobs were low-skilled and low-paid, with the Bureau of Labor Statistics projecting that 70 percent of nonmanagerial and nonprofessional jobs would fall in these categories by 2024. This is a workforce producing "service" commodities in jobs transformed in the image of the modern factory for wages akin to those in agriculture.

The Forging of the Just-in-time Supply Chain Gang

Even more recent has been the emerging "logistics revolution" of the last two decades. The supply chains that have always characterized the flow of goods from produce to producer, producer to retailer and service provider, have been streamlined, digitally tracked and guided on a just-in-time (JIT) basis, and moved by intermodal transportation systems from "node" to "node" along upgraded rail, road, water, and air "corridors" and through high-tech cross-docking warehouses. Time has become the centerpiece of competition. It is an irony that amidst today's crumbling national infrastructure that is the object of so much political opportunism, the nation's five dominant rail freight carriers have spent billions to upgrade cross-continental rail corridors. These improvements are meant to carry double-stacked container platforms of both domestic and foreign-made goods along North America's major "land bridges"—much of the system built and maintained by the members of the BMWED we met above.

Like the JIT rhythms of lean production, these reshaped supply chains set the brutal pace of work throughout the entire process of capital accumulation. They underlie capital's new slimmed-down just-in-time supply chain gangs. But these chains are now famously vulnerable to worker actions and can be broken. Their time-bound nature and the role of delivery speed in competition have increased this vulnerability in the last two decades.

The major "nodes" in this backbone of production and circulation are not only key points of transshipment, but also huge concentrations of workers. If the pressures of today's faster-moving production of goods and services are an incentive to resistance and to some extent the means of effective action, the new concentration of workers in massive "logistics clusters" has provided potential sites for a major rebellion. There are about sixty logistics clusters in the United States, each concentrating thousands of mostly blue-collar or manual workers. By one estimate there are 3.2 million people employed in these clusters, but this leaves out many rail, road, and communications workers and others who service and link the clusters together across the country.

Among the largest are those adjacent to Chicago, with 150,000-200,000 mostly blue-collar workers; Los Angeles and the port of New York-New Jersey, with at least 100,000 each; UPS's "Worldport" in Louisville, employing 55,000; and the FedEx hub at Memphis, directly employing 15,000 with a total of 220,000 in the surrounding cluster. They draw on the vast reserve armies of labor in the cities of which they are extensions. These are the Detroit, Gary, and Pittsburghs of today. These urban centers are the homes to those immigrants who struck twice this year, to the activists in Black Lives Matter, and to tens and even hundreds of thousands of current union members, some of whom, at least, could be mobilized to help organize these new proletarian heartlands—if, that is, the eyes and minds of both union leaders and many members were not so firmly focused on the imagined "others."

It is in these giant concentrations of workers that rail workers, truck drivers, mechanics, IT specialists—mostly white, relatively well-paid, unionized, but also under attack—meet the growing mass of those who move goods into, across, and out of huge factory-like warehouses. These latter workers are mostly Latino and black, about a quarter of them women, all are poorly paid, non-union, and often employed by labor supply agencies. The opportunity to organize hundreds of thousands of workers is obvious. But barriers of race, ethnicity, and immigration status, always present, are if anything more pronounced in the aftermath of Trump's victory. Taking on racism and nationalism will be key to organizing and uniting these different groups of workers. In this respect, the legacy of business-union ideology and practice presents one more barrier to an opportunity that could turn the labor movement around.

The Great Diversion: Imports, Immigrants, and Benign Management in Business-union Ideology

One reason so many workers, union members, and labor officials are drawn to Trump's xenophobic promises to end immigration, imports, and offshoring is that for decades the official union explanation of job losses in manufacturing and elsewhere has centered on imports and offshoring. This focus, of course, has been encouraged by the entire "free trade" ethos of the neoliberal era, with its trade agreements like NAFTA, the now-dead Trans-Pacific Partnership, and the not-yet-dead Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement and its rule-making institutions like the World Trade Organization and the European Union. These are policies and structures that labor should

oppose because they prevent the sort of state intervention that developing nations need to industrialize, develop domestic markets, and increase incomes. At the same time, these trade agreements demand privatization, marketization, reduced government spending, and the undermining of labor rights in the developed economies as well. But much of the rhetoric that comes from labor leaders appeals to base forms of nationalism and anti-foreign sentiment. Yet, while imports and offshoring do take away some jobs, they are not the major cause of lost manufacturing jobs or more recently of slow job creation in the United States and most developed nations. These are functions of capital's profitability problems in an increasingly competitive world.

The systemic instability spawned by globalization, falling profit rates, and neoliberal remedies that brought on the deep recession of the early 1980s, the lesser ones of the early 1990s and 2000s, and the Great Recession of 2008 destroyed millions of manufacturing production jobs. The increased productivity of most of this era, a result of the intensification of work as well as new technology, guaranteed that when production rose again between recessions, few if any new manufacturing jobs were created. The double irony here is that not only did most U.S. union leaders focus almost exclusively on the sometimes imagined (and sometimes real) results of free trade, but they submitted to or even encouraged the concessions and various labor-management cooperation schemes that accompanied lean production and promoted the very productivity increases that were the major cause of job loss and of growing inequality over most of this period. Talk about shooting yourself in the foot—twice.

The legacy of this analysis and practice is not only a misguided focus on imports and a willingness to make concessions in hopes of saving jobs by becoming "competitive," but also a labor nationalism that encourages a dim view of immigrants as the "foreign other" job stealers. "They" steal your jobs when work goes to their countries, and "they" steal them when they come here. Nationalism and

racism, of course, have been there in one degree or another since the birth of the republic, but the official labor focus on things foreign has only strengthened these and legitimized them through the mantra of globalization. Even though most top union leaders no longer take this line on immigration and most unions actually, indeed, necessarily, attempt to recruit immigrant workers, the legacy of "Buy American" is deeply ingrained and only a stone's throw from "Make America Great Again."

Aside from the fact that "Buy American" was a total flop in the 1970s and 1980s in textiles, garment, and auto, its revival by the UAW and possibly others is sure to be a gift to the Xenophobe-in-Chief in the White House. It is also likely to stoke up anti-immigrant sentiment, since "Buy American" is neighbor to "American Jobs for American Workers." Now that U.S. auto workers are producing more cars and trucks than ever, with a much smaller workforce, wouldn't it make more sense to fight the conditions in those auto plants that cost all those jobs in the first place and to organize the non-union suppliers in the Midwest and the "transplants" in the South? Wouldn't internationalism, at home in alliance with immigrant workers who fill supplier plants and abroad with auto workers facing the same conditions, competition, and hostile employers, provide a more durable future?

The twin scams of labor nationalism and labor-management cooperation have worked well for capital, with owners' share of income growing apace over this whole period. It is the enormous increase in capital's share of value added (that is, surplus value) extracted on the job through lean and post-lean methods, more than tax policy or financial (that is, fictitious) capital, that is the source of increased income inequality. As political economist Anwar Shaikh points out in his monumental work *Capitalism*, "the overall degree of income inequality ultimately rests on the ratio of profits to wages, that is, on the basic division of value added." (Shaikh 2016, 55, emphasis original).

One is heartened by an all too rare union leader like Chuck Jones,

president of Steelworkers Local 1999 at the Carrier plant in Indiana where Trump posed as savior. Jones not only questioned Trump's sincerity in this grandstand move to get the state of Indiana to bribe Carrier to save a few hundred of the much larger number of jobs being moved to Mexico. Jones also routinely tells his members that it isn't Mexican workers who are taking their jobs, but greedy corporations like Carrier. What a breath of fresh air from the home state of Gene Debs and, well, Mike Pence.

From Under the Radar into the Sunlight

Like the protesting rail workers we saw above, the conflict and upsurges within today's apparently monolithic and bureaucratic unions receives little media attention. To find out anything about these internal rebellions you have to read *Labor Notes*, *Union Democracy Review*, or some of the left press. Change, however, rumbles below the surface and under the media radar. Most of the grass-roots rebellions in the unions want real democracy, oppose labor-management cooperation, reject concessions in favor of greater militancy, attempt to draw on the increasing racial and gender diversity of many unions, and generally go beyond the norms of business unionism.

Rank and file reform movements sometimes win national power, as in the Postal Workers and Amalgamated Transit Union. Other national reform challenges to incumbent union leaders came close, as in the Teamsters, or made a respectable showing as in the International Association of Machinists, winning a third of the vote. Some, like those in the Machinists, Teamsters, and New York State Public Employees Federation, got a few members on the union executive board.

More typical are rebellions in local unions. Some of these, like in the Chicago Teachers, the New York State Nurses Association, Communications Workers Local 1101, or various Teamster locals, won in large local

unions. In the huge United Federation of Teachers in New York City, the MORE/New Action caucus swept the seven high school seats, as the opposition often has in the past, but couldn't beat the powerfully entrenched Unity Caucus. Most, however, are neither clearly victorious nor visible. But when they are, they can inspire others. The Chicago Teachers Union, for example, has spawned similar movements in teachers unions across the country and even set up a national caucus, the United Caucuses of Rank-and-File Educators (UCORE) with about twenty affiliates. This grass-roots trend is growing, but is still a minority and largely invisible to the public, other union members, and even much of the political left.

Most of these challenges arise from previous efforts to organize against concessions, unresponsive or pro-company leadership, or conditions in the workplace discussed above. The IAM (Machinists) Reform Slate, for example, arose in part from a grass-roots movement called Rosie's Machinists 751. This local movement against concessions and deteriorating conditions has gone national and was important in the 2014 challenge. Sometimes it also goes the other way as well. After reformers took over Communications Workers Local 1101 in New York, they went on to play a key role in the activist nature of the 2016 Verizon strike.

Do these movements or organized labor in general have any relationship with the mass strikes and demonstrations we saw in the spring of 2017? So far, the answer has to be: not much. To be sure some unions, particularly those with reform leaderships, large numbers of immigrant members, or the few with left traditions, endorsed the May 1 Day Without Immigrants. The International Longshore and Warehouse Workers, the Communications Workers, the United Electrical Workers, National Nurses United, American Postal Workers Union, Amalgamated Transit Union, SEIU United Service Workers West, and some local unions endorsed May 1. Of course, many of the May 1 strikers surely were union members. But it was not an action organized by

unions or their leaders.

The highly visible events on February 16 and again on May 1, when tens of thousands of immigrants and their supporters struck and demonstrated in 40 cities across the United States, were possible because of the work of immigrant-worker organizations that are themselves as invisible to the public and other workers as the rank and file rebellions in the unions. Many of these are immigrant-based workers centers such as Make the Road New York and Make the Road Pennsylvania, the Restaurant Opportunities Center, and other immigrants' rights or neighborhood groups. The organization most behind this remarkable strike nationally, however, appears to have been Movimiento Cosecha (Harvest Movement). Itself until recently under the media radar, Cosecha explicitly advocates striking and noncooperation as the only way to make immigrants' rights an issue in the United States. Their statement on this is instructive:

Time and time again our community is asked to vote for the next Deporter-in-Chief, whether Obama or Trump, who will shape immigration policy for the next four to eight years. Each election, we're promised that if we vote for the Democrats, they will give us immigration reform. When their promises go unfulfilled—when Obama deports three million immigrants or when Trump expands his power to deport and terrorize our communities—what do we do? We strike.

But isn't the strike dead? Isn't it the case that strikes associated with collective bargaining have almost disappeared? The Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS), which unlike the Bureau of Labor Statistics attempts to report all strikes associated with contract negotiations, records a mere 112 strikes during fiscal 2016, down year after year. In the first three months of 2017, the FMCS reports only 20 strikes ongoing or ended in these months. To be sure, in a rudimentary search I found a few strikes in early 2017 and more in the last two years that the FMCS missed. Most of these were wildcat, grievance, or unfair labor practice (ULP) strikes. Some workers have turned to ULP or

grievance strikes where permanent replacements can't be deployed.

The fact remains, however, that union leaders and members have shied away from conventional strikes due in part to the threat of replacement workers, the uselessness of most current labor law, and the growing anti-union fervor of capital and its politicians. This, in spite of the fact that a growing number of employers are vulnerable to strike action due to the just-in-time nature of their production or inputs and supplies.

Yet, tens of thousands of mostly working-class people, by holding demonstrations on work days, have turned to the strike weapon to vent their grievances. It's hard to know just how effective this year's immigrant strikes were. Fox News, of all places, reported that on February 16, "thousands were estimated to have abstained from work, school, and other commitments in protest and solidarity." The Atlantic (February 21, 2017) cited bricklayers, shipyard workers, and paint manufacturers who were fired for striking on that day, though most participants did not face retaliation. Bloomberg reported that construction felt the impact, but that it was the restaurant industry that was hardest hit on February 16. The U.S. Senate coffee shop had to close as workers stayed away.

May 1 was much smaller than the 2006 Day Without Immigrants, when construction sites, meatpacking plants, and trucking in Los Angeles's busy ports were shut down. Yet, May 1, 2017 was also called "A Day Without Immigrants" in most cities, meaning withholding their labor. Reports of businesses closed were common. In Reading, Pennsylvania, for example, about three-quarters of that city's businesses were closed. The Huffington Post spoke of people "skipping work" and Philadelphia teachers calling in sick on May 1. It was not only immigrants fighting for the right to stay and work in the United States, but also the women who struck on March 8 for gender equality and against Trump. The Fight for \$15 also called its actions strikes, although some question whether these actions over the last few years really involved many strikes. It has to be

noted, however, that \$15-minimum-wage laws have been passed in a number of cities and states as a result of that effort and of unions picking up the issue.

So far, all these have been limited to one-day actions with necessarily limited impact. Labor historian Nelson Lichtenstein speculated, "We may be entering an era of political strikes, in which unions and other groups set a date and an agenda, but in which lots of unaffiliated people join in. The question is: Can these strikes be given any sort of institutional backbone, any impact other than a one-time event that needs to be recreated from start each time?" In a more optimistic tone, Cosecha has stated, "We will start with one day, but we are going for seven—a week without immigrants." This is a tall order that will be hard to deliver, but it is a goal worth pursuing. All this remains to be seen.

The use of the strike for broad social and political goals, no matter how limited, is something we have not seen in the United States since the May 1, 1886, strike for the eight-hour day by 300,000 or more workers who were themselves mostly immigrants. The significance of this should not be lost or underestimated in understanding the state of the U.S. working class. These previously unrecognized workers and their mostly under-the-radar organizations have reintroduced, if not perfected, the mass political-social strike and brought their struggles into the sunlight that even the self-censored media could not ignore.

Will this inspire more unionized workers to turn to the strike and use the new, often interconnected, vulnerabilities that the reorganized production and circulation of goods and services offer? Will the overlaps of these seemingly different groups of working-class people in the urban

centers and their adjacent "logistics clusters," where millions are concentrated, contribute to another worker upsurge on the scale of the 1960s and 1970s, or even the 1930s? Will working-class struggle in general come out from under the radar into the sunlight, bringing new troops to an embattled labor movement?

