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31 October 2017, by **robm**

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War Against the Poor

31 October 2017, by **Alex de Jong**

Meanwhile, in the south of the country Islamic fundamentalist violence has taken on a qualitative new dimension. The attack on Marawi City provided Duterte with the opportunity to declare martial law, while the violence of the government army creates new breeding grounds for fundamentalist groups.

Campaigning for the elections that made him president, Rodrigo Roa Duterte promised to eradicate crime. He promised to be ruthless and kept his promise. One year into his presidency, thousands have been killed in his “war on drugs.” The victims of this war are either killed “resisting arrest” or are murdered by unknown assassins.

Local journalists and human rights activists report how police execute people in their homes and plant evidence. According to reports, the anonymous assassins are mostly cops or are paid by them. The budget for cash rewards to cops who have

“rendered extraordinary service” ballooned.

In his speeches, Duterte encourages cops to plant evidence and kill suspects, and promises to protect cops from prosecution.

Nobody knows how many have been killed. Based on news reports, activists estimate that the number of dead could exceed 10,000. The victims are almost always the poor: pedicab drivers, street peddlers, scavengers. Economically and socially marginalized, they are killed with impunity.

But Duterte retains support. He owes much of his popularity to widespread disillusionment with the political establishment. Political activist and sociologist Walden Bello describes support for Duterte as motivated by dissatisfaction with what he calls “the EDSA republic.”

In 1986, dictator Ferdinand Marcos

was overthrown by mass protests concentrated on EDSA avenue, the main thoroughfare in the capital Manila. The so-called “People’s Power Revolution” produced high hopes for the restoration of democratic rights as well as for social progress and development of the country.

Since then, every administration tried to claim the mantle of 1986. They were all disappointments. According to government standards, over a quarter of the population of over 100 million lives in poverty. The Philippines is one of the most unequal societies in the region; recent economic high growth rates benefited only a small part of the population.

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Trump and Duterte

Philippines President Duterte presents himself as a nationalist who is especially opposed to the continuing strong influence of the former colonial power, the United States. After Barack Obama voiced pro-forma concern over human rights violations in the Philippines, Duterte called him a “son of a whore.”

Duterte referred to U.S. atrocities committed during its colonization of the Philippines, and said U.S. troops should leave the country. While campaigning he promised an “independent foreign policy.” The high point of this rhetoric came in October 2016 when Duterte declared “separation from the U.S.” and the intention to join the “ideological flow” of China and Russia.

But the ferocity of Duterte’s rhetoric has not been matched by acts. Joint U.S. and Philippine exercises continue, construction of facilities for use by the U.S. military continues, and Duterte expressed his thanks for U.S. support to the Philippine army in the fight for Marawi City.

And after Donald Trump praised Duterte for his “unbelievable job on the drug problem” in a phone call in May, signaling that the U.S. government would not object to the killings, Duterte’s anti-U.S. tirades lessened, although he still refused an invitation from the White House.

Duterte’s “nationalist” posing serves two ends. One is that he is trying to rebalance the Philippines’ relationship with the United States, and develop more friendly ties with China. Duterte signed multi-billion-dollar deals with the Chinese government that are bound to be immensely profitable for his allies.

Secondly, Duterte uses nationalist pretenses to deflect international criticism, accusing critics of hypocrisy and ignorance. The continuing weight of the pro-U.S. Philippine army, however, ensures that any real “separation” remains unlikely.

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“A Crisis of Hegemony”

Herbert Docena is a socialist activist who teaches at the University of the Philippines. Asked for the reasons for the support for Duterte, he argues that “we need to consider why his rhetoric fell on receptive ears. There was massive disillusionment with the liberal, or semi-liberal, institutions. I think what we experienced was really a crisis of ruling-class hegemony as the different factions of the ruling class failed to overcome their differences. At the same time, the Left was weak.”

In this context, Duterte seemed to offer an alternative: strong leadership and harsh measures to teach the people “discipline,” end crime and corruption and develop the country. He emphasizes his differences from the political class that previously ruled the country, cracking jokes, rolling up his sleeves and cursing the rich as out-of-touch *coños* [a slang term meaning “cunts” — ed.] Duterte profits from a sense of crisis that his campaign and government helped to create.

Kar Calderon is an activist in Manila with Block Marcos, a group that mobilizes against the growing authoritarianism of the government (. Says Calderon: “Duterte managed to create a discourse that the root of all problems in the country is drugs. It’s always drugs, drugs, drugs.”

Tin Alvarez, also an activist in the Block Marcos group: “Duterte has been skillful in how he succeeded in constructing a problem. To me, the main problem of the Philippines is poverty, and impoverishment, how people are made to be poor. But when Duterte ran for power, we were suddenly told that the really pressing problem was crime.”

Duterte presents himself as the strong leader who can save the country. Those who oppose him in his crusade are, he suggests, in the pay of the druglords.

Although Duterte has support across social classes, he would not have been able to become president without building alliances with fractions of the bourgeoisie. Key parts of the coalition supporting Duterte are members of the bourgeoisie that, like himself, come from the peripheral provinces. Such provincial fractions compete with those in control of the national government in Manila for access to power and wealth.