Union growth and mass strike movements, the British historian Eric Hobsbawm reminds us, do not come in "a mere rising slope," but from "accumulations of inflammable materials which only ignite periodically, as it were under compression" (1964, 139). This certainly describes the conditions of most working-class people in the United States, indeed, across the world, today. This isn't something to be predicted, but to be sought in practice. To paraphrase the well-known Wobbly, "don't wait, organize!"

[New Politics](#)

USAID in El Salvador: The Politics of Prevention

11 August 2017, by **Hilary Godfriend**

"When I see the concern and the actions of Salvadorans from all sectors of society, who regardless of their political affiliation, are determined to make El Salvador a safe and prosperous country, I feel more motivated and honored to work at USAID/El Salvador," said USAID El Salvador Mission Director Larry Sacks as he was sworn in to the position in 2015. [5]

"Polarization is one of the biggest challenges for El Salvador to overcome," declared outgoing ambassador Mari Carmen Aponte in her final press conference in February 2016. [6]

The State Department's rhetorical work of de-emphasizing political ideology serves a fundamentally

ideological purpose in El Salvador, where politics have long been characterized by radical social movements and robust political parties with dramatically opposing visions.

On the left stands the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), the party of the former armed revolutionary insurgency; on the right, the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) party, which was founded by the architect of the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero. While the FMLN espouses a democratic socialist doctrine, ARENA inaugurates every electoral campaign at the site of the 1932 massacre of anywhere from 10,000-30,000 indigenous and ladino peasants because, as one legislator put it, "this

is where we first stopped the advance of the communist hordes."

After the FMLN finally won the presidential elections in 2009, ARENA's credibility has waned considerably, not least due to the FMLN's unearthing of myriad multi-million dollar embezzlement and corruption schemes from previous ARENA administrations. [7]

Precisely when the left had consolidated political-electoral power, the Salvadoran right and its historic allies in the U.S. government began to advance a discourse that portrays ideological struggle and partisan politics as passé, even backwards.

The cynicism of this alleged nonpartisanship is rendered all the

more evident by the State Department's ongoing support for actors with direct ties to the Salvadoran political opposition. When it comes to development aid, these alliances with the ultra-conservative economic elite don't just have political consequences; they have consequences in the critical life-or-death realm of public security in El Salvador.

Following the so-called "Central American child migrant crisis" at the U.S.-Mexico border in 2014 and a surge in gang-related homicides in El Salvador in 2015, a large proportion of USAID assistance to El Salvador was oriented toward "violence prevention" and ostensibly supporting the FMLN government's security strategies.

In 2016, the Agency spent a total of \$60 million in El Salvador, with the category of "Conflict prevention and resolution, peace and security" receiving the largest portion of funding (over \$16 million). Of these funds, \$10.5 million were oriented specifically towards crime and violence prevention projects. [8]

On April 24th, Foreign Policy reported that a leaked State Department 2018 budget proposal would "end foreign aid as we know it," merging USAID into the State Department and essentially eliminating foreign development assistance worldwide. [9]

Agency officials reacted with alarm: "What you're basically doing is eviscerating the most important tool of American influence in the developing world, which is our development program," Andrew Natsios, former USAID Administrator under George W. Bush, told the magazine. "I don't think they understand what the role of USAID is, what USAID's mission directors are. USAID's mission directors are among the most influential foreigners in the country."

Natsios' frantic remarks are revealing: He essentially admits that USAID's mission has nothing to do with development, but rather political intervention on behalf of U.S. interests abroad. This is no great secret, but it is a fact that most Agency officials in

the field would be reluctant to advertize.

The Trump administration's final FY2018 budget request is indeed dramatic. USAID's Caribbean development program and South America regional program would be eliminated. Compared with 2016, the Central America regional program would be slashed by 75% and the Latin America and Caribbean regional program reduced by 62%. El Salvador, in particular, would receive 32% less foreign assistance. [10]

The proposed cuts have doubtless sparked a panic within the State Department. But they also offer an opportunity to reckon with the purpose and consequences of US foreign aid.

USAID's violence prevention activities in El Salvador are particularly instructive. A closer look into the Agency's strategies reveals that these U.S. initiatives are short-sighted and ineffectual at best, and at worst undermining the FMLN government's efforts to address the roots of social violence, to the political benefit of the opposition and the detriment of the most vulnerable Salvadorans.

Confronting Roots of Violence

El Salvador is no longer the murder capital of the world, but it held that ignoble title for several long months in 2015 and 2016. For the first time since the failure of a brief and controversial truce established between the two principal gangs "MS-13 and 18th Street" and the government in 2013, murder rates are on the decline. [11]

In comparison with figures from the same period in 2016, homicides today are down by over 50%, and extortions have fallen 27%. As the beleaguered population breathes a tentative sigh of relief, officials with the second FMLN administration (2014-2019) point to the success of a comprehensive security plan combining enhanced law enforcement and community violence prevention strategies. [12]

"The decrease in homicides is evidence that the plan is working. But it is also evidence that prevention is one of the best strategies to achieve that," says 28-year-old Leonardo Fuentes.

Fuentes has a strong background in community organizing. He was organized in the National University's radical student movement during his college days and grew up working with FMLN base committees in his neighborhood in the working-class San Salvador suburb of Apopa. Today, he joins the ranks of many young FMLN supporters who have been recruited into the state machinery following the party's 2009 and 2014 electoral victories, working to provide young Salvadorans with alternatives to crime and migration.

Violence, of course, is much more than homicides; the obsession with murder rates that dominates public discourse on violence in El Salvador renders invisible the gender violence, anti-LGBTQ violence and structural violence that has historically marginalized communities and perpetuated inequalities.

Furthermore, homicide numbers are a poor measure of gang violence itself, which principally impacts the population not through killings but rather through extortion, mainly of small and informal businesses. This conflation of violence with murder rates reflects or perhaps contributes directly to the impulse to respond with more violence, a tendency that Fuentes and his colleagues are working to counter.

Violence has been a tragic, defining trait of Salvadoran history for at least the past century, as has courageous collective resistance to injustice. In 1932, a campesino uprising coordinated with the Communist Party against the landed elites and their military protectors was met with astonishing force, becoming perhaps the most singularly traumatic event since the conquest and known simply as "La matanza" or "the slaughter."

But the repression could not quell the popular demands for land, democracy and dignity in the face of the semi-feudal conditions under which the vast

majority of the population labored in abject poverty. Peaceful movements for reform and basic rights in the 1960s and '70s were met with escalating brutality by the military regime, leading eventually to a 12-year civil war between the U.S.-backed dictatorship and a leftist guerilla insurgency.

After UN-brokered peace talks put an end to the conflict in 1992, it was estimated that 75,000 people had been killed and tens of thousands more disappeared; over 85% of the violence was attributed to the regime.

The period of peace, however, brought little respite from violence. The 1990s saw the implementation of sweeping neoliberal "reforms" under four consecutive terms of ARENA party rule, and with them the ideological framework that sustains such governance. As Ellen Moodie has expertly chronicled, violence was discursively transformed from political to social, from collective to individual.

Moodie writes, "Parsing violent incidents as individual acts, as unconnected to social relations or political conditions, could help rupture the old revolutionary and solidarity social imaginaries [This] helped to install the architecture of El Salvador's postwar transition, from an epoch characterized by fear of state and paramilitary and insurgent terror, as well as collective resistance, toward an era of market democracy structured around life as a series of channeled choices " around private responsibility for the management of risk." [13]

Homicides, even assassinations, and the emerging youth gangs all became part of a new, demobilized, depoliticized postwar framework. Unresolved traumas of the war along with the devastated neoliberal economic landscape proved fertile terrain for the U.S. gang culture imported by Salvadoran youth deported from Los Angeles in the mid-1990s.

Prevention vs.

Repression

"The gang problem has structural causes," Fuentes tells me. "I lived part of my youth and adolescence during those twenty years [of ARENA rule]. I'm from a community that generates a lot of violence, I went to school in those places where there was a lot of violence For us, the poor, crime is always going to be an option, because you have to eat, you have to be able to clothe yourself. So in the end we can't stigmatize the young people for deciding [to turn to crime], because it is the fault of government policies that we have fallen into this."

The ARENA governments met the incipient crisis predictably: with repression. The party's "iron fist" policies played well in campaigns, but only further radicalized the gang structures.

"The crime fighting was more violent than the crime itself," Fuentes remembers. "I was maybe ten or twelve years old when those plans were being implemented, and every day we'd watch the news and see the police come into some community and do searches.

"They'd take the young men out violently and in front of their families and their children. So, what happened was that children no longer saw the police officer as someone who would keep them safe, but rather as someone who took their dad away or who was violent with their mother. So that cycle of violence got deeper."

Since taking power, the FMLN government has sought to implement a dual strategy of scaled-up law enforcement control on the one hand and long-term, comprehensive strategies to address the root causes of gang violence on the other. They have taken measures to crack down on prison security and expanded the presence of security forces across the national territory, including the controversial use of the Armed Forces in police patrols.

At the same time, the leftist party has overseen unprecedented increases in social spending, including critical education, health care, land,

infrastructure and agricultural investment. These programs aim to strengthen the deteriorated fabric of Salvadoran society and to rebuild the social safety net that, to the extent it ever existed, was decimated by decades of divestment, privatization and deregulation. [14]

In 2014, President Salvador Sánchez Cerén convened a Citizen Security and Coexistence Council, bringing together stakeholders from across the political, governmental, religious and civil society spectrum to forge a consensus on a national security strategy. International agencies, including USAID, also participated in the process.

The plan produced by the Council, "Plan El Salvador Seguro," (Secure El Salvador Plan, or SESP) was adopted as national policy and focuses the majority of its proposals on violence prevention, rehabilitation, and care for victims, along with some oriented towards improving law enforcement. [15]

Last year the president created a new government entity, the Vice Ministry of Social Prevention, to help coordinate these efforts. "This is the first time in history that it's not just the police, the army and the attorney general's office involved in security but rather all of the institutions of the state, not understanding security as just a question of crime," emphasizes Fuentes.

As part of the Plan, Fuentes coordinates a program called "ActÁvate" or "Activate Yourself," run by the executive's Cultural SecÁreÁtariat in conjunction with the National Sports InstiÁtute and the National Youth InstiÁtute. ActÁvate helps organize arts and recreational activities for young people in at-risk communities, from community filmmaking and historical memory projects to athletic tournaments and music classes.

"Our interventions as the Cultural Secretariat depend on the realities of the prioritized municipalities and communities," he explains, "we don't have a vertical line that says, "This is what we will bring them," instead it's a whole consultation process with

the people.”

The ActÃvate program is part of a roundtable on the recuperation of public spaces within the Citizen’s Security Council. Other roundtables are dedicated to expanding extracurricular activities in public schools, providing services and care for victims of crime, and creating economic opportunities in vulnerable communities, with a single roundtable dedicated to law enforcement.

But while prevention is now the policy priority on paper, repression still gets prioritized in practice. The SESP is financed by a special tax on telecommunications, and the budgeting of the funds from the tax requires Legislative Assembly authorization every three months.

“The majority of representatives in the Assembly are right-wing, and a large part of those representatives came out of the military dictatorships or are [former] military members, so their vision of security is always about confrontation and repression,” Fuentes explains.

“That’s why the funds that go towards prevention are always up in the air. We’re always wondering whether we’re going to have funding in the next three months, because it always gets debated, and the debate has always been that 90% of the funds that come in through the tax should go to repression and the leftovers can go to prevention.”

The escalated policing strategies have provoked concern from human rights advocates over abuses of authority and, most disturbingly, cases of death or disappearance at the hands of the authorities. “Human rights violations should not be permitted from any perspective,” Fuentes insists, but the struggle to reform such inherently repressive institutions has proven difficult.

He and his colleagues routinely denounce abuses to their superiors, and urge the communities they work with to report violations, but most people fear reprisals. Fuentes himself has suffered his share of discrimination by the authorities: “Many of those cops were part of the

implementation of the Iron Fist Law, and they still have those vices.

“I remember that they had a slogan during the Iron Fist that was something about how if you were wearing shorts and had an ear pierced you were a gang member. Imagine that level of stigmatization! Even though I wear shorts most of the time and I have an earring, but I’m not a criminal. And the police and the army have abused me because of it.”

The obstacles and opposition to implementing comprehensive, long-term violence prevention are considerable. On top of the internal challenges within the security forces and the right’s obstructionism in the legislature, the conservative Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court has blocked key sources of revenue for security programming, including successive progressive tax reforms and \$100 million in loans for public security and violence prevention. [16](

“The Constitutional Chamber is engaging in partisan activism, and that’s clear. They are making decisions that impact the people as well as the government, they are doing electoral work [for the Right],” says Fuentes.

Currently, the Chamber is reviewing a suit against the special tax that finances the SESP. “We are worried that the Chamber could declare it unconstitutional tomorrow,” Fuentes admits. “Then what would happen with all these projects that have been so difficult to initiate? How would we continue them? This plan only survives because of that contribution.”

The right’s civil society arms, principally embodied by the National Association of Private Enterprise (ANEP) and the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic Development (FUSADES), a right-wing think tank that was actually co-founded by USAID in 1983, [17] are leading the opposition to the SESP. Salvador Enrique Anaya, the lawyer who filed the suit against the special tax for the SESP, has a close relationship with both organizations.

ANEP, despite its early participation

in the Citizen Security Council, responded to the unveiling of SESP by hiring none other than Rudy Giuliani to draft a counter-proposal. [23] a regional department store chain owned by one of El Salvador’s oldest oligarchic families and principal donors to ARENA. [24]

When it comes to violence prevention projects, the dynamic is no different. Despite USAID’s claim to be supporting the Salvadoran government’s security strategy, the Agency is channeling nearly all its violence prevention assistance through the very corporations and organizations that are boycotting the SESP.

One of USAID’s centerpiece violence prevention initiatives is called SolcionES. [25] The program is run by the Business Foundation for Educational Development (FEPADE), whose founding members [26] include nearly every major Salvadoran corporation along with the foundations of the oligarchic Simán, Poma and DueÃ±as families â€” a veritable who’s who of ARENA financiers.

FUSADES is another principal partner of the five-year, \$44 million project, \$20 million of which is provided by USAID, with private sector donors providing the rest. According to USAID, SolucionES “promotes corporate social investment to have a greater impact on crime and violence prevention at the municipal level,” offering activities such as sports clubs, job training and youth leadership programs, all independent from and parallel to similar existing government initiatives.

“SolucionES is like another mini Secure El Salvador Plan,” Fuentes tells me. He pauses, searching for a diplomatic phrasing: “There are a variety of strategies, but I believe that everything should revolve around the central government’s leadership. If these other strategies aren’t aligned with that leadership or in coordination with that leadership, what can often happen is that they work against it, or also they appear to have partisan, political-electoral motives.”

In the highly politicized Salvadoran context, USAID’s alliance with leading

opposition actors like FUSADES amounts to a partisan endorsement.