Another important ally of Duterte is the wealthy Marcos family, which for two decades has been rebuilding its political influence.

The coalition that supports Duterte, a relative outsider to the political establishment of the capital before his election, is not static. Mark Batac of Block Marcos: “Over the last year, Duterte prioritized the support of the military. At first, Duterte tried to get the support of often clashing constituencies, including parts of the Left.

“In his first year in office, he realized which parties are critical for his hold on power and the army is one of those. Some of Duterte’s policies, such as his rapprochement with China, sit uneasy with the army which is fundamentally pro-U.S. Of all presidents, he has been visiting military camps most and he has appointed several military commanders to his government. He wants to secure himself the support of the army.”

One way in which his administration retains support is the intense use by its supporters of social media, where his supporters attack critics with slander and threats, and praise real and imagined achievements of Duterte’s government.

Permanently in campaigning mode, touring around the country, Duterte has gathered dedicated supporters. The strong faith many of them have in Duterte is symbolized by the nickname they gave him; Tatay, father. Since his election, Duterte’s popularity declined, but it remains strong especially among more affluent layers.

Despite his populist rhetoric, Duterte continued the free-market policies of the previous administrations. After a

year in office he has dropped much of his earlier claim to be “leftist,” but the administration continues to present itself as an adversary of “oligarchs.”

Confusion in the Left

Initially, Duterte’s leftist claims were bolstered when he appointed a handful of leaders from the pro-Maoist National-Democrats as members of his administration and the movement entered his heterogeneous coalition.

The Philippine Left has been thrown into confusion by Duterte. Before running for president he was a local strongman, a mayor of Davao City on the southern island of Mindanao. For decades he cultivated a mutually beneficial relationship with the Maoist movement.

The underground Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its above-ground allies, together forming the National-Democratic movement, remain the largest current on the Philippine Left. Mayor Duterte and the Maoists were on friendly terms. Duterte supported legal National-Democratic groups in Davao City while the Maoist guerrillas refrained from attacks that would embarrass the mayor.

The above-ground movements did not target Duterte in protests and muted their criticism of his policies — including his use of a death squad to kill petty criminals, street children and drug addicts in Davao City, a policy that Duterte as president has extended nationwide.

During the election campaign, it turned out that Duterte had the support of parts of the Maoist movement, including important figureheads like their ideologue Jose Maria Sison. Duterte re-opened the peace negotiations with the CPP and the party declared that it was “forging an alliance” with the new president.

The Maoists suggested that through negotiations Duterte could be convinced to implement sweeping social reforms. National-Democrats rallied in support of “Duterte’s

progressive policies” and defended him against criticism regarding the extrajudicial killings, claiming such criticism was coming from supporters of the defeated candidates or was part of a “destabilization plot” by the CIA.

Duterte’s nationalist rhetoric about “separating” from the former American colonial power was especially popular among them — but they have been disappointed by continuing cooperation between the Philippine and U.S. militaries.

The honeymoon between Duterte and the Maoists lasted several months. But negotiations stalled, then broke down as Duterte insisted that the Maoists should sign a mutual cease-fire. But even after Duterte declared “all-out war” against the Maoist New People’s Army (NPA), the National-Democratic cabinet-members did not resign. They continued to assure Duterte of their loyalty and defend him against criticism.

Although its expectations of Duterte diminished, the National-Democratic movement was careful to leave open the possibility of a new turn in their relationship with the government. In May, Judy Taguiwalo, the National-Democratic Social Welfare Secretary, still claimed that it was a “no-brainer” that Duterte was opposed to the killings.

Some weeks later, the chair of Bayan (“Nation”), the umbrella of National-Democratic organizations, admitted that the National-Democratic members of Duterte’s cabinet were “objectively helping to deodorize his regime by just doing their jobs competently and consistent with their pro-people stand.”

Only halfway through September did the National-Democrats leave the government coalition, after Taguiwalo and one of her comrades were dropped from their posts. A handful of National-Democrats remain in posts in the administration.

The National-Democrats have now organized a new coalition, “Movement against Tyranny,” which aims to “unite all freedom loving Filipinos against tyranny and for human rights.” The National-Democrats have been

criticized for their opportunism, but the movement remains capable of mobilizing significant numbers.

Marawi and Martial Law

In June, another crisis opened as jihadists claiming allegiance to Islamic State attacked the city of Marawi on Mindanao. The attack provided Duterte with the opportunity to declare martial law for the entire island.

The constitution introduced after the fall of Marcos contains several safeguards intended to prevent another president from using martial law to become a dictator. However, opposition to Duterte in the institutions and parliament is so weak that he has had little difficulty introducing martial law. The fighting also again boosted his popularity.

Although the jihadists are claiming allegiance to Islamic State, the recent violence is an escalation of local dynamics. Mindanao is where most of the country’s Islamic minority lives; about 20% of the local population identifies as Muslim. Parts of Muslim Mindanao are among the poorest regions of the country.

The national government has always marginalized the Moros (the name dates back from the Spanish period). Decades ago, Moros were pushed off their land in favor of Christian settlers in a resettlement program organized by the national government. Later, Marcos’ attempts to centralize state power meant that local Muslim elites who previously represented and cooperated with the national government lost power.