The other flagship USAID violence prevention project involves the installation of youth community centers outfitted with recreational items like videogames or exercise equipment. The program got off to a rocky start with the bewilderingly poor translation of what was presumably meant to signify “Outreach Center” as “Centro de Alcance,” which literally means something like “reach center” or, generously, “achievement center.”

The management of this project is contracted to the U.S.-based firm Creative Associates International. Creative Associates gained infamy in 2014 when its covert social media project in Cuba [27] was revealed to be an attempt to galvanize dissidence. In Honduras, Afghanistan, Yemen and Libya, USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) has contracted the company to prop up unstable regimes in the wake of U.S. intervention — essentially counter-insurgency work. [28]

Creative Associates International in El Salvador has a five-year, \$24 million project with USAID which includes the establishment of youth outreach centers as well as observatories to collect municipal crime data across a target 55 municipalities in total. [29]

Like SolucionES, the Outreach Centers promote a decidedly neoliberal discourse of personal responsibility and individual initiative that obscures material systems of power and oppression. One local partner in the project is the Dutriz Group, which owns one of the country’s most reactionary right-wing newspapers, La Prensa Gráfica. The company promotes USAID programs in the periodical’s pages and finances workshops with at-risk youth.

According to the newspaper’s own reporting on the workshops, “risk factors [for gang involvement] include lack of identity among young people, low self-esteem, bad company and the absence, in some cases, of dreams or life plans Part of the hypothesis is that by acquiring life dreams and hope in the future, young people will be

more resistant in the face of negative life options and can consider better options.” For the United States and its partners, it appears, security is a matter of attitude. [30]

USAID claims to have adapted its implementation strategy for violence prevention projects to the municipalities identified as priority for the SESP, but the realities on the ground are not so neat.

Fuentes offers an example: “The Secure El Salvador Plan has prioritized San Vicente and USAID has prioritized San Vicente, and we coordinate; and the Secure El Salvador plan has prioritized the canton Achichilco in San Vicente, and USAID also has the Achichilco canton. But, for example, there are municipalities where we don’t have the same prioritizations. Or more commonly, there are communities that are not prioritized by the Secure El Salvador Plan but are for USAID, and vice versa.”

Fuentes tempers his exasperation tactfully, saying, “Personally, I think that foreign aid should have better communication with the government, because if not, efforts are duplicated.” But Fuentes’ frustration with the outreach centers goes beyond their territorial distribution. The SESP seeks to address structural issues of social violence through community organizing, cooperative economic initiatives and committing state institutions to serving historically marginalized communities. The programs run by USAID and their elite donors, in contrast, have shallow roots in the communities they claim to serve.

“I think the difference between the strategy that USAID is using and that of the Secure El Salvador Plan is that the Secure El Salvador Plan has been consulted across sectors, and it has been able to avoid assistencialism” [programs that position the participants as passive recipients of aid], Fuentes tells me. “In contrast, I feel like the outreach centers still have a lot of that.”

“Remember that ANEP and all these organizations, being organizations that defend economic interests, have

money to throw at this kind of strategy,” says Fuentes. “Since the population in this country is used to assistencialism, and our people are very grateful, if you bring three videogames to a group of kids, they’ll be really happy. But what happens when those games get ruined? Or how to you make it sustainable?”

Fuentes and his colleagues in the SESP work to help communities organize themselves and develop projects collectively. This process yields rewarding results, but requires a much more challenging process of bringing distrustful populations together to identify needs and build leadership. For Fuentes, USAID’s alternate vision and methods create an unhealthy dynamic of opposition between the U.S.-led programs and those directed by the Salvadoran government.

“When you arrive in a community and you say that you’re part of the Secure El Salvador Plan, the first thing that the community does is distance itself, but if you go in as SolucionES or USAID and you bring ten soccer balls with you, people will approach you,” he complains, “But as an institution, you have no guarantee what they’ll use them for or how much it is actually favoring violence prevention and the community’s security.”

Politics over Prevention

The violence and terror generated by street gangs and organized crime in El Salvador has concrete, devastating impacts in the lives of working Salvadorans, including forcing many to risk a dangerous journey to join family members in the United States. This crisis has structural origins that can only be addressed by the dramatic transformation of a militarized, neoliberal state at the service of domestic and international capital into a democratic welfare state capable of facilitating an equitable redistribution of wealth and providing for all Salvadorans.

Together with basic social programs, crucial infrastructure investments and measures to make governance more

transparent and participatory, the Secure El Salvador Plan is a key part of the FMLN's modest efforts to begin this transformation. While advocates raise serious concerns about the government's law enforcement crackdown, the SESP's focus on prevention program marks a truly unprecedented turn towards addressing the roots of El Salvador's security crisis.

But with FMLN governance under a full-frontal assault from the reactionary economic elites and their servants in the legislature, courts, and

the commercial media, the U.S. government has thrown its lot in with the FMLN's adversaries, providing glowing publicity and funding for the corporations and foundations that are engaged in a bitter war with the administration.

In communities across the country, USAID's logo is emblazoned on banners and murals alongside those of the organizations that represent the recalcitrant Salvadoran oligarchy, bolstering their images as credible, benevolent seekers of development

and prosperity as the FMLN struggles to advance a competing vision of solidarity and equity.

While the SESP fights to stay afloat, USAID has partnered with the leaders of the opposition to promote competing initiatives. These projects provide excellent photo opportunities for the Ambassador and her corporate allies. The critical long-term needs of besieged, marginalized Salvadoran communities, however, fade into the background.

[Against the Current](#)

The last time the US launched 'fire and fury' on North Korea, a third of the population died

10 August 2017, by **Phil Hearse**

As the Guardian says:

"But despite two unpredictable nuclear-armed leaders trading barbs, most observers believe the possibility of conflict remains remote, with the North Korean leadership using its nuclear program as a bargaining chip rather than an offensive weapon." [31]

But the unpredictability of two megalomaniac leaders is just the point. Trump's threat of 'fire and fury like the world has never seen' appears to be a radically different approach to that of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who just a few days ago was telling Kim Jong-un and the North Korean leadership that the US did not seek regime change and "we are not your enemy".

But Trump's interests are not exactly the same as the whole US capitalist class, or even of the majority of right wing Republicans who control Congress. Trump has seen an unprecedented fall in his approval ratings down to around 30% since taking office and it was absolutely predictable that he would try to use

the military card to shore up his base.

US presidents may be sometimes stymied on the home front by Congress, but as 'commander in chief' they have wide-ranging powers to launch wars, declared or otherwise. And domestic critics in the US largely fall into line when the military are involved. As Phil Ochs said in his song Love Me I'm a Liberal, "When it comes to times like Korea, there's no one more red white and blue".

Kim Jong-un's nuclear sabre rattling seems irrational, indeed lunatic, but that too has a domestic rationale. In the past brinkmanship has led to deals which got North Korea huge amounts of (largely unpublicised) economic aid, for example the 1994 deal between Bill Clinton and Kim Jong-il, the present leader's father.

But even in a brutal dictatorship, the ideological mobilisation of the population matters. Sheer terror and a permanent state of emergency in relations with South Korea and the US, are what whip North Koreans into line.

The danger of course is that the two main forces in play are commanded by unpredictable megalomaniacs. Calculations of rational state interests don't necessarily win out when such people call the shots. The war danger is very real.

For the people of North Korea, warnings from their leadership about the United States seem all too real. During the Korean war (1950-53) the whole of the North was bombed flat and according to some estimates a third of its population died.

A Washington Post journalist Blaine Harden explains that although much of the propaganda of today's North Korean regime is preposterous and idiotic, the hatred of America is often genuine and based on memories of the Korean war:

"The hate, though, is not all manufactured. It is rooted in a fact-based narrative, one that North Korea obsessively remembers and the United States blithely forgets.

"The story dates to the early 1950s,

when the U.S. Air Force, in response to the North Korean invasion that started the Korean War, bombed and napalmed cities, towns and villages across the North. It was mostly easy pickings for the Air Force, whose B-29s faced little or no opposition on many missions.

"The bombing was long, leisurely and merciless, even by the assessment of America's own leaders. Air Force Gen. Curtis LeMay, head of the Strategic Air Command during the Korean War, told the Office of Air Force History in 1984 that "Over a period of three years or so, we killed off what 20 percent of the population'.

Dean Rusk, a supporter of the war and later secretary of state, said the United States bombed "everything that moved in North Korea, every brick standing on top of another." After running low on urban targets, U.S. bombers destroyed hydroelectric and irrigation dams in the later stages of the war, flooding farmland and destroying crops.

"Although the ferocity of the bombing was criticized as racist and unjustified elsewhere in the world, it was never a big story back home. U.S. press coverage of the air war focused, instead, on "MiG alley," a narrow patch of North Korea near the Chinese border. There, in the world's first jet-powered aerial war, American fighter pilots competed against each other to shoot down five or more Soviet-made fighters and become "aces." War reporters rarely mentioned civilian casualties from U.S. carpet-bombing. It is perhaps the most forgotten part of a forgotten war." [32]

Curtis LeMay's casual estimate of 20% of the population killed by US bombing doesn't account for all deaths among the North Korean civilian population, as the fighting flowed back and forth along the peninsula. According to Brian Wilson:

"It is now believed that the population north of the imposed 38th Parallel lost nearly a third its population of 8 - 9 million people during the 37-month long "hot" war, 1950 - 1953, perhaps an unprecedented percentage of mortality suffered by one nation due to the belligerence of another." [33]

A Daily Telegraph journalist has exposed the massacre of civilians in South Korea during the war, especially those with left wing sympathies.

"Authorities in the country have discovered mass burial sites containing thousands of bodies, including scores of children. Trawls of records including declassified files in Washington have uncovered evidence of the massacres of at least 100,000 people suspected of having sympathy with the North Koreans.

"In some cases, American forces are alleged to have been present and in at least one case an American officer authorised a massacre of prisoners believed to have left-wing sympathies....

A major massacre of civilians took place on Wolmi Island, adjacent to Incheon where American troops landed in September 1950. According to Choe Sang-hun, "When American troops stormed this island more than half a century ago, it was a hive of Communist trenches and pillboxes. Now it is a park where children play and retirees stroll along a tree-shaded esplanade.

"But inside a ragged tent at the entrance of the park, some aging South Koreans gather daily to draw attention to their side of the conflict, a story of carnage not mentioned in South Korea's official histories or textbooks.

"When the napalm hit our village, many people were still sleeping in their homes," said Lee Beom-ki, 76. "Those who survived the flames ran to the tidal flats. We were trying to show the American pilots that we were civilians. But they strafed us, women and children." [34]

Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos

It would take a book to detail all the civilian deaths during the Vietnam war in the 1960s and '70s, which involved aerial bombardment on an unprecedented scale, in South

Vietnam, against North Vietnam and in Cambodia and Laos.

Several million people died in Vietnam, the majority civilians who died at the hands of US and South Vietnamese forces. But the US extended its air war into Cambodia and Laos, which had their own Communist insurgencies and where sections of the Ho Chi Minh trail, which routed aid from North Vietnam to fighters in South Vietnam, were located.

No one really know the human cost of the bombing campaign in Cambodia, but 500,000 is among the lower estimates. However the bombing of Laos, much less known by the public, was even more devastating.

From 1964 to 1973, the U.S. dropped more than two million tons of bombs on Laos during an astonishing 580,000 bombing missions - equal to a planeload of bombs every 8 minutes, 24-hours a day, for 9 years - making Laos the most heavily bombed country per capita in history. No one knows how many people died there, but it must be in the hundreds of thousands. Since the war more than 20,000 people have been killed or injured by the mass of unexploded cluster bombs that litter the countryside.

And after 9/11...

The mass slaughter of innocents by US air power continues to this day. Unknown thousands have been killed by the profligate use of airborne mass violence in Iraq and Syria, the latter of course joined by Syrian and Russian air power. Even in recent weeks the cruel bombardment by US planes of civilians in the Isis last strongholds in Mosul - including with white phosphorous, banned under in international law - has cost many hundreds of lives.

Donald Trump's threat of using "fire and fury the like of which the world has never seen" can't be literally true, unless he was actually threatening the use of nuclear weapons. The world has seen plenty of aerial destruction, mainly by the US military, including the nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The

consequences of attempting any sort of attack on North Korea are likely to be disastrous for people throughout

the peninsula and beyond. Threatening war with Pyongyang

makes it more likely. The world has not been closer to nuclear war since the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

“Successful Convention Moves DSA to Left”

9 August 2017, by **Dan La Botz**

Most were new members who had joined in the last year either came out of the Bernie Sanders campaign or joined in reaction to the frightening prospect of the Donald Trump presidency. The convention cohered the hundreds of new members into a national organization in what was virtually a re-founding of the DSA. It gave them the experience of beginning to run their own organization, and the delegates adopted constitutional changes and policy resolutions that moved the organization to the left.

DSA was founded in 1982 by the merger of Old Left activists from the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) led by Michael Harrington and by New Left activists of the 1970s who had created the New American Movement (NAM). Inspired by Harrington’s notion (called the “realignment strategy”) that it would be possible to reform the Democratic Party by driving out both the big city political machines and the South’s white racist Democratic Party politicians, from the 1970s to the 2000s DSOC and DSA were oriented toward the progressive labor union officialdom, the leadership of the civil rights movement, and the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. DSA was affiliated with the Socialist International and identified with the Scandinavian Social Democratic parties that had successfully constructed welfare states with impressive programs of health, education, and housing. By the 1990s it was clear that Harrington’s strategy had failed and without a clear alternative perspective, a smaller, weaker DSA stumbled into the twenty-first century.

A New DSA

The Bernie Sanders campaign with its call for a “political revolution” and a fight against the “billionaire class” and especially Sanders definition of himself as a “democratic socialist” created a tremendous political upsurge, especially among the youth, and revived the DSA. Longtime DSA leaders, the organization’s small staff, and the leaders of DSA’s youth group, the Young Democratic Socialist (who renamed themselves the Young Democratic Socialists of America at the convention), seized the opportunity and recruited thousands out of the Sanders movement. When Trump won the presidential election and took office in January, thousands more joined. It is these mostly young activists who made up the delegates to the convention—one out of five a person of color, two out of five women—determined to make themselves into socialists and to make DSA their own. Naturally in such an organization the levels of movement involvement, of socialist education, and of political experience were highly uneven, but the convention thanks to its “Socialism 101” style workshops went a long way in providing a common basis for what is virtually a new organization.

A Move to the Left

Like most conventions, DSA’s had plenary sessions with featured speakers, educational workshops, and opportunities to caucus, but the members demanded more time to discuss and debate the resolutions. With so many members new to both

left politics and parliamentary procedure, at times the meeting was tedious, frustrating, even aggravating, but under the guidance of an experienced chairs who combined patience with firmness, it was a tremendous learning experience for the group. Through the long hours of debate with points of information and myriad motions, in the end the convention adopted a national priorities document that made the fight for a single-payer health care program a national objective.

The convention also voted to adopt several constitutional amendments and resolutions that moved the organization significantly to the left. The delegates:

- Voted to leave the Socialist International (SI), based on arguments that the European Social Democrats had become the enforcers of neoliberalism and austerity, that the other member parties around the world included many authoritarian governments, and, finally, that the SI was disintegrating.