In the early seventies, Mindanao erupted in war. A new generation, many of whom had studied in Egypt and Libya and were influenced by the pan-Islamic and nationalist ideas of that era, allied with parts of the dissatisfied elite to form the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), an armed movement aiming for the creation of a separate Moro republic.

The war reached a peak in the mid-

seventies with over 13,000 dead and more than a million refugees. Although the MNLF, and its split the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, entered peace negotiations with the government and renounced their goal of separation, Mindanao has remained restless. The Fronts never disarmed, and scattered clashes continue.

The peace agreements did not solve the causes of the ongoing violence. Mindanao remains almost an internal colony to “imperial Manila,” a source of agricultural products, minerals and cheap labor but underdeveloped and underrepresented. Members of the national elite ally with local warlords who deliver them votes and keep their fiefdoms under control.

In this context, militant groups are able to find recruits and support, and new groups are formed. These movements are not homogeneous or tightly organized. Local loyalties, often to certain clans, are frequently more important for their supporters than formal political affiliations or agreements.

Some Moro groups are little more than criminal gangs, enriching themselves through kidnapping and extortion, others are more political. Alliances and rivalries are often fluid, and members of the local elites form or support armed groups as tools in their competition with others.

Reflecting international influences, since the early eighties militant Moro movements have become more and more influenced by Islamic fundamentalist ideas. Ties to regional jihadist networks have existed since the nineties. In particular, the group that attacked Marawi City has its roots in the private army of the wealthy Maute family.

Joseph Franco, a research fellow at Singapore’s S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies who has worked with the Philippine military, says that in early last 2016 the Mautes projected themselves as followers of Islamic State to “spook and coerce” a rival clan; then “that tactical use of terrorist imagery took on a life of its own.”

For a younger generation, references

to Salafist jihadism (violent Sunni fundamentalism) are not just a tactical ploy. The Philippine army claims to have killed two of the Maute sons during the fighting in Marawi City. Unlike the MILF, the Maute group has been targeting Christians for murder and desecrating Christian churches.

Fewer than 1000 fighters strong, the Maute group is trying to provoke a religious war on the island. Their attack on Marawi City was meant to gain national and international recognition. Its success probably surprised even the Maute group.

Despite facing thousands of government troops supported by airplanes and artillery, in mid-September the group was still not completely pushed out of the city and had killed over 130 soldiers.

So far, the violence has largely remained confined to Marawi, but the Mautes have allied with other splinter groups that adopted similar terrorist tactics and future attacks are likely. The government army has resorted to such large-scale violence and brute force that much of Marawi City has been flattened, creating a traumatized and hostile population among whom the Mautes or similar groups most probably will find future recruits.

Targeting the Left

Philippine leftists, including National Democrats, fear the country is drifting towards dictatorship. The bourgeois opposition is weak, and many of its representatives defected to the government.

One of the few bourgeois politicians who strongly opposed Duterte’s human rights violations, Senator Leila de Lima, was accused of cooperating with drug lords and imprisoned. State violence and the campaigns of slander and harassment by his supporters make opposition difficult and dangerous. Critics of the government are removed from their posts and intimidated.

Political killings strongly increased over the last months. Dozens have been killed, most of them from the National-Democratic movement, but

activists from other currents such as the Philippine section of the Fourth International, the Revolutionary Workers’ Party of Mindanao, and the Partido Manggagawa have also been targets.

In addition, social resistance against the Duterte regime is weakened by divisions among the Left. The National-Democratic organizations refuse to cooperate with or often even to recognize other progressive groups. The labor movement is divided between the National-Democratic Kilusang Mayo Uno and the coalition SENTRO.

The human rights movement is similarly divided between the National-Democratic group Karapatan and the iDEFEND coalition. The broad Left, ranging from socialist groups to networks of progressive NGOs in the country, had difficulty orienting itself faced with a president who claimed to be a socialist, mouthed anti-U.S. rhetoric and appointed well-known leftists to his administration.

Herbert Docena speaks of a crisis of the workers movement “Twenty, thirty years ago, at least ten percent of workers were members of unions, now that is two percent. That put a lot of limits on what the Left can do.

“Out of desperation and frustration, the Left chose to take part in liberal institutions or to cooperate with factions of the elite. This was crucial; at the time when people were fed up and looking for an alternative, they saw the two most powerful currents of the Left either in alliance with the previous president, as the social democratic party Akbayan did, or with the Marcoses, Duterte or some other elite faction, as the National Democrats did.

“It is difficult to see National Democrats share a platform with the Marcoses, and then you have the social-democrats who joined the previous government. That makes it difficult to present an alternative outside of those existing structures. The main forces of the Left squandered an opportunity.”

According to C.J. Galunan of Block Marcos: “The Left failed to develop a

long term vision and underestimated the potential there was. Instead, short term gains, for example in elections, were prioritized while the National Democrats continue to prioritize the armed struggle in the countryside over all other forms of struggle."

A first dent in Duterte's power appeared after the president kept his promise to give the Marcos family permission to bury their dead patriarch in the cemetery for national heroes. Spontaneous protests broke out, often involving young people relatively new to progressive politics.

Recent cases of killings of teenagers by the police have fed rising dissatisfaction.

Still, Duterte continues to implement his authoritarian agenda. The government aims to rewrite the constitution to favor the regional political dynasties and oligarchs that serve as Duterte's crucial allies, and the Marcos dictatorship is being rehabilitated.

The Philippine Left, in all its various shapes, retains social weight and roots. But because of the lack of a convincing alternative this weight does not translate into political

influence. Says Galunan: "There is a new, emerging left in the Philippines, in or outside the existing currents. We need to distinguish ourselves from the elites, but also critically examine the past failures of the Left."

The struggle against authoritarianism and for human rights will be central to the formation of a new Left. Such a new Left would need to be as radical as the disillusionment with the EDSA republic is deep, and remain independent from all factions of the Philippine elite. The next few years will be decisive "and dangerous.

Resisting Capital's Disasters

30 October 2017, by **Against the Current** Editors

Each of these appalling events, however, while creating new levels of human misery, also generates whole new opportunities to profit from them. Hurricane Katrina set in motion the dismantling of New Orleans' public schools and their replacement by corporate charters. In Puerto Rico, rebuilding the destroyed power grid is likely to be a publicly subsidized but private for-profit project. As Congressman Luis Guterres aptly put it, the United States "wants to own Puerto Rico," but not to treat it as part of the U.S. homeland.

Borrowing and expanding author Naomi Klein's term, we might call all this "disaster capitalism" on steroids. But that evocative term is useful mainly if the emphasis is placed where it belongs, on capitalism, the ultimate disaster facing human civilization.

This is especially important at a time when it appears to many people that the driving force behind current events is the unhinged character of the current U.S. administration and the twit-in-chief at its head. Yes, Donald Trump's serious personality disorders are an accelerant in the gathering firestorms of war buildups, global chaos and environmental collapse, as is the incapacity of the

U.S. political system to control the White House. But the underlying causes run much deeper.

Trump represents the twisted and half-deranged face of a systemic assault on virtually every facet of the social safety net, workers' rights, and the entire public sector "apart from the bloated permanent war economy. For more than three decades, it's proceeded under the banner of neoliberalism through administrations of both capitalist parties, even if the current regime of Trump and the far-right Republican Congress are a particularly malignant manifestation.

With Trump's attacks on health care and women's rights, the wave of reactionary judicial appointments, threats of war, anti-immigrant raids and deliberate ripping up of environmental regulations coming in waves, it may also seem "appropriating another allusion (from Star Trek) "that "resistance is futile." But it's not: Recent examples show that human action can put checks on the inhuman workings of an inhuman system "and point toward its ultimate replacement.

Resistance Exhibit A: When the latest iteration of the Republican drive to

"repeal and replace Obamacare" crashed and burned, it didn't happen because Senate Democrats spontaneously grew a spine and a few Republicans sprouted a conscience.

Every medical association and health care union came out against this cynical, lying and sadistic effort to gut Medicaid to pay for billionaires' tax cuts. Disability rights organizations condemned it and staged militant demonstrations. Eighty percent of the U.S. population hated it. Ultimately, popular anger overrode the blackmail of the Crack Brothers and the far-right donors threatening to withhold their filthy money from the 2018 Republican campaigns.

Trump's executive moves to dismantle insurance subsidies and wipe out the protections of the Affordable Care Act will be fought out in the courts and Congress, but rising popular anger and the momentum growing for a single-payer health insurance system will shape the longterm outcome of this protracted struggle.

Resistance Exhibit B: Recipients of DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) "facing Trump's threat to strip their protection from deportation and their ability to pursue education

and employment â€” not only refused to slip into the shadows. Mobilizing to protect their families, they angrily confronted the Democratic congressional leadership following Trump’s chummy get-together with Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer.

Fears of a “bipartisan” rotten deal to preserve their protection while putting more border patrol agents in immigrant communities â€” pitting DACA recipients against other vulnerable people â€” drove them to demonstrative direct action against not only the Trump regime but also their supposed “friends” in the Democratic leadership at Pelosi’s press briefing.

Resistance Exhibit C: What began in 2016 as Colin Kaepernick’s kneeling protest of racial injustice and murderous police violence has become a mass expression, fueled both by Trump’s attack tweets and by still more unpunished police killings of unarmed African Americans.

Resistance Exhibit D: We would be remiss not to mention the labor movement’s most successful political mobilization in recent history, when over 300,000 petition signatures in Maryland halted “right-to-work” legislation in the state pending a vote on the November 2018 ballot. (See [Labor Notes](#)).

Criminal Negligence and Fighting Back

What began as Washington’s inadequate and fumbling response to Hurricane Maria has devolved into a major case of criminal negligence that threatens the survival of millions of Puerto Ricans. The U.S. military, with its new \$700 billion budget approved by an 89-8 Senate vote (can we please have our gridlock back?), can play a deadly game of chicken flying warplanes on the North Korean coast. But in the critical first week after Hurricane Maria, why wasn’t it mobilized to clear the roads and get desperately needed relief to Puerto Rico’s stranded communities â€” or immediately establish emergency medical assistance for thousands of people in danger of dying without it? (See Rafael Bernabe’s article in this issue for the background of the

crippling of Puerto Rico’s finances and economy under U.S. colonial rule, and his account of the hurricane’s aftermath posted [here](#). For a scathing critique of Trump’s indolent response to the hurricane disaster, see the [New York Daily News](#).)