- Voted to support Boycott, Divest, Sanctions movement and to oppose efforts to criminalize it.

- Voted to establish a People of Color Caucus.

- Voted to establish a Labor Commission.

- Voted to establish a forum for political debate within the organization.

The Democratic Party and Labor

DSA members by and large oppose both Trump and the neoliberal

Democrats. As I argued before the convention, [I viewed the progressive wing of the Democratic Party as the central issue](#). Two different motionsâ€”I was involved with bothâ€”attempted to get DSA to adopt a more critical attitude toward the Democratic Party and especially toward the progressive Democrats in groups such as Indivisible, MoveOn.org, and Our Revolution. The motion failed, but received about two-fifths of the vote, another sign of the growing radicalization of the DSA membership. A third resolution that called for DSA to begin to transform itself into a political party was tabled on the grounds that there were legal questions about running candidates. And, finally, a motion to draft Bernie Sanders for a Peoples Party also went down to defeat by an overwhelming vote.

DSA labor activists had pushed for the creation of the labor commission. That Commission begins with 350 labor union members, while according to one of its organizers there are in DSA some 1,440 rank-and-file union members, or about 6 percent of the total membership, based on an extrapolation from a survey of 5,000 members. There was one labor gathering during the convention as about twenty teachers met to discuss rank-and-file labor perspectives.

The convention agenda, determined by earlier surveys of the members and delegates, recommendations from the convention committee, and by the delegates themselves was focused on health care and politics, and as was pointed out by delegates during the last session, did not include the [critical issue of climate change](#). And, as one activist pointed out, there was not one motion on LGBT issues. DSA members, of course, are [involved](#) in both of [those issues](#) already and will no doubt continue to bring up them up at the chapter level as well as making demands on the new National Political Committee (NPC) in the future.

When at one point the chair moved an

untimely disability resolution out of order, a small, short protest by a group of disabled members chanting “Nothing about us without us,” led to a motion to overturn to chair, another to suspend the rules, and then to the adoption of a resolution to add disability language acceptable to the disability caucus to the priorities resolution.

There were also moments of tremendous enthusiasm. Not only did DSA break with the Socialist International, but it made symbolic moves to identify itself with the broad left parties of the left in Europe and Latin America. At the banquet held on Saturday night DSA delegates cheered wildly the spokespersons from the Party of Socialism and Liberation (PSOL) of Brazil, of France Insoumise, of Podemos of Spain, the Left Bloc (BE) of Portugal, and the British Labour Party. The Labour Party spokesperson could hardly speak over the riotous singing of “O Jeremy Corbyn.”

Election of a New Leadership

There were 42 candidates for DSA’s 16-member National Political Committee. The DSA Constitution specifies that, “Of the elected members, at least eight shall be women and at least four shall be racial or national minority members of DSA.” (A motion to expand the committee to 24 failed on Friday.)

Throughout most of its history DSA has had no history of caucuses, but this convention was different. Going into the convention there was a statement titled “Unity and Diversity” signed by a number of DSA members, which if not exactly a caucus represented an attempt by some longtime members to join with younger members around a reaffirmation of DSA’s “big tent” conception. A group of young DSA membersâ€”several of whom had been

friends in YDS a few years backâ€”created the left leaning Momentum slate which emphasized a rank-and-file labor perspective and the Medicare for All campaign. There was also a Praxis slate, which promoted NGO-style training, combined with an emphasis on localism. Most of the candidates ran as individuals, some with little or no political platform. I ran as an advocate of a more critical attitude toward the progressive Democrats, which I had argued was the central issue facing DSA.

In the end, the convention elected six Momentum delegates and another independent close to Momentum, five Praxis delegates, and four DSA members from the old leadership team. I was not among those elected. (The election [results](#) can be found here where the winning candidates names are given in bold face.)

The new leadership team will head the largest socialist organization in the United States since the Communist Party of the 1940s and the Socialist Party of the early 1900s. The challenges are many, above all the Trump administration and the neoliberal Democrats, but the opportunities are also great. Future developmentsâ€”the 2018 elections, a possible economic downturn, a turn to a more authoritarian governmentâ€”will test DSA. If it can meet the challenges, DSA will lay the foundations for the first really mass socialist party in twenty-first century America.

The convention ended with the singing of the “Internationale.” I was delighted to be one of those leading the singing of the workers’ anthem. The Portuguese Left Bloc comrade turned to me and said, “It’s just so exciting, you are teaching them the Internationale!” And we both knew that she meant, we are helping a new generation of socialists in America to come to come into its own.

August 8, 2017

[New Politics](#)

Podemos-PSOE agreement: a historic error!

8 August 2017, by **Isidro López** , **Raul Camargo**

CLM is the third biggest autonomous community in the Spanish state. It is very rural, with a population slightly above 2 million. Faced with an inability to get their budget passed, the PSOE, on July 13, 2017, invited Podemos to enter the government, offering two posts, including that of vice-president.

From July 21-24, Podemos CLM conducted an electronic vote for its 15,000 supporters in CLM., with a single question on two subjects, the adoption of the budget and entry into government. Some Podemos supporters in CLM, including the Toledo circle, criticised the voting procedure on the grounds that there had been no time for debate, the information had been insufficient and that there should have been two separate questions on the adoption of the budget and participation in the regional government. The result of the plebiscite was 3,562 (77.98%) votes for Yes and 1,006 (22.02%) for No.}

We have seen in the last week a profound turn by the Podemos political leadership, towards a dynamic of governmental agreements with the PSOE, of which the entry into the government of Castilla-La Mancha provides the first experimental test. The PSOE in Castilla-La Mancha is perfectly similar to the clientelist parties which have controlled the state apparatuses of Andalusia and Extremadura for decades.

Beyond this concrete case, the meetings held on July 17th in the legislature between the two leaderships seem to seal the new political line, to the extent that this meeting has been characterised as “prefiguring an alternative government”. The re-invention of PSOE leader Pedro Sánchez as a figure of the left opposed to the PSOE apparatus smacks of a manoeuvre of political marketing. It provides no solid bases for abandoning the

interpretation maintained over the last period on the nature of the PSOE.

We don't know if one day another PSOE will exist (of course, the more this party receives the institutional oxygen to conserve its current structures and modes of functioning, the less this is possible). What is clear to us on the other hand is precisely what this political formation represents today. The PSOE is not exactly a political party, it is more an appendage of the state, and not just any state, but the model of political organisation of the Spanish social formation that we characterize as the regime of 1978.

The PSOE resembles more a ministry than a political organisation of “transformation”. A policy of generalised agreements of government, with a relationship of forces favourable to the PSOE, thus means accepting to be transformed into the left wing of the regeneration of the regime, and to shore up the very elements where the political crisis manifested itself in May 2011.

It is perhaps necessary to recall that the PSOE is the party of permanent disillusion. The historic disappointments are so numerous that recounting them in detail would require an entire book. It should be enough to recall that the initial event of the current political cycle, the mobilisations on May 15, 2011, emerged following the indignation provoked by the “socialist” government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero.

Until then, the captive vote for the PSOE was informed by the bipartisan logic of the PP versus PSOE binary. That is, logic dictated that in the absence of other electoral choices, any reaction against a right wing government would be capitalized by the useful vote for a nominally left party. A useful vote and a vote of

sanction – distanced from any perspective of political construction of a different order – which fed off the hope that a simple change of faces would give oxygen allowing an electorate discontented with the actions of the right to breathe for a while. All this as an unstoppable crisis of representation grew and, under the form of a “held nose” vote or abstention, reproduced the disillusionment of broad layers of the population, generally the most exploited and dominated.

When the need to “keep out the PP” at no matter what price is invoked as a definitive argument for entry without criteria into governments alongside the PSOE, it is precisely accepted as an inevitable fact that Podemos should participate in this dynamic of de-alignment and crisis of representation in exchange for some posts inside the state apparatus.

Beyond the political disdain supposed by the acritical acceptance of this position in the territories where the PSOE appears as much of a central adversary as the PP, if not more, like Andalusia, it is a policy with nothing new about it – the old Izquierda Unida devoted itself to exactly this for many long years, with political results which are well known.

It is ironic to note that the very people who howled against the left-right political axis rally without any major problem to the worst version of the latter, which was institutionalised by the regime of 1978: the PP-PSOE-“crutch on its left” axis.

All this stems from a rhetoric of government according to which only taking positions inside the state can guarantee any kind of transformation. A position which, as can be seen in municipalities like Madrid, faced with the imposition of the budgetary corset, disdainfully underestimates the autonomous and radically

undemocratic force of the state institutions, so as to mark off its own oligarchical political agenda to those who accede to these institutions without the counterweight of a sufficiently strong political movement. Without even mentioning the obstruction practiced by the socialist groups in the municipalities of "change".

It is in this sense a false move which, far from finishing off the neoliberal political guidelines of the state, will oblige Podemos to adopt them. For the PSOE, this is not a problem: it has already done it many times. For Podemos, this would condemn the formation to political insignificance and in the worst of cases implosion, which would clear the road to a new political landscape, in a context of world political instability, favouring the implantation on our territory of the same type of reactionary political formations laying waste to half of Europe.

One of the political phantoms which has reappeared in recent days to justify the turn towards agreements with the PSOE is that of the "government of progress". We should not forget that barely five years ago, we had just such a government of progress, that of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. It should also be remembered how it ended, clearing the road in electoral terms for a PP absolute majority and, in social terms, to the political insurrection of 15M, which allowed the birth of Podemos.

The first years of this government were marked by the coexistence of cultural wars and advances in civil rights on the one hand, and on the other by complete agreement on the economic model of the financial bubble at the very base of a system of corruption visible for some years in

Spain, linking the banking, political elite and state functionaries at various levels as well as the entrepreneurs, a network with "mafia" traits. All this with its innumerable ramifications at different levels of the state, imposed in Spain by the European neoliberal order.

It was, in the last instance, this tolerance towards the neoliberal order which led to the greatest social and economic crisis in Spain in decades. At this time the political leaders of "Zapaterismo" affirmed that "the forces were not there" to think of a change of model.

It is obvious that there is objectively little room to imagine that a government, in these subordinated conditions, could be capable of going beyond the lines of the continental neoliberal forces which underlie the economic policies imposed by the EU. It is precisely the view that "the forces are not there" which seems to constitute the basis of the positions of the Podemos leadership on the agreements of government with the PSOE.

A certain sentiment of defeat, declared hastily, lies behind this political turn. This option - which tacitly assumes that Podemos has reached its ceiling and new advances in "democratic transformations" are no longer possible, apart from the fact that it is in line with the these advanced by Errejón, nominally defeated at Vista Alegre 2 - develops all the political and organizational faults forged by Íñigo Errejón and Pablo Iglesias at Vista Alegre 1.

This Podemos, forging a verticalist model, renounces the possibility of constructing a strategic horizon; that is a series of medium and long term objectives based on the interests of the broad social layers which have

opposed the regime over the last few years. Instead, the Podemos leadership is following a short term tactic, whose most disastrous expression is the general agreement with the PSOE. If anything is "exhausted" it is this model of political orientation based on a very short term approach.

As we have clearly stated in the document "Podemos en Movimiento", presented at Vista Alegre 2, we do not believe that the cycle is exhausted. The context of political turbulence and economic slowdown across the whole world is ineluctable. It is precisely the political forces who have remained in the spectrum of what was the political centre, including its "progressive" variant, who are today being pitilessly punished electorally.

In Spain, what is passed off as a "recovery" is nothing other than a crystallisation of the social, economic and ecological crisis. It is not about simply maintaining a passive position - other paths can be explored with other political forces, including the PSOE, which do not involve entry into government, on the basis of punctual agreements up to partial accords on matters which correspond to the programmatic principles of Podemos. And, of course and above all, to continue the construction of a real political, economic and social alternative to the forces of the regime of 1978 and to the financial powers that this regime first and foremost represents.

In this context, to capitulate before bipartisanism, to accept being its "left" crutch through the recomposition of the left wing of the regime, would help to close from above the political conjuncture in which the foundation of Podemos took place, and would represent an authentic political disaster.

The Future of Greece

7 August 2017, by **Costas Lapavitsas, Jacobin**

In Greece, it's not quite accurate to talk about the "rise and fall" of the left-wing party Syriza. "Rise and plateau" would be more fitting.

Syriza came to power in January 2015 promising to confront the "troika" — the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund — to secure an exit from the Greek debt crisis and end the austerity under which Greeks were suffering. Thus commenced five months of high-drama negotiations that culminated in a national referendum in which the Greek people said a resounding "no" — "Oxi" — to the deal offered by the troika.

Yet in the face of this historic response, Syriza prime minister Alexis Tsipras went towards the creditors, signing a third memorandum resigning the country to ever deeper austerity and mounting privatizations.

Tsipras's unprecedented capitulation was followed by another: his decision to stay in power to implement the terms of the memorandum. To many, Syriza's rapid climb to state power, its tough talk in negotiations, and its feints towards "Grexit" signaled an acceleration of the class struggle in Greece. Its capitulation proved an abrupt end to that feverish process. Now the party lumbers on, zombie-like, dully implementing anti-worker and anti-left measures of historic magnitude.

Costas Lapavitsas accompanied every step of this dizzying process as an MP for Syriza and a member of the Left Platform, a bloc within the party that called for exit from the European Monetary Union and the preparation of the Greek people for confrontation with international creditors. Had the Left Platform won the strategic and political argument in Syriza, Greece likely would have gone down a very different path.

Today neither Lapavitsas nor the Left Platform continue to be part of Syriza. Yet Lapavitsas has not relinquished the Left Platform's central assertion: that the subjection of Greece's working class is not inevitable.

Here, George Souvlis, a PhD candidate

in history at the European University Institute in Florence, and Petros Stavrou, a former Syriza adviser and current member of the radical left initiative ARK, speak with Lapavitsas for Jacobin about Syriza's government, the struggle against austerity across

Intellectual Influences

Jacobin By way of introduction, would you introduce yourself by focusing on the formative academic and political experiences that strongly influenced you?

Costas Lapavitsas :I come from the generation that began to understand the world after the fall of the dictatorship in Greece. During this period, radicalization was a crucial feature of Greek society. My own family was on the left, so I was naturally radicalized long before I began my university studies. But the wider context of the 1980s in the UK was crucial for my formation. During this period I realized that the world was far bigger, and the ideological and political issues at stake were far wider, than I had experienced in Greece in the 1970s. Much of my political maturing, in other words, occurred in Britain. Since then, I have been active in the ranks of the British left. Another crucial intellectual experience for me was discovering Japanese Marxism nearly three decades ago. It provided me with an even wider aspect of both Marxism and economics as well as a broader way of looking at capitalism.

Jacobin :Could you name some of the intellectuals — such as economists and political theorists — that were crucial for your intellectual formation as a Marxist economist?