Trump couldn’t resist putting on full display the depths of his racism, lobbing rolls of paper towels into a San Juan audience, and his infantile attention span, announcing that FEMA won’t stay on the ground for the long term. It will be the outraged reaction of Puerto Rican communities in the island and the U.S. mainland, and solidarity with them, that will determine how this threat plays out.

Make no mistake, acts of resistance â€” and of basic human decency â€” are just the beginning of what will be needed to confront capital’s disasters. It’s absolutely critical that hundreds of people have poured into the streets of St. Louis in outrage over yet another unpunished police murder â€” Anthony Lamar Smith gunned down by officer Jason Stockley.

But if president Obama’s Justice Department declined to bring federal charges over the killing of Freddie Gray in Baltimore, there is surely no chance of the straight-up racist Sessions/Trump regime doing so in St. Louis or elsewhere. With the U.S. labor movement in its present sad condition unable to respond to these crimes, that job is left to the grassroots communities of color and anti-racist allies.

As for the Republican defund-and-destroy-Obamacare crusade, like Dracula it will rise again, both in the forthcoming budget battles and over Trump’s executive order to cancel federal subsidies for insurance. Bernie Sanders’ Medicare-for-all (single payer) Senate bill with its unprecedented 16 sponsors is a welcome development, and a sign of a rapidly growing movement. But right now, will it serve the Democrat leadership as a wedge issue to force a serious ongoing debate â€” or mainly a marketing promotion to hold their disillusioned progressive voting base in line for the 2018 midterm election season?

The anger and loathing in the first nine months of the Trump nightmare have staved off some of his worst agenda items â€” and these are not small achievements.

Spontaneous mass outpourings at airports killed the first attempt at Trump’s Muslim travel ban. After Charlottesville popular outrage, mass mobilizations and physical resistance have largely replaced the fascist “white nationalist” big show with small turnouts of ratlike neo-nazis huddling behind protective police lines.

Support for Trump has pretty much shrunk toward its irreducible hardcore base. There is no need to dwell on what the broad public knows, and the Republican leadership better than anyone â€” that Trump’s behavior is unlikely ever to be “normalized,” and that his affinity for dictators and thugs on the global stage is embarrassing even by the usual cynical norms of imperial conduct.

Whether Donald Trump might actually need a war or near-war to salvage his ill-gotten presidency, and how far he might be allowed to push the crisis with North Korea or Iran, is a truly scary question. (A statement “No Trump, No War, No Way” from Solidarity, the organization sponsoring Against the Current, is posted [at](#).)

Forcing the Issue

None of these considerations, important as they are, contradict the deeper reality that U.S. society and human civilization are being hammered by one disaster after another â€” calamities fundamentally driven by capitalist production, accumulation and politics.

How many years have seen three consecutive monster storms like Harvey, Irma and Maria? Ten hurricanes and counting, for the first time since 1893, are only the Atlantic Basin side of the story. One-third of the country of Bangladesh, as well as big areas of India and Nepal, went underwater from monsoon rains that went way out of control, severely affecting more than 40 million people and directly killing over 1200. (<http://wxch.nl/2ewb1KT>)

The physics of the situation are not esoteric. Ocean waters are much warmer than historically normal, fueling the ferocity of storms. Warmer air holds more moisture, leading to massive increases in rainfall amounts and intensity. And in the case of Harvey, persistent high pressure to the north “a product of anomalies in jet stream currents keeping weather patterns in place longer than usual” kept the storm lingering over Houston, then back into the Gulf of Mexico for yet another landfall and enhanced havoc.

One might think that the impact on popular consciousness of such successive apocalyptic events should be cumulative. But high-level editorial decisions must have been taken not only at Fox News but at the “liberal” CNN and MSNBC and the “neutral” Weather Channel, that “climate change” was not to be seriously discussed in the storm coverage, and

if anyone mentioned it, quickly brushed aside as inappropriate or insensitive.

Climate chaos will produce ever more brutal tropical storm seasons and at the same time, more horrific wildfire seasons in the U.S. and Canadian West, less and thinner Arctic sea ice, permafrost melting and resulting methane releases, and other effects including accelerating northward movement of tropical parasites and the pace of species extinctions.

The only way of breaking this logjam is by powerful global environmental movements, rooted in the most heavily impacted communities and indigenous peoples’ struggles, that force the issue “as the magnificent mobilization against the Dakota Access Pipeline did this past year. Those fights don’t always win, but they put the crisis on the public agenda.

Not every ugly and tragic deportation can be blocked “most can’t, while the forces of racism and reaction hold power. Not every act of murderous police violence can be prosecuted “few will be, even when Democrats hold office, let alone the likes of Jeff Sessions. Not every ecocidal oil pipeline and fracking well can be stopped.

But they all must be protested, and called out for the racist and corporate crimes that they are. And the various protest movements “as they increasingly recognize, whether they’re about the planet or police or Palestine “must find ways to act together and in solidarity. The struggle to understand what our movements share in common is the necessary beginning of what’s needed to attack the root causes of capital’s spreading disasters.

[Against the Current](#)

“If the elections are held on December 21, the vast majority of independence leaders will be in prison!”

29 October 2017, by Andreu Coll

What have been Rajoy’s decisions regarding the proclamation of independence?

Rajoy has called elections for December 21 in Catalonia. He has taken control. Formally, he is the president of the Generalitat and Saturday morning he will concretize, with all the secretaries of State, how to take control of the Generalitat. They have dissolved all the international organizations of the Generalitat (the delegations abroad) except that in Brussels. They have even dissolved the delegation of the Generalitat in Madrid. They have broken the mandate of 140 members of the government, well beyond the councillors, president and vice-

president. They have also dissolved the Catalan parliament and called the elections. They have dismissed the political chief of police and the under-secretary of the interior. The Minister of the Interior is taking direct charge of the Catalan police.

It’s amazing because everyone thought that Rajoy was going to call the elections later, in June. But he finally decided to hold them as soon as possible. We will see if they will ban the separatist parties. On Monday, there will also be a complaint from the State Attorney General against the entire government, the president and perhaps the deputies who voted for independence. This is more difficult because the vote took place by secret ballot to avoid the repression.

Puigdemont will be accused of rebellion, he faces 30 years in prison! The Jordis are in prison for sedition, a less serious charge, so it is possible that on Monday the police will arrest the members of the government and give them a preventive sentence.

What can the Catalan government do?

It is difficult because there are now two legalities. According to Spanish law, the head of the Generalitat is Rajoy and Catalonia is part of the Spanish state ... There has therefore been the proclamation of independence, but it is not possible to impose the authority of the Generalitat on the territory.

On Saturday morning, there is an executive council meeting, made illegal. As soon as the decisions of the Council of Ministers are published in the official bulletin, everything that Puigdemont does will be added to the charges already standing against him ... notably that of usurpation of public office. If the elections are held on December 21, the vast majority of independence leaders will not be able to stand because they will be in prison!

Why did Puigdemont finally proclaim independence?

If Puigdemont had not proclaimed independence, it would have led to a break in the independence camp. When he put forward the idea of calling elections on Thursday, two members of parliament resigned and

there was an internal revolt in his party, PDeCAT. So he did not dare to do it. Moreover, he was pushed by the government's refusal to withdraw section 155. The majority of mayors in the provinces indicated that they would leave the party if he did not go all the way.

How will the population react?

There will be a mass movement to support the government, a movement that will be peaceful. The dynamics will accelerate. On Saturday, the government will decide how to take control of the Generalitat. But there could be a huge chaos, because of the arrests and the arrival of the Spanish authorities at each council. The other question is what will the Mossos, the Catalan police, do. The situation is very tense, there have already been

clashes between the national police and the Mossos. Rajoy wants to use the Mossos for repression and this will further divide this body.

Anti-Capitalists in Catalonia have just issued a press release **Defend the Catalan Republic and open the Constituent Process** stressing the importance of a constituent process, particularly to involve sectors that are not pro-independence, but above all to discuss the social content of the movement for a change of society. We also insist on the need to broaden the dynamics beyond Catalonia. It also depends on the general dynamic: mobilization will be peaceful at first, but there may be violent repression.

Solidarity initiatives all over Europe are important for us, to encourage us and weaken Rajoy.

October 1983 to October 2017 - The Irish State's Abortion War Against Women, the "Unmanageable Revolutionaries"

28 October 2017, by John Meehan

In 2017 all was changed, changed utterly. On 30 September 2017 the Abortion Rights Campaign (ARC) brought over 30,000 people on to the streets of Dublin demanding abortion services in Ireland and repeal of the 8th Amendment. [1]

A main speaker was Bernadette McAliskey:

"The third speech from the platform was given by civil rights leader, independent electoral politician, feminist, republican and ant-fascist Bernadette Devlin McAliskey. Speaking with her usual clarity and conviction she began by noting: *"it is unbelievable that we're still here, demanding something we demanded almost fifty years ago."* She praised the diversity of the current campaign, noting a sea-change from previous activist scenes she had been a part of

where the *"bad images"* of *"sex workers, trans people, traveller women, migrant women"* would not have been given any voice, and consequently denied any of the gains made by the movement. *"The eighth amendment"* she said *"is not exclusively about abortion. It is the usurpation of the individual's right to have control over their own body. It is the right of each person to exercise first and last control over their own body, all day, and every day"*. With such cognisance of the dynamics of power and political struggle, she made clear: *"Repeal of the eighth amendment is not a favour we are asking, it is a fundamental defence of democracy for everybody and every citizen. Achieving our aims is decriminalising, and making accessible, abortion, here in the South will give courage to those in the North*

to continue their same struggle for the same ends." [2]

In the 1980s the Catholic Church was politically and socially dominant. However, 33% of the voters defied the bishops in the 1983 referendum and voted No. By contrast the Dáil approved the 8th amendment wording by 85 votes to 11. The masses were more radical than the elected politicians. The No campaign lost, but it was not humiliated.

Looking back from 2017, it is clear that the religious right scored a pyrrhic victory - it overreached itself.