Costas Lapavitsas :The first book I read in political economy was Sweezy and Baran's Monopoly Capital, when I was pretty young. It's a great book, one of the most important contributions to Marxism in the twentieth century, and gave me a lasting respect for Sweezy's economics. Needless to say, I have also read the bulk of Marx's writings

carefully, but never treated them as holy texts. For me, Marx was a great thinker and revolutionary, but that is about it. I have also read the usual complement of Marxist classics. I should single out Trotsky in particular, whose writings on the Russian Revolution, the development of the Soviet Union, and the emergence of fascism in the interwar years have greatly influenced me. I have long belonged to the part of the Left that is heavily critical, even rejectionist, of the Soviet Union. Finally, my specific understanding of Marxist economics is a mixture of, first, the Anglo-Saxon Marxist renaissance of the 1970s and 1980s and, second, of the Japanese Marxism of the Uno School. I owe a great debt to many but I would single out Ben Fine and Laurence Harris in the UK and Makoto Itoh and Tomohiko Sekine in Japan.

Did Syriza Have an Alternative?

Jacobin :Let's discuss Greece. Syriza — after the defeat of the new bailout — has created a narrative about the unavoidable nature of this development, suggesting that this was the only way to move forward. Do you share this understanding of events? If not, what was the other way? In terms of economy, what should Syriza have done to avoid these developments?

Costas Lapavitsas :It is interesting to note that the main argument that comes from the current leadership of Syriza is that there was nothing else that could have been done. This is also exactly the argument deployed by New Democracy, PASOK, and everyone else who has run Greece for decades. Yet Syriza rose to power by promising another way that would deliver real change in Greece and Europe.

I supported Syriza at the time because another way was indeed possible. If not, what exactly was the point of Syriza? To have Alexis Tsipras as prime minister instead of Antonis Samaras of New Democracy? To have people in government who call themselves "left" and will hopefully

implement the bailout policies more "softly?" I completely reject this view.

The real problem with Syriza was not that there was no other way. The real problem was the strategy adopted by its leadership was unsound from the start. It was wrong politics, wrong economics, wrong understanding of the world. In short, they aimed to oppose the lenders and transform Greece, while remaining in the European monetary union. This was never possible, as I argued at the time along with several others in Syriza. We gave battle, opposing the leadership and arguing for an alternative path by exiting the EMU and defaulting on the national debt. That was the only realistic alternative for Greece, which could have opened a fresh path of radical social change.

Events showed that we were absolutely right and the strategy of the leadership was nonsense. But we were not able to win the political argument, and that was the crucial thing. After the failure of his strategy, Tsipras surrendered to the lenders and adopted their policies. The surrender of Syriza is a black mark for the whole of the European left.

Jacobin :What you are suggesting above is at a macro-economic level. Don't you think that there were other short-term tactical alternatives? (Such as organizing an earlier referendum, to impose € from the first day they took the power € capital and banking controls.) Because what happened in the end was to impose capital controls at the last minute in a very difficult conjuncture when the Greek state was almost economically paralyzed.

Costas Lapavistas :For what? What would have been the point of the earlier tactical application of controls, if Syriza was not prepared to go all the way by exiting the EMU and defaulting on the debt?

Jacobin :It's not my position, but some argue that these moves would have gotten better results in the negotiations between Syriza and the troika compared to what the bailout agreement brought. Do you share this position?

Costas Lapavistas :Better negotiation to achieve what? This is just wrong thinking. The problem of Syriza was not tactics, although the negotiating methods of Tsipras, Varoufakis, and the others were also clumsy from the beginning. What is the point of aggravating the lenders with a provocative style and verbiage when you lack the steel to go all the way? It is far better to wear a suit and tie but stand ready to declare default when it is necessary.

The problem with Syriza, however, was not its methods, but its strategy. They did not understand what Europe was about, how implacable the lenders were. Above all, they did not understand that the only way to combat the enormous power of the European Central Bank over the availability of liquidity in the economy was to produce a national currency. There was no other option for a left government. I told Tsipras this in private conversation but he did not want to hear it, for that would have involved a real break with the institutions of the European Union. And a break was not what he wanted by training, disposition, and political outlook.

Jacobin :I think it was crucial for the failure of Syriza € and this is my opinion € that the party didn't tell Greek people the truth during the period of negotiations. The truth of what was going on between the two sides and what interests were at stake. I'm sure you remember that the main discourse produced on behalf of the party during this period was that everything was under control, that there would be a fair agreement that both sides would benefit from, etc. I think this was a wrong tactical step because in that way Syriza demobilized the people, delegating the process of negotiations to a group of specialists, the team around Tsipras. In that way, Syriza made people believe that sooner or later there would be a solution in favor of their interests. The people were neither accurately informed about what was happening in Brussels nor were they ready to protest en masse against the menaces of the

troika. I believe that the Plan B would have involved preparing the Greek people as much as necessary for a possible break with EU. What do you think?

Costas Lapavistas :Popular support and political preparation of the working class and broader social layers would have been of paramount importance for any radical government that truly wanted to change things in Greece. Syriza had the opportunity to engage in that after the 2012 election, when it became the official opposition, but it didn't.

Instead, the leadership followed the path of promoting Alexis Tsipras as the next prime minister and a figure of the global left. After coming to power, they never came clean on key questions, even though people wanted answers. The only point on which they were adamant was that they wanted to stay within the European institutions. That is one of the few issues on which they were honest. They were, and remain, committed Europeanists.

How, then, could they have prepared the people for a major clash with European lenders? Even at the time of the July 2015 referendum, which could have evidently been a point of rupture, they meticulously avoided preparing the people for battle. Powerful centers in Greece and abroad were systematically trying to scare the Greek people by saying that a "No" would mean exit from the EMU and disaster. Syriza and its leadership never put it that way but always said that the referendum was merely another weapon in the negotiations with the lenders. And in the end they surrendered and turned "No" into "Yes." They never wanted a real fight.

Jacobin :Do you think this strategic choice is connected with the strategy that Eurocommunist parties adopted during the 1970s, or was it strictly a decision by the people around Tsipras? For example, Giorgos Stathakis, the current minister of environment and energy and one of Tsipras's most important economic advisers, was one of the most sincere people in Syriza, having said from November 2016 that the only realistic option for the party in

power was immediately to sign a memorandum with the troika.

What is your take on this? Can this choice be explained with reference to ideological, economic, or personal reasons, or is it some intersection of these factors that can effectively decode the adopted strategy?

Costas Lapavistas :I do not think that we can directly connect the shambles of Syriza with the Eurocommunist tradition. There were many historical currents of the Left that went into Syriza. Some came from Eurocommunism, but some of the most prominent ones came from the Stalinist tradition of the Greek Communist Party. A good proportion of Syriza's leading cadre were straight down-the-line Communist Party cadre and not Eurocommunist by any stretch of the imagination.

The real problem with Syriza was not Eurocommunism but how the party was constituted, and what it became. It began in an uncertain way in the early 1990s, mostly as Synaspismos, effectively an offshoot of the Communist Party that was always top-heavy and not rooted in the working class. It became Syriza in the 2000s, a small outfit that saw itself as potentially an important player in Greek politics because it seemed to be offering a new way of doing politics that would be pluralist, democratic, and so on. The major change in Syriza occurred under the leadership of Alekos Alavanos, who was probably the most talented politician of his generation on the Left. Syriza acquired the features of a new mass party that could attract many different currents of the Left in an environment of constant discussion and exchange of opinion. It was also consciously movementist.

The disastrous mistake that Alavanos made was to appoint Tsipras and his small group as the new leadership of Syriza, thinking that he was opening the way for a new, fresh, and radical generation. Tsipras proved enormously ambitious and equally adept at taking over the party. He pushed Syriza toward great electoral success in 2011-12.

Around 2010, Syriza was just a small

party among many on the Left and, to be frank, it spouted the greatest nonsense regarding the nature of the unfolding crisis. Tsipras boldly pushed it to take part in the mass protests that then occurred in the squares of the Greek cities. Above all, Tsipras was prepared to say that he was ready to govern, unlike all the other leaders of the Left. The combination of his willingness to govern and the involvement of Syriza in the movement of the squares propelled the party forward in the elections of 2012. It became the government in waiting.

For a short period of time it seemed that Syriza represented a new form of organization that could be the future for the Left not only in Greece, but in Europe. A loose alliance of various currents engaging in constant debate, with a powerful cadre, which could attract electoral support and become the party of government. The reality became clear in 2015. Syriza was not a new way of doing politics for the Left, but merely the latest way in which the Greek political establishment could continue to rule. Endless political debate and movementism proved neither a guarantee of internal democracy nor a challenge to capitalism. Syriza has shown itself to be completely undemocratic in government, an amorphous political body with an all-powerful leader at the top and no real political debate. It's an electoral machine that has become imbricated with the Greek state and seeks only to maintain itself in power. There is no future for the Left in the Syriza model, that's for sure.

Jacobin : A discursive motto that informs the official narrative of the Greek government after the July 2015 agreement is that its governance, despite the many difficulties it's confronted until now, can be defined as a success story due to its fiscal performance increasing the state's primary budget surplus to roughly 4 percent of GDP in 2016. Do you share this optimism on behalf of the Greek government? Could we define its economic performance as a successful one?

Costas Lapavistas :Let me put things in context. The great economic

contraction in Greece ended in 2013. Since 2014, the Greek economy has been effectively stagnant: a little bit up, a little bit down. The worst part of the crisis was already over a year before Syriza took power. So it's ludicrous to say that Syriza has delivered some kind of success for Greece, or the Greek people. In factual terms, after Syriza took over, the economy returned to mild recession and has continued on an indifferent path throughout 2016 and so far in 2017. Of course, in Greek politics it is possible to create a parallel reality through the constant repetition of falsehoods, and Syriza is very good at this. But the truth is obvious in the figures and in the lived experience of people.

In terms of actual economic policies, Syriza has proven to be the most obedient government Greece has had since the beginning of the crisis. They have accepted the economic policies of the lenders, signed the third bailout agreement in August 2015, and have been meticulous in applying it. There is no evidence of independence, no exercise of sovereignty. In this respect, the latest agreement they signed in May 2017, completing the second review of the third bailout, once again obediently followed the dictates of the lenders.

During its ascent to power, Syriza made a huge fuss about negotiating hard, being tough, and standing up to the lenders, unlike the previous, "soft" Greek governments. In practice they have proven the worst negotiators Greece has had during the crisis. The lenders have completely dominated them, imposing austerity, taxes, and pension cuts, without providing any debt relief.

The future looks bleak for Greece. It will probably continue to stagnate: growth will perhaps pick up a little, then it will decline a little, and then again the same. It will become a country with a permanently high unemployment rate and high income inequality; a poor country whose trained youth will leave; an aging country crushed by huge debt; an irrelevant little country on the fringes of Europe. Its ruling class has accepted this eventuality, it is a historic bankruptcy of its rule. Syriza

is also playing a part in this disaster.

Jacobin :And what about the debt? Syriza has claimed that there will be debt relief soon.

Costas Lapavitsas :In May 2016 the Eurogroup, which is the body that basically runs the monetary union, decided a framework for the Greek debt, which Syriza has accepted. There will be no “haircut,” because there is no mechanism within the monetary union for one state to take the losses from the policies of another. According to the framework, Greek debt will be considered sustainable as long as the total cost of servicing it (interest and principal) does not exceed 15 percent of annual GDP. Greece might be offered some help to achieve this “sustainability” by lengthening the term of some of the existing loans and providing a reduction of interest. This is the best that Greece can hope for from its “partners” in the European Union. For that, Greece will have to shape its fiscal policy to achieve a very substantial primary surplus for a long time. That is, low government spending and high taxation, i.e., deep austerity, for decades. By implication, rates of growth will be lowered. This is an awful predicament that makes the Greek debt decidedly unviable in the medium to long term.

In May 2017 the Syriza government signed a further agreement based on precisely this framework. They have legislated fresh measures, reducing pensions and imposing taxes to ensure eye-watering austerity of 3.5 percent primary surpluses a year until 2022. They have also agreed to achieve further surpluses of 2 percent a year until 2060! Despite legislating these extraordinarily harsh measures, they have received absolutely no concessions on the debt. It is amazing incompetence. They have capitulated, surrendering every last vestige of national sovereignty and imposing harsh measures on working people, while failing abysmally to secure any terms that would allow the Greek economy to recover, thus reducing unemployment. The Syriza government is a disgrace to the Greek people but also to the international left.

Jacobin :Do you think that this situation in Greece can be compared to that of Latin American states during the crisis of the 1980s, since a debt crisis was a determining feature in both cases?

Costas Lapavitsas :To an extent, yes, because the Greek crisis was in substance a balance-of-payment crisis. Moreover, the crisis has been handled by the IMF, so one can find similar results to Latin America. However, the real analogue for Greece is not Latin America but the German crisis after World War I, the war-reparations crisis. After losing the war, Germany was forced to make huge reparations, mostly to victorious France, while at the same time it faced restrictions on its economy that reduced its capacity to export, and thus to make the payments required. Throughout the 1920s Germany was put in an impossible position, as John Maynard Keynes realized immediately. The end result was, of course, the rise of Hitler, who denounced the debt and militarized the economy in preparation for World War II. Greece is in a similar position today. It has a huge external debt and is obliged to make foreign payments, but it cannot generate the external surpluses since the monetary union effectively does not allow it. The budget surpluses at present are created by squeezing the domestic economy, thus reducing the prospects of growth. It is an impossible situation for Greece, which could only be resolved by forcibly breaking out of the trap.

Jacobin :The ex-minister of finance Yanis Varoufakis has endorsed recently that there was a Plan B. Do you believe this statement? If there was one, why was it not used as an option by Tsipras’s team during the negotiations with the troika when there was still time and space for maneuvers? In the case that Tsipras would play this card, what impact do you think that it would have in economic and political terms?

Costas Lapavitsas :It’s a common thing to create a narrative about the past that allows you to live with yourself. It is also common to keep reinventing the past to suit better the needs of the present. People often do

that in politics, though I personally try to avoid it as much as I can. There was never a Plan B in a real sense — that is, a plan to take Greece out of the monetary union and break with the European Union. At most there were some back-of-the-envelope exercises on what to do if the pressure of the lenders became too much. They never amounted to a Plan B such as I kept demanding — and proposing — that is, a coherent whole that would be based on popular support. And there could not be for Syriza because such a plan would have necessarily involved exiting the EMU. Syriza leaders, including Yanis Varoufakis, were committed Europeanists who would not countenance a break with Europe. The Syriza members who were not Europeanists and demanded a break, were eventually pushed out by Tsipras.

Jacobin :Recently you and Theodore Mariolis wrote an analytic report, “Eurozone failure, German policies, and a new path for Greece,” published by the RL Institute, in which you describe the steps that a future government should conduct in order for Grexit to be a feasible project without destructive consequences for the majority of the Greek people. What should a future government do to make a possible Grexit a success story, even in the long term?