The religious right was dealt a body blow in the early 1990s as its incubator, the Catholic Church hierarchy, lost its suffocating grip on the minds of the Irish masses. Information about decades of child

abuse rose to the surface.

High profile priests and bishops were publicly exposed as hypocrites. Father Michael Cleary and Bishop Éamonn Casey appeared mighty to millions of adoring worshippers on monstrous altar-stages with Pope John Paul II during his 1979 Irish pilgrimage: these men, Father Ted style rock stars, fell from grace in the 1990s.

Cleary was an active promoter of the Catholic nationalist gang "Youth Defence". In the early 1990's two women - Annie Murphy and Phyllis Hamilton - came forward exposing these gentlemen as hypocrites who preached one thing and practised another - both clerics were fathers of children who lived double-lives, breaching the celibacy vows of the Catholic priesthood.

More universally, lies spread far and wide to carry the 1983 referendum caught up with their promoters. The Catholic right lost mass credibility - its halo lay on the ground, shattered in pieces.

In 1992 The X Case made world headlines: the Irish State, in secret, tried to intern a suicidal 14-year-old rape victim. Public anger quickly escalated. Huge mass protests forced the Fianna Fáil government to act: it handed the problem over to the Supreme Court. Humiliation followed for the religious right: the court ruled that the 14 year old could not be prevented from travelling outside Ireland for an abortion, and that censorship of abortion information was unconstitutional.

The Supreme Court injected a sting into the tail of the government: these judges ruled that abortion in Ireland was legal on the grounds of suicide. In 1992 and 2002 the state organised two referendums designed to overturn this ruling, and failed.

The pro-choice movement was on the winning side, defeating the anti-women forces in four abortion referendums: 3 in 1992 and 1 in 2002. [3]

Constantly, mass pressure to stage another abortion referendum getting rid of the 8th amendment has

intensified. The 30 September 2017 pro-choice march in Dublin was not an isolated event.

Before 2011, almost all Dáil Deputies refused to initiate any practical legal measures to achieve a deletion of the 8th amendment. But in the February 2011 General Election the old conservative party structure was shaken badly by the results of the 2008 financial crash: a number of left-wing pro-feminist Dáil Deputies won seats. They regularly proposed legislation providing for deletion of the 8th amendment. They also introduced abortion law reform bills which were constitutional. Most of these deputies worked closely with a growing feminist/socialist mass movement: the annual Abortion Rights Campaign marches for choice in Dublin took off in 2012, attracting very significant numbers on to the streets, most of them young women.

The response of successive right-wing governments (Fianna Fáil plus Green Party, Fine Gael plus Labour Party, Fine Gael minority government) has been : sit tight, play for time, hope the problem will go away.

On October 28 2012 Savita Halappanavar, a 31 year old woman who hailed from India, died in a Galway Hospital because she was denied an abortion. This made a huge national and international impact, and drew bigger mobilisations than the first ARC march. A Health Service Executive (HSE) Report on Halappanavar's death called for legislative and constitutional change. Inside the Dáil deputies Clare Daly, Ruth Coppinger and BrÁd Smith proposed abortion reform bills which were regularly defeated. The government introduced very restrictive new legislation posing as abortion reform - the Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013. Pro-choice deputies voted against it.

The above events occurred because an identifiable 31-year-old woman from India died in a Galway Hospital - a shocking commentary on "Official Ireland".

It is useful to compare and contrast two issues : same-sex marriage and abortion reform.

During the lifetime of the 2011-16 Fine Gael/ Labour Coalition a referendum was held which resulted in the legalisation of same-sex marriage. This campaign demonstrated the political incapacity of the Catholic religious right to prevent social progress on this issue. However, there are very important differences between same-sex marriage and abortion reform. [4]

Drawing on the experience of the marriage equality referendum, which was effectively an uncontested campaign, the Coalition leadership may be thinking that a variety of leaflets can be produced (with little internal discussion) in the last month; and that groups around the main urban areas will distribute them.

This is a risky tactic: unlike the equality referendum, which had a simple and popular proposal to allow gay men and women to marry each other, the Abortion Referendum will be seriously contested. There will need to be a mass canvassing campaign - but so far there is no orientation to this and no material for use in mass canvassing in support of repeal - whatever the final referendum proposition is.

Most right-wing politicians are astute: they know that a full-frontal defence of the 8th Amendment is deeply unpopular, and that association with the Catholic hierarchy on this issue is a kiss of electoral death.

They couch their arguments against a Repeal Referendum with passive statements, claiming there is "no appetite" for abortion law reform. Believing their own propaganda, the Fine Gael/Labour government of 2011-16 set up a "Citizens' Assembly" to examine the case for abortion law reform. Members of the assembly were selected to represent an accurate sample of the Irish voting population.

This intended delaying tactic backfired spectacularly. The assembly made a series of recommendations calling for radical reform of the state's abortion laws. [5]

The assembly's report is now with a parliamentary committee that is due

to issue recommendations in December 2017.

After that, according to Taoiseach [Prime Minister] Leo Varadkar, the Dáil will debate the issue and an “indicative timetable” means a referendum could occur in May or June 2018.

This is a very shaky agenda. This process has “delay” in its DNA.