Costas Lapavitsas :The steps of Grexit have long been well understood. There is no mystery. Grexit requires, first, recapturing monetary sovereignty through an act of parliament, thus redefining the legal tender of the nation. A 1:1 conversion rate would be immediately applied on contracts, money flows, and money sums that are under Greek law. At the same time, there would be bank nationalization, capital controls, banking controls, and steps to ensure that there is a regular supply of medicines, food, and energy in the initial period until the economy turns round. The most serious economic problem would be the devaluation of the New Drachma, the extent of which will depend on the state of the current account and the strength of the economy. In the case of Greece, it is not easy to estimate it, but I would guess that a devaluation of 20-30 percent in the new position of

equilibrium would be likely. Devaluation would be positive for Greek industry, which needs to recoup competitiveness in the international markets and domestically. Workers would also benefit in the medium-term as employment would be protected, but they would require support in the short-term, particularly through subsidies and tax relief. This is not an easy path by any stretch of the imagination, but it's perfectly feasible and requires determination and popular participation. There would probably be a period of considerable difficulties, perhaps six to twelve months, but then the economy would turn around.

Exit, however, was never a cure by itself for Greek problems. I have always understood it as part of a different set of economic policies that would change the balance of social forces in favor of labor and against capital, thus putting the country on a different path. Greece needs a progressive exit, in other words.

For that, two steps are fundamental. First, the government should lift austerity, abandoning the ridiculous and destructive aim of 3.5 percent for primary surpluses. It should boost public spending for investment and other things, aimed mostly toward services because that is where employment could be rapidly created. Second, the government should adopt an industrial strategy using public resources to rebalance the economy in favor of industry and agriculture rather than services. If these policies were adopted, the benefits for working people would be substantial, the balance of class power would change, the conditions of wage labor would be improved, and there would be scope for income and wealth redistribution. It would be possible to talk of Greece entering a different path of development with a strongly anticapitalist character that could lead to the socialist reorganization of society.

Jacobin : In a possible Grexit scenario, where would a Greece outside of the EU fit in the global economy – what would it trade, with whom; would it expect a trade war with the EU?

Costas Lapavistas :The “trade war” argument is typically employed by people who either wish to continue with the bailout policies or are too scared even to contemplate radical change. Greece would certainly face difficulties if it went down the path of rupture, not least because it would inevitably have to default on its debt. But then, it is widely known and accepted that Greek debt is unsustainable. Default is a serious business, but today it does not lead to war, boycotts, and other colorful outcomes. Countries continue to operate and survive. After all, it is the state that would default, not the individual productive agents.

Far more risky than default is the prospect of a break with the European Union, which would not occur simply because of defaulting, but also because Greece would adopt economic policies that would contradict those of the EU. Greece would have to be prepared for that in order to put its economy back in order. There are no shortcuts. It would have to negotiate special terms, exemptions, and so on, and it would have to be prepared for a fight to adopt the policies that it needs. If the workers and the popular strata were determined, the country could be successful.

The Future of the Eurozone

Jacobin :Now let’s move to the EU developments. What do you think is the future of the eurozone and how do you see the European Commission’s scenarios for a multi-speed Europe, which appears to be the plan that Germany currently has for the EU?

Costas Lapavistas :The eurozone crisis as a distinct period in the historical development of the EU is practically over. Germany has imposed its own solution and defeated all opposition. The point bears restating: Germany has prevailed and imposed its will on Europe during the last seven years. It has emerged as the indisputably dominant country. As that has happened, it has also become clear that the new Europe is a highly stratified entity, with a core and

several peripheries. The old distinction of core and periphery that Marxists used to talk about has reemerged in Europe in new and virulent ways. The core, more specifically, is the industrial base of Germany which mainly consists of cars, chemicals, and machine tools. There is no other industrial complex in Europe that is remotely comparable to the German, with the possible exception of northern Italy.

The core has defined several peripheries, two of which stand out. The first is immediately attached to the German industrial core: Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, and Slovenia. This periphery acts as a hinterland of German industrial capital, providing labor, resources, and productive capacity, all bolted onto Germany. The second periphery is in the south: Greece, Portugal, and Spain. These are economies with weak industry, low productivity growth, and low competitiveness, which used to have a large public sector that provided employment but can no longer do so. Their role is to provide trained labor personnel to the German core.

This stratification of Europe provides the foundation of enormous German political power. The ascendancy of Germany has not resulted from a plan by the German historical bloc, though after a point it became a conscious policy. The most important lever in ensuring the ascendancy of Germany has been the monetary union, which has provided Germany with the means to dominate Europe commercially and has acted as the base for German industrial capital to export to China, the United States, and so on. Through the monetary union Germany has emerged as a major global power. But like any capitalist process of this type, tensions and internal contradictions have also emerged. These have mostly to do with the core of Europe, and two issues are of paramount importance.

The first has to do with Germany itself. The rise of Germany exporting industrial capital has happened on the back of German workers: continuing austerity in Germany, wage restraint, tightened public spending, a lack of domestic investment, and the compression of domestic demand. This

is the foundation for German capitalist domination of Europe and has provided the wherewithal for German capital to gain share in the world market. It is clearly an unstable and untenable situation in the long-term. Two-thirds of German labor survives on precarious terms, with low wages and tough labor conditions.

The second are relations between Germany, France, and Italy. This is a point of major weakness. France is of course a country of the core but it cannot survive with Germany because it does not have the industrial base, the competitiveness, and the ability to shape the monetary union. In effect, its historic bloc lacks a strategic plan on how to confront Germany and is fast becoming subservient to Berlin. Italy is even worse. It has a significant industrial base but its presence in the monetary union is deeply problematic because it cannot compete on reasonable terms and its growth rate is very weak. Italy has been in a state of low level austerity for years. This cannot persist forever and tensions will break out at some point. To sum up, the rise of Germany has stratified Europe in ways that have never been

seen before, creating enormous tensions. This is where I expect to see eruptions and the acceleration of history in the years to come.

Jacopin :Do you think these eruptions will come from above or below?

Costas Lapavistas :In recent years we have seen the rise of right-wing populism and authoritarianism, often in fascist form, in several parts of Europe. This is a result of the stratification of Europe and the emergence of German domination. It is also the result of the retreat of democracy as Europe has become more and more unequal. The failure of parliamentary democracy, which is manifest across Europe, and the fact that the political process has become detached from the concerns of working people, is part and parcel of the ascendancy of German capital across Europe. The reaction has inevitably taken the form of demanding more sovereignty, and it has come from below: people sense that they have lost power over where they live, where they work, who makes the laws, who enforces the laws, who is accountable, and how. There are

demands for popular and national sovereignty across Europe.

In the past the forces of the Left in Europe would have been formulating these demands to express the needs and aspirations of working people, opposing big business and German ascendancy across Europe. The tragedy is that the Left has not played this role in Europe for years, and as a result, the Right has stepped in, even appropriating the mode of expression of the Left, and giving an authoritarian turn to popular demands. But there is nothing inevitable about this development. It will all depend on how the Left reacts from now on. There is no firm attachment of working people to the far right in Europe. The real issue is whether the Left can get its act together and begin to intervene effectively. The potential exists. What is lacking is a clear understanding of the burning political issues in Europe as much of the Left continues to operate within the framework of the 1990s and 2000s. It is time for the Left to break out of that and once again play its historic role in Europe.

[Jacopin](#)

An Open Letter to Emmanuel Macron

6 August 2017, by **Shlomo Sand**

As I began reading your speech on the commemoration of the Vel d'Hiv roundup [35] I felt grateful toward you.

Indeed, in the light of the long tradition of political leaders, both Left and Right, past and present, who have denied France's participation and responsibility in the deportation of Jewish-origin people to the death camps, I was grateful that you instead took a clear position, without any ambiguity: yes, France is responsible for the deportation, yes there was antisemitism in France before and after the Second World War. Yes, we must continue to fight all forms of racism.

I saw these positions as standing in continuity with the courageous statement you made in Algeria, saying that colonialism constitutes a crime against humanity.

But to be wholly frank, I was rather annoyed by the fact that you invited Benjamin Netanyahu. He should without doubt be ranked in the category of oppressors, and so he cannot parade himself as a representative of the victims of yesteryear. Of course, I have long known the impossibility of separating memory from politics. Perhaps you were deploying a sophisticated strategy, still yet to be revealed, aimed at contributing to the

realization of an equitable compromise in the Middle East?

I stopped being able to understand you when, in the course of your speech, you stated that "Anti-Zionism . . . is the reinvented form of antisemitism."

Was this statement intended to please your guest, or is it purely and simply a marker of a lack of political culture? Has this former student of philosophy, Paul Ricoeur's assistant, read so few history books that he does not know that many Jews or descendants of Jewish heritage have always opposed Zionism, without this making them antisemites?

Here I am referring to almost all the old grand rabbis, but also the stances taken by a section of contemporary Orthodox Judaism. And I also remember figures like Marek Edelman, one of the escaped leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, or the communists of Jewish background who took part in the French Resistance in the Manouchian group, in which they perished.

I also think of my friend and teacher Pierre Vidal-Naquet and of other great historians and sociologists like Eric Hobsbawm and Maxime Rodinson, whose writings and whose memory are so dear to me, or indeed Edgar Morin. And finally I wonder if you seriously expect of the Palestinians that they should not be anti-Zionists!

Nonetheless, I suppose that you do not particularly appreciate people on the Left, or, perhaps, the Palestinians. But knowing that you worked at Rothschild Bank, I will here provide a quote from Nathan Rothschild. President of the union of synagogues in Britain, he was the first Jew to be named a lord in the United Kingdom, where he also became the bank's governor.

In a 1903 letter to Theodor Herzl, the talented banker wrote that he was anxious about the plan to establish a "Jewish colony"; it "would be a ghetto within a ghetto with all the prejudices of a ghetto." A Jewish state "would be small and petty, Orthodox and illiberal, and keep out non-Jews and the Christians." We might conclude that Rothschild's prophecy was mistaken. But one thing is for sure: he was no antisemite!

Of course, there have been, and there are, some anti-Zionists who are also antisemites, but I am also certain that we could find antisemites among the sycophants of Zionism. I can also assure you that a number of Zionists are racists whose mental structure does not differ from that of utter Judeophobes: they relentlessly search for a Jewish DNA (even at the university that I teach at).

But to clarify what an anti-Zionist point of view is, it is important to begin by agreeing on the definition of the concept "Zionism," or at the very

least, a series of characteristics proper to this term. I will endeavor to do so as briefly as possible.

First of all, Zionism is not Judaism. It even constitutes a radical revolt against it. Across the centuries, pious Jews nurtured a deep ardor for their holy land, and more particularly for Jerusalem. But they held to the Talmudic precept intimating that they should not collectively emigrate there before the coming of the Messiah. Indeed, the land does not belong to the Jews, but to God. God gave and God took away again; and he would send the Messiah to restore it, when he wanted to. When Zionism appeared it removed the "All Powerful" from his place, substituting the active human subject in his stead.

We can each give our own view on the question of whether the project of creating an exclusive Jewish state on a slice of land with a very large Arab-majority population is a moral idea. In 1917 Palestine counted 700,000 Arab Muslims and Christians and around 60,000 Jews, half of whom were opposed to Zionism. Up until that point, the mass of the Yiddish-speaking people who wanted to flee the pogroms of the Russian Empire preferred to migrate to the American continent. Indeed, two million made it there, thus escaping Nazi persecution (and the persecution under the Vichy regime).

In 1948 in Palestine there were 650,000 Jews and 1.3 million Arab Muslims and Christians, 700,000 of whom became refugees. It was on this demographic basis that the state of Israel was born. Despite that, and against the backdrop of the extermination of the European Jews, a number of anti-Zionists reached the conclusion that in the name of avoiding the creation of fresh tragedies it was best to consider the state of Israel as an irreversible fait accompli. A child born as the result of a rape does indeed have the right to live. But what happens if this child follows in the footsteps of his father?

And then came 1967. Since then Israel has ruled over 5.5 million Palestinians, who are denied civil, political, and social rights. Israel subjects them to military control: for part of them a sort

of "Indian reservation" in the West Bank, while others are locked up in a "barbed-wire holding pen" in Gaza (70 percent of the population there are refugees or their descendants). Israel, which constantly proclaims its desire for peace, considers the territories conquered in 1967 as an integral part of the "land of Israel," and it behaves there as it sees fit. Thus far 600,000 Jewish-Israeli settlers have been moved in there . . . and this has still not ended!

Is that today's Zionism? No!, reply my friends on the Zionist Left "which is constantly shrinking. They tell me that we have to put an end to the dynamic of Zionist colonization, that a narrow little Palestinian state should be created next to the state of Israel, and that Zionism's objective was to establish a state where the Jews would be sovereign over themselves, and not to conquer "the ancient homeland" in its entirety. And the most dangerous thing in all this, in their eyes, is that annexing territory threatens Israel's character as a Jewish state.

So here we reach the proper moment for me to explain to you why I am writing to you, and why I define myself as non-Zionist or anti-Zionist, without thereby becoming anti-Jewish.

Your political party has put the words "La République" in its name. So I presume that you are a fervent republican. And, at the risk of surprising you: I am, too. So being a democrat and a republican I cannot "as all Zionists do, Left and Right, without exception" support a Jewish state.

The Israeli Interior Ministry counts 75 percent of the country's citizens as Jewish, 21 percent as Arab Muslims and Christians, and 4 percent as "others" (sic). Yet according to the spirit of its laws, Israel does not belong to Israelis as a whole, whereas it does belong even to all those Jews worldwide who have no intention of coming to live there.

So for example, Israel belongs a lot more to Bernard Henri-Lévy or to Alain Finkielkraut than it does to my Palestinian-Israeli students, Hebrew speakers who sometimes speak it better than I do! Israel hopes that the

day will come when all the people of the CRIF ("Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France") and their "supporters" emigrate there! I even know some French antisemites who are delighted by such a prospect. On the other hand, we could find two Israeli ministers close to Netanyahu putting out the idea that it is

necessary to encourage the "transfer" of Israeli Arabs, without that meaning that anyone demanded their resignations.

That, Mr. President, is why I cannot be a Zionist. I am a citizen who desires that the state he lives in should be an Israeli republic, and not a Jewish-

communist state. As a descendant of Jews who suffered so much discrimination, I do not want to live in a state that, according to its own self-definition, makes me a privileged class of citizen. Mr. President, do you think that that makes me an antisemite?

Verso

Statement by Anticapitalistas

5 August 2017, by Anticapitalistas

1) Our rejection of the offensive of the opposition against the Bolivarian government. The Venezuelan opposition is led by deeply anti-democratic sectors linked to the ruling classes. These sectors are preparing a program of authoritarian reaction against the conquests of the Bolivarian revolution, some of which have been greatly diminished by the crisis that the country is going through. An opposition that has not hesitated to burn, assassinate and attack defenseless citizens in recent years and has recently intensified its methods, with the hijacking of helicopters and the use of firearms. This offensive is not new but it is framed in a context of coups, soft or authoritarian depending on the country, in Latin America, as in Brazil, Honduras and Paraguay. These coups have counted on the complicit silence of governments and the international press. The immediate consequences of

these coups have been a harsh repression of activists and poor people. In this case we see the same complicity with the Venezuelan opposition, hiding their violent character and we fear that the same cruelty will be used against the activists of the left and the inhabitants of the poorer neighborhoods of Venezuelan cities if it succeeds in the political destabilization in Venezuela and a coup, as part of the opposition seeks.

2) This does not mean that we unconditionally support Maduro's government: the corruption, bureaucratization and incompetence of the PSUV government are intolerable in a socialist, revolutionary and radically democratic project. The fact that we consider it a priority to stop the onslaught of imperialism and the ruling class does not imply that we have no criticisms of the limits of

Maduro's government and its political management. The revolution within the revolution consists of expanding liberties, combating bureaucracy with democracy, redistributing wealth more, and building institutional mechanisms that guarantee the control of the economy and the state by the popular classes.

3) We reject all Spanish interference in Venezuelan affairs. The PP and the government of Rajoy, so reluctant to defend the memory of the victims of the Franco regime, has used the Venezuelan crisis to defend the interests of companies eager to regain their economic power in Venezuela and to discredit Podemos. The Venezuelan crisis can only have a democratic outcome if there is a new revolutionary impulse within the Bolivarian revolution; it will never come from those who have plundered the Latin American countries.

Not Just an Artifact

4 August 2017, by Ilya Budraitskis, Ilya Matveev, Sean Guillory

This year, the Russian anti-corruption and opposition politician Alexey Navalny initiated nationwide protest rallies in [eighty cities](#) on March 26

and [more than one hundred](#) on June 12. Both days of action demonstrated a sharp uptick in popular discontent and revealed the growing

politicization of young people and residents of provincial cities. Indeed, many of the protesters who joined Navalny's rallies didn't participate in

the mass demonstrations that were mostly concentrated in Moscow in 2011-12. These newly minted activists took to the streets to fight the nation's pervasive corruption, growing economic inequality, and crumbling living standards.

This popular upsurge caught the Russian left flatfooted. Though many committed activists and adherents remain in the movement, repression has weakened it, and disagreements over the annexation of Crimea and the Russian intervention in Ukraine have divided it. How should the Russian left "not to mention the international socialist movement" respond to this upsurge and, especially, its leader?

For many American and European leftists, the Russian left appears as an artifact. They valorize Russia for its revolutionary past "taking its desires and achievements as a source of inspiration and its mistakes and tragedies as a cautionary tale" but reduce its contemporary manifestation to a caricature.

At a moment when Russia and Vladimir Putin sit at the center of intense popular discussion, Western leftists need to become aware of Russia's various oppositional political forces, the realities they face, and the alliances they can build.

Navalny's Critics

The Russian left wasn't alone in its bewilderment this June. The Kremlin and the older generation of Russian liberal opposition were also surprised. Navalny quickly became the object of not only scurrilous attacks in the Russian state media but also criticism from a number of opposition pundits.

Unfortunately, a considerable portion of this criticism ignores the political context, engaging in an abstract discussion of Navalny's electoral program. Attacks on irresponsible "populism," which Russian liberals have taken as a mantra after Brexit and the recent European election cycle, were automatically transposed onto Navalny.

For example, liberal economist Andrei Movchan [argued](#) that the demand for

a 25,000 ruble monthly minimum wage (about \$440) panders to Russia's poorest and threatens the middle class's current standard of living. Provocative journalist Oleg Kashin [attacked](#) Navalny in the New York Times, calling him an authoritarian leader and comparing him to Boris Yeltsin. Vladislav Inozemtsev, a theoretician of the so-called postindustrial society, fears Navalny doesn't have a "vision for the future" that can replace his impudent populism.

Singing the same well-worn chorus in a different melody, liberal pundits talk over the heads of the protesting youth, addressing the business and educated classes' reasonable representatives: "Is it really worth it?" they croon. "Do we need to replace Putin's depressive tedium with Navalny's volatile populism?"

Unfortunately, even leftists have joined this skeptical campaign. Alexey Sakhnin and Per Leander [recently called](#) Navalny "the Russian version of Donald Trump." They listed some indisputable facts, but Sakhnin and Leander took them as signs that Navalny's entire movement is xenophobic and pro-market "essentially identical to Trump's exploitation of social discontent for political power."

Criticizing Navalny with such a specious comparison makes leftists outsiders to the movement, as if its future will have no impact on their prospects. Further, the article concludes that Navalny's defeat will clear a space for a Russian Bernie Sanders "a true progressive leader with the right platform" implicitly accepting Putin's reelection in the hopes that a more left-wing politician will step forward.

Electoral Calculations

Many of these criticisms depend on the belief that Navalny will participate in next year's presidential elections, but this outcome is far from certain.

For one, his freedom remains in jeopardy. The Russian state has

already jailed his brother Oleg on trumped-up charges, effectively turning him into a hostage. Navalny himself is serving a suspended sentence "which Russian Federal Penitentiary Service officials have repeatedly [asked](#) to convert into real time" and faces other false corruption accusations.

Navalny's fate is intertwined within the opaque working of the Putin machine. There will be nothing democratic about next year's elections: Putin is preparing to be triumphantly returned for another term.

Indeed, elections have become a ritual with fake candidates, vote rigging, and a preordained outcome. Political scientist Gregorii Golosov [calls](#) them "electoral event[s]": they superficially resemble the people's democratic will but simply act out the Kremlin's prewritten script.

Since he'll invariably be excluded from this performance, Navalny has tried to undermine it from offstage, by sparking politicization from below. Because the government is unlikely to allow him to run for election, Navalny will probably call for a boycott of the presidential elections instead.

The Left should support this call. We should stand in solidarity with Navalny, demanding an end to repression and the creation of democratic opportunities. In addition, we should welcome the fact that his campaign has merged the issue of political freedoms with Russia's colossal inequality. Alongside an end to corruption, Navalny and his supporters demand the fair redistribution of income from natural resources and from the privatization of former Soviet enterprises.

This doesn't require unconditional support for Navalny or his personal politics, which are difficult to evaluate. In interviews, he insists that he is neither on the right nor on the left, but he nevertheless tries to rally both. His main campaign slogans call for abstractly progressive changes: government transparency, support for small businesses, democratic rights "which include allowing the far right to participate in political life,

permitting atheists to publicly declare their beliefs, and putting the [right to gay marriage](#) up for public vote.

Speaking from these abstract positions, Navalny attacks everything he associates with the archaic, especially Putin's moralizing traditional values, which has intensified thanks to the Russian Orthodox Church's censorship. At the level of declared values, Navalny shares little with Trump, who built his campaign on isolationism and xenophobia.

Moreover, Navalny's campaign has taken strong positions on the Russian economy. He criticizes government authorities not just for being undemocratic but also for creating a predatory system that only profits the top 0.1 percent. While we can't call him a genuine social democrat, he's certainly not Trump, whose tax plan greatly benefits the American counterparts of those Navalny attacks in Russia.

Regardless, leftists can use Navalny's campaign to show that attacks on corruption will not change the politics of authoritarian post-Soviet capitalism. Effective criticism of individual multimillionaires is not the same as a consistent critique of the free market. Navalny's socioeconomic demands, including the new minimum wage, won't substantially improve people's livelihoods if it doesn't include a powerful mobilization of

workers from below.

If Navalny wins "a doubtful result" it won't be through Putin's staged election but through a street movement that sends the entire ruling system into crisis. The politics he will ultimately practice will be connected to this movement's dynamics, and the Left can help push them in a more progressive direction.

Two Steps Forward, One Step Back

Leftists should prove themselves as Putin's most consistent and active critics, not as Navalny's opponents. We must participate in street mobilizations, as activists from the [Left Bloc](#) and the [Russian Socialist Movement](#) are already doing. More leftists should participate in this movement, show unconditional solidarity with its democratic demands, and support and develop the socially progressive elements of Navalny's program. Only then can we criticize it for its [undemocratic decision-making](#), its flirtations with Russian nationalists, and its commitment to the free market.

The Russian left must also recognize that the movement Navalny has inspired is not the only locus of politicization. Labor conflicts, though small, localized, and diffused, have

increased over the last year, particularly around the issue of owed wages.

Urban and rural communities have been actively fighting against ecological destruction, industrial pollution, gas pipeline construction, and the eradication of urban green space. Long-haul truckers have similarly been protesting for two years against the new transport tax, the collection of which Putin outsourced to the son of one of his billionaire cronies.

The authorities' attempts to crush these demonstrations "as during the [recent protests](#) against so-called housing "renovation" "have only created more activists. These, in turn, feed a new wave of opposition politicians at the municipal level, including some avowed leftists.

By engaging with this evolving political atmosphere, participating in social movements, and strengthening the left media, the Russian left can grow into an independent force. For all its faults, Navalny's movement has produced more positives than negatives, prying open political spaces in a regime reliant on citizen passivity.

The Left, both in Russia and all over the world, must embrace this opportunity for the future democratization and the realization of social justice in Russia.

[Jacobin](#)

The coming civil war

3 August 2017

JEDDAH - The vibrant Saudi city and the country's economic hub. Well, not anymore. It feels a bit like a ghost city these days. Things don't look as glamorous and promising as they once were.

This is not a city-specific condition though. Businesses across the country are struggling to meet their financial

obligations. These include their fixed and operational costs such as salaries, rents, and the ever-increasing government fees and requirements.

The labour market

The government sees the foreigners working in the Saudi labour market as

a legitimate source of continuous extraction of income. According to a Banque Saudi Fransi report released in July and [reported about in Saudi media](#), there are an estimated 11.7 million foreigners in Saudi Arabia, 7.4 million of whom work and the remaining 4.3 millions who are companions.

Instead of paying these new fees, in the weeks after the law was introduced, tens of thousands of foreign workers have fled the country

On 1 July, authorities began collecting fees from companions when they renewed their ID cards, a residence permit renewed annually. Companions will now pay 100 riyals (\$26.66) each month. By 2020, according to the bank, that figure will rise to 400 riyals (\$106.66) and are expected to generate \$20bn for public coffers.

It seems as if the policymakers in decision circles fail to see beyond the face value of their initiatives. Yes, these new fees may raise direct revenues, but they will also destroy the country's entrepreneurship and small and medium-sized businesses. These enterprises operate on very limited budgets and resources. So instead of supporting this already struggling sector, these new regulations will only squeeze them further.

For that reason, many employers have responded by transferring these newly adopted fees onto their employees and labourers. Consequently, the vast majority of foreign workers now have to pay these newly introduced fees from their own earnings. Instead of paying, in the weeks after the law was introduced, tens of thousands have fled the country, and more will follow.

As a result, the labour market is shrinking by the day while the costs of labour work and services skyrocket. The prices of many goods and services provided by the impacted businesses will also rise.

Remember: all this is happening in an economy that is already shrinking.

Saudi purchasing power

These mounting, excessive pressures on the small and medium-sized businesses will lead many of them to go bust at a time when Saudis' purchasing power is already at its lowest in decades and worsening.

In a [2016 report](#), the Jeddah-based National Commercial Bank stated that

in February 2015, "cash withdrawals declined by 13.3 percent [year on year], point of sale transaction value retreated by 9.0 percent annually, the largest decline since 2009".

They added: "We do believe that lower disposable income from the hikes in energy and water prices in addition to the negative wealth effects from the back-to-back annual declines in Tadawul [Saudi Stock Exchange] will weaken consumption expenditure..."

The report also said that total deposits in the Saudi banking system in 2015 grew by 1.9 percent, "the weakest since the Gulf war".

"Saudi banks primarily rely on deposits to expand their balance sheets by extending credit lines to the private and public sectors. Consequently, total claims of the banking system, including [treasury] bills and government bonds, decelerated to 8.9 percent [year on year] for 2015," the report states.

Note that this report was published in 2016. Most of the surge in the prices of water and energy and the new government fees had not taken effect by then. But when their impact starts to be felt this year and early into next year, Saudi medium and small businesses - which make up almost 90 percent of all business enterprises in the kingdom - will likely be further devastated.

The Saudi economy still hasn't reached bottom yet. There is still some way to go for things to get even worse. For example, there are rumours that the government, after having officially [frozen new hirings in the public sector](#), is seriously considering redundancy for tens of thousands of government employees.

So besides the psychological and financial shocks of the severe and sudden reverse growth, now even more families will slip into poverty as a result of mass unemployment.

The government's spending

behaviour

The public in Saudi Arabia no longer seems to perceive the government as part of the solution. Instead, they feel a sense of betrayal by their government. The kingdom's sudden, intensive and very committed rush to drain the economy is ruining its legitimacy. The Saudi government is facing a serious credibility crisis that will need significant work in the coming months and years to overcome.

Public anger is mounting and no one really knows when it will reach a tipping point

The unpopularity and widespread rejection of the 2030 Vision - the economic reform programme introduced by Mohammed bin Salman last year - is a case in point. People are waking up to a harsh, unexpected reality and are astonished to find that their government - which was supposed to be looking after their interests - is actually behaving in a rather strange and irresponsible way right in the middle of an economic crisis and a war of attrition in Yemen.

During US President Donald Trump's recent visit to the kingdom, the government [signed an agreement worth \\$350bn over 10 years](#), deals which the Saudi public widely perceived as humiliating. The government has promised even more deals to come. It has also provided Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's government with billions of dollars in fuel, cash and other grants.

Public anger is mounting and no one really knows when it will reach a tipping point. Increasingly fed up with the government's spending behaviour, the public demands that the government fund badly needed national initiatives in regard to health, housing, and job creation.

Internal chaos

In the midst of all the mess, Saudi leaders continue to behave like conquerors in their own nation. They always pride themselves on taking control of the kingdom by sword (*al-*

sawf al-amlah).

This is an absolute monarchy which allows no room for any deviation from official opinion or position - including expressing sympathy with a cause the government doesn't approve or a country it doesn't like such as Qatar.

For example, if any Saudi citizen is found guilty of sympathising with the position of the state of Qatar in the recent diplomatic conflict, they could face a prison sentence of up to 15 years and up to half a million dollars in fines. What kind of regime in its right mind would even consider such political expression or solidarity a crime, let alone punish it so harshly?

Obviously, the law has generated a wave of mockery in social media platforms. But the point here is that the government is out of touch with reality and fails to sense how frustrated the people are with its attitudes and behaviours.

Moreover, the government has marginalised the local sub-cultures of every region in Saudi except that of Najd, where the ruling Al-Saud family come from. They abolished regional traditional dress and forced everyone to adopt the Najdi dress as the formal state uniform.

Civil servants in Saudi Arabia must adhere to this national dress code and cannot wear their local regional dresses at work. Saudis must wear the 'formal' Najdi dress when taking photos for their national ID card and passports or else they will not be issued.

Imagine that: people cannot wear the regional traditional dress of, say, Aseer or Hijaz, but must wear the dress of the victorious family. This is how you treat a defeated enemy, not your own people.

The civil war scenario

Now for a civil war to emerge, it only needs a spark. I am not in the business of promoting its outbreak. To the contrary, I am writing this as a wake-up call.

So what's different here, some may ask? Economic hardship is not necessarily *the* determining factor that motivates people to stand up against their government. There are tens and possibly hundreds of countries around the world with worse economic situations than Saudi Arabia. Look at Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America or many other places where coercive governments continue to exist regardless of bad economic realities.

It will only take a few thousands to take their anger to the streets and for the security forces to respond with aggression for things to slip into conflict

Well, it is slightly different in Saudi Arabia. Imagine if you have a family home, one that you were only able to buy after many long years of hard work. You have lived there for generations and, suddenly, you're about to lose it. How would that make you - or anyone else for that matter - feel?

Imagine the disappointment: your family slips into poverty and homelessness after having thought for decades that they had escaped it for good. For individuals, it would be easy to imagine that this could make some go insane or even become suicidal while others would have to start over from scratch.

For Saudi society as a whole, however, this can only mean one thing: revolution. When people lose everything they have, their only response is to hit the streets in frustration.

Aside from the sudden loss of wealth, Saudi Arabia's other difference lies in the fact that the poor in the kingdom, and largely the rest of the population, are concentrated in cities. As such, they do not suffer from the structural barriers to effective activism that the poor in other third-world countries face.

Just as poor Tunisians and Egyptians showed in their countries' revolutions, Saudi's poor enjoy solid communication infrastructure and are well-connected geographically and can, therefore, pretty easily organise

and assemble.

Another important factor is money in Saudi politics which has always been an instrument to extend influence and promote stability through internal spending on employment and construction contracts. The drying up of liquidity will, therefore, further destabilise in the kingdom in the near future.

The socio-economic factors are in place. Economic activity is retreating in size. The government's mistreatment of the population in terms identity rights and other liberties further escalates the drive towards a dead end. The compounding effect of all these factors coming together can only, overtime, mount to a revolution.

It will only take a few thousands to take their anger to the streets and for the security forces to respond with aggression for things to slip into what could be characterised as the initial phases of a civil war.

Think of Libya and Syria in this context. During the Arab Spring, the brutal dictatorships in the two countries responded with excessive force when protesters demanded regime change. This usually leads to disobedience among some of the security forces and, overtime, large factions defected. This is how the Free Syrian Army was created.

Once that happens, the country is open to outside interference. Bottom line: it is much more sensible for the Saudi government to act now and contain public anger before it bursts.

Policy implications

The only way out for the government is political openness. This is no longer an ethical choice, but increasingly a political survival strategy.

An open, transparent, effective and elected legislature is needed for the political distribution of responsibility. People, as voters, will have their share of responsibility and so will their representatives in the formation and outcome of policies. This should ease some of the internal pressures and

tensions that the Saudi government faces today.

Saudi Arabia is at a defining phase of its history. It can either modernise and survive or resist and fade

Moreover, the government should allow free expression. It is not only a human right, but also a human need. Psychologically, people in all contexts need to be able to freely speak their minds and naturally feel relieved when they do. It makes them feel relevant and valued when they can have their say in matters of public concern. It

would have the added benefit of giving the public a new and positive impression their government is finally busy with more important issues than worrying about policing their mouths.

All in all, Saudi Arabia is at a defining phase of its history. It can either modernise and survive or resist and fade. Economic modernisation is unattainable in the absence of public scrutiny and accountability because, in the shadows, the motives for corruption and mismanagement override public interest.

In times like these, when the country's finances are overstretched, greater public inclusion in the decision-making process is no longer a luxury, but a necessity if leaders want to contain public anger and seize an opportunity.

Socioeconomic factors fuel hostility towards the government. The cure is good governance. Any delays in adopting this "cure" will only make the worst-case scenario the inevitable outcome.

[Middle East Eye](#)

Walter Kanelutti (1955-2017)

2 August 2017, by Friends and comrades in Vienna

During the 1970s, the radical left in Austria was at the peak of its influence at universities and in other parts of society. The most important campaign of GRM was the protest against the nuclear power plant Zwentendorf an der Donau which was constructed but never put into operation: a referendum in 1978 meant the end for nuclear energy in Austria.

At the beginning of the 1980s, Walter was first and foremost active in the movement supporting the Sandinista revolution; he also spent four months with the working brigades in Nicaragua. After his return, he changed from university work to the editorial staff of our newspaper Die Linke (The Left). It was due to Walter's ability to get to the heart of matters, to reach clarity, and to react to unexpected developments that we managed for nearly 25 years to produce a well made bi-weekly (until the end of the printed edition in 2006). Given the many imponderables of production (will the promised articles come or not ...) the bi-weekly pattern formed part of his life for years.

After a sojourn in Algeria where he cooperated with comrades of the Socialist Workers Party (PST), he

always remained aware of the developments in this post-revolutionary country. He detested those not able to look further than the end of their nose and preferring petty power struggles in the Austrian backyard over an internationalist perspective.

Walter's membership in SOAL and the Fourth International always remained the guiding line for his revolutionary activism – in spite of attempts of little avail to socially and politically anchor the organization (interventions in social-democratic youth organizations, "turn to Industry", cooperation in and building of the Alternative List later becoming the Green Party). He did not yield (without representing dogmatic or sectarian positions at any time) even when the Marxist left – and, also, our organization – lost the drive of the 1970s during the 1980s and the majority of a whole generation accommodated to the bourgeois mainstream.

At the end of the 1980s, it was shocking to observe the rise of the FPÖ- [36] and open manifestations of anti-semitism, xenophobia and parts of National-Socialist ideology. Still, the

movement against the "blue-black government" of the year 2000 (with chancellor Wolfgang Schüssel of the ÖVP [37] and Jörg Haider of the FPÖ-) formed a glimmer of hope and a mandate to continue.

Due to the engagement of SOAL in globalization-critical movements, Walter joined the European Social Fora in Florence and Paris. As a delegate, he represented SOAL several times at the World Congress of the Fourth International; there, he was known to many under the name "Boris Jezek" which was also his nom de plume for many articles in Die Linke.

During the last years Walter was active in refugee support. Together with fellow activists he founded the association "Herein" (Come in) renting and providing apartments for refugee families.

Walter was successful in his professional life, as a coach, and, before that, as a publishing editor and in other professions. But there were more important aims in his life. He concentrated his energy in the way Bert Brecht called for: "Change the world! It needs it!"

“The Putinist Majority Could Fast Become Anti-Putinist”

1 August 2017, by **Ilya Budraitskis**

How would you describe the ideology of the ruling regime in contemporary Russia? On what values rests that which some call “Putinism”? What is behind the facade of all this speech about “spiritual bonds” and “our glorious past”?

The conventional idea has become that from the beginning of Putin’s third term we have been experiencing a conservative turn. If in the ‘00’s the regime presented itself as technocratic, standing above politics and simply ensuring the integrity of the country, stability, etc., then in the 10s’ we have observed an ideological evolution.

The conservative orientation to traditional values and aggressive anti-Western rhetoric have made many, including the oppositionally-minded, believe that the Russian regime has accomplished a revolution of values, and now opposes the world order, which is exemplified by the policies of Western countries. It is often asserted that we are undergoing a phantasmagoric reincarnation of the Stalinist, Soviet, imperial project, for which it is characteristic to deny the values of the contemporary global world.

It seems to me that this understanding of an ideological evolution represents a trap. I do not believe that Russia has, from the beginning of this conservative turn, transformed into a space isolated from the rest of the world, where other laws obtain, other values reign, where even the people themselves have mutated into one or another anthropological type—sovki [derogatory term for people still “stuck” in the Soviet past, for surviving members of “Homo Sovieticus”—tr.], zombies, vatniki [literally, “quilted jackets,” a

derogatory term for lower class nationalistic Russian—tr.].

Despite Putin’s Russia’s attempt to transform itself on the level of rhetoric into an alternative to the contemporary world, it remains fully a part of that world. Despite the conservative turn, Russia has not even for a minute ceased to be a part of the world capitalist order ruled by the laws of the market. In this sense, conservative rhetoric is an important constitutive part of the spirit of Russian capitalism. This spirit not only does not contradict basic market values, but gives them a new form, and a new disguise.

So it turns out that we do not have any special values that differentiate us from the West?

You can often hear it said “indeed Putin himself has said it more than once” that Russians have different values than Western people, and these values are collectivististic, the opposite of Western individualism.

But if you actually think about this claim, which is often reproduced, then the question arises: what sort of collectivism is actually meant? From our own life experience we know that Russia is a country of aggressive social inequality, with a fairly atomized and unintegrated society, in which people habitually think of their own interests and take their neighbors and other inhabitants of their cities for suspicious competitors, from whom one can expect only scams and dirty tricks, and who implicitly or explicitly covet our place in the sun. In this sense, Russian society is even more individualistic than Western society, in which various forms of self-organization are incomparably more developed.

But still, there is a certain sense

behind this semi-official dichotomy: it suggests that Western individualism is the desire to take into account the interests of the minority (for example, the “self-satisfied gays” or “lazy migrants”) claiming some kind of explicit representation, who ought to be provided for by the state at the expense of others. According to the rhetoric of the Russian media, Western states support manifestations of individuality at the expense of taxpayers. But the Russian state defends the interest of the majority, expressed as the desire of people to receive for their money that product in culture and education that corresponds to their traditional ideas. The principle of collectivism in this interpretation is simultaneously a market principle. The collective here is understood not as a community, all members of which provide support to each other, but as the majority of buyers who vote with their rubles for certain values, the dominance of which the state thus assures. The conservative state is no more nor less than a successful and attentive seller in the market of moral and cultural values. Its law—the client’s desire.

In this version of the conservative turn, there is no special “Russian way.” Of course, we encounter this combination of the market with a veneer of conservative values in other countries. Just such a symbiosis of nationalism, conservatism, religious obscurantism, and a severely pro-market policy (albeit with local specificities and in different proportions), for example, is widespread in Eastern Europe. The same trend reflects the evolution of American Republicans over the past decade. In this sense, Russia is not only not unique, but even the opposite—it is in the vanguard of some global or pan-European tendencies.

The architecture of the modern Russian media field is built in such a way that actors who do not agree with the ideology of the ruling regime are all but automatically labeled liberals. But how, generally, do contemporary Russian liberalism and its adepts present themselves? And how can you describe its relationship with the current ruling regime?

Yes, in recent years, thanks to state propaganda, the very word “liberal” has become a synonym for the internal enemy. Of course, this phantasmagoric figure is necessary for the ruling power. In order to insist on the organic unity of the people and government, it is necessary to point to those who are trying to destroy that unity. Used in this sense of a subversive minority, the term “liberal” has completely lost touch with its real meaning, with the political definition of liberalism. From the point of view of power, anyone who opposes new repressive laws, attacks on human rights, or restrictions on freedom of speech, is automatically numbered among liberals.

The other side of this false opposition is that if all of the enemies of the existing system are liberals, then the system itself can not be in any sense liberal itself. However, with the very notion of a liberal collective enemy, as with the rejection of liberalism by the system itself, we face two serious problems.

First, liberals in Russia are by no means the only opposition movement. It is not at all necessary to be a liberal to criticize government’s actions, including its suppression of civil liberties.

Second, the current government’s policy is grounded in part on economic liberal principles. If we understand the logic of the government’s reforms in education, health and culture, we will find that it largely corresponds to what is commonly called neoliberalism: the dominance of the principle of profitability, of economic “efficiency” over the interests of society.

Finally, we have confusion among those who actually express adherence

to liberalism. Factually, by “liberal,” in the Russian political tradition, is normally understood both those who advocate a free market and see political democracy as its simple consequence, and those for whom liberalism is first and foremost civil liberties and human rights.

It is important to separate the supporters of civil liberties from the supporters of economic freedom. These are different conceptions of freedom, which actually come into conflict with each other. The propagandistic designation of all opponents of the regime as liberals prevents, among other things, the clarification of positions both within the opposition as a whole, and among the self-described liberals themselves.

I would like to discuss one remark of Alexei Navalny, which he made in an interview with Ksenia Sobchak on TV Rain. He said that for contemporary Russian politics, the right-left dichotomy basically does not function. How would you respond to this?

On the one hand, I agree with Navalny’s position. The concepts “right” and “left” really do not matter if we are talking about the official imitation of politics. If we take the spectrum of parliamentary parties, the notions “right” and “left” do not have much meaning. These parties are not really right and left, because they lack political independence. Their actions are determined not by political convictions and values, but by curators from the presidential administration who are neutral to any values. It does not make much sense to say that Mironov is left and Zhirinovsky is right: this is true.

However, this does not mean that in general the notions “right” and “left” have no significance in the Russian context. Here I can not agree with Navalny. If we want politics to be not just a cynical means of manipulation, but a space in which we uphold certain principles and views on the development of the country, self-identification in the ideological spectrum is extremely important. Even if today it is represented by small groups that are not in parliament.

Of course, in Russia there is real left, and a real right. Just outside systemic politics. Why Navalny denies this is also understandable. His goal is to include all people who are oppositional to the current regime in his own election campaign as volunteers. And technically for him it is not important who they are—“left or right.

Is Crimea really rallying Russian society around Putin? Is his 84% support, as measured by the polls, an accurate expression of reality?

One of the main system-forming myths of the modern Russian political regime is the myth of the identity of the country, the state, and the people. A myth expressed through the famous formula “Russia is Putin. Putin is Russia.”

The main and defining feature of this mythical majority is its passivity. It is assumed that this majority is not able to assemble and express itself independently, and therefore its only representative, its only voice, is Putin. And this is the strong point of this myth: it insists that everyone by him- or herself is powerless. Therefore, we need to recognize ourselves, via television, in Putin, to contemplatively accept his active will, his activity, as the positive side of our own inactivity and impotence. This pessimistic philosophy has, of course, an impact on the consciousness of many people in Russia.

But its weakness stems from the same source as its strength—“from passivity. Support for power is not measured by anything other than sociological surveys. How, for example, do we know that the people trust Putin? We can no longer learn this from elections, since turnout is constantly decreasing, and their results do not represent the actual opinion of the majority. Also, naturally, we do not know anything about the majority’s support of Putin through mass demonstrations, rallies, etc. We see that people do not participate voluntarily in these rallies of celebration and unity with the regime. Administrative power has to be put to work to gather a more or less sizeable demonstration of support for any state actions.

The only way to confirm the support of the people remains the sociological survey. But these questionable surveys do not focus on what specific elements of public policy people support. The main paradox of Putin's "Crimea Is Ours" majority is that people who support Putin can simultaneously be extremely critical of all the concrete manifestations of the state that are present in their own

lives. At the level of personal life experience they are not satisfied with current social policy, they do not like Russian police, they do not believe in the independence of the courts, they are extremely unsatisfied with the situation in health care and education, etc. But at the same time they support Putin. And these people are included in the 86% that, according to the pro-Kremlin mass media and sociologists, support Putin.

And it is very likely that at some point this qualitative, concrete discontent connected with people's real life experience will pass to the abstract figure of the leader with which this state associates itself. Therefore, it is possible to imagine that one day this phantom-like 86% pro-Putin majority could suddenly and swiftly turn into an 86% anti-Putin majority.