Having said that, the government will find it difficult back out of its commitment. The death of Savita and the various international and domestic human rights pressures, the outcome of the Citizens’ Assembly and the mass pressure of the street activity are pushing the government towards a referendum to legally permit abortion but referendum wording remains unclear.

The Fine Gael government does not have a Dáil majority – it governs thanks to a “confidence and supply” arrangement with its right-wing rival Fianna Fáil and could easily fall in the early months of 2018.

Ruth Coppinger TD outlines the policy of pro-choice activists:

“The first question for the Oireachtas Committee on the 8th Amendment is to decide whether we think there should be a referendum and, if so, on what? In my opinion, having heard and read all the legal advice – and obtained

my own – we should propose a referendum to simply repeal the 8th. We should then legislate to provide abortion rights in this country, rather than sending people abroad or criminalising them at home.

For that reason, the Committee needs to make a decision on the first question, then move on to the other. People have been campaigning for years for repeal. It’s not new. The members of the Committee have known the Citizens Assembly proposals since April and have had six months to get their advice. We’ve also had hours of testimony by legal experts. Next week, we will meet the Committee’s legal adviser in private session and will then discuss this out in public and should then vote on the options.

So far, Solidarity-People Before Profit, the Civil Engagement Group, the Social Democrats, Ind4 Change, Labour and Sinn Féin have all backed motions for simple repeal. FG and FF are hesitating. Why? Is it because their large and well-funded parties haven’t had time to get legal advice? Or could it be that they want to, later on in the Committee, link a repeal referendum with restrictions on abortion legislation?” [6]

The pro-choice forces are mobilising. The ARC has campaigning groups around the state, raises a lot of money and distributes its own propaganda.

The main statewide umbrella organisation is the Coalition to Repeal the 8th Amendment which describes itself “The Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment is a growing alliance of over 100 organisations including human rights, feminist and pro-choice organisations, trade unions, health organisations, NGOs, community organisations and many others. Our members agree that the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution must be repealed in order to respect and protect the lives, health and choices of women in Ireland. Together we are raising awareness of the urgent need for a referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment.” [7]

Many organisations are working intensively on the issue within the broad coalition. For example the Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8th Amendment has worked consistently with trade union activists promoting Pro-Choice and Repeal the 8th policies. The result is that most large Irish Trade Unions now have progressive policies on this issue.

The anti-choice forces are using all their resources to attack the Citizens’ Assembly recommendations, and are attempting to squeeze the public debate into a narrow box.

The full picture will emerge in early 2018.

October 17 2017

Class, hegemony and independence

27 October 2017, by Brais Fernandez, Marc Casanovas

One of the typical “common sense” arguments of the traditional left for not supporting the Catalan referendum of October 1 is that the process is led by the bourgeoisie. This is blatantly false and can only be based on two misunderstandings, one malicious and another that is either the product of ignorance or a displacement of categories so absurd that it is invalidated. The falsity of this

argument is empirically verifiable. The Catalan big bourgeoisie has repeatedly protested against the process’ as irresponsible and generating instability for business, as anyone can see if they google the statements of the Catalan employers Foment del Treball. Ignorance comes in defining what the bourgeoisie is, as a concept that the Spanish left has only used in the last 40 years to refer

to Catalonia or, in the case of the PCE, to justify its policy of alliances with the progressive and national bourgeoisie (sic) represented by Suárez in 1978.

“Bourgeoisie” is a concept of classical economics taken over by Marxism, which defines the ruling class in relation to ownership of the means of production. As we have already

remarked, the elites of this social sector are against the process: Foro Puente Aéreo, Foment del Treball, the elitist Circulo Equestre, the Circulo de EconomÀa or the international Comisión Trilateral have repeatedly expressed their opposition to independence, as well as José Manuel Lara (Planeta), Isidre Fainé (CaixaBank), Josep LluÀs Bonet (Freixenet) and Josep Oliu (Banco Sabadell), although some sectors of Foment del Treball did, given the facts, support the process with the hope of improving its position and privileges in relation to the bourgeoisie of the rest of the Spanish state and internationally. Also, given the dynamics of popular mobilization, the process has been endorsed by most of the small and medium-sized enterprises, organized in entities such as PIMEC, Cecot or the Chamber of Commerce.

But in no case have these actors driven the process - faithful to their proverbial pragmatism they have been repositioning their interests as the process has moved on. As Artur Mas himself acknowledged with Lampedusian melancholy in front of the Colegi d'Economistes de Catalunya before 9N: "The elites of the country should not try to change the course of history, but they must channel this basic movement. It is not about braking or halting, but making it go well."

To make things not "go well" for these sectors of the ruling class, to influence their contradictions, and to try to ensure there is not a "channelling" of the crisis of the regime, ending with a new pact and redistribution of the pie among elites, is the first task for any organization or space that aspires to political and social change.

Watching from the sidelines, waiting for the biggest mass movement in Europe at the moment to crash, with the excuse that sectors of the Catalan bourgeoisie intend to "channel" it to their own interests, is not an option. To the contrary, it is precisely for this reason that the movement must be supported, and its political leadership challenged by activating and bringing together its most popular sectors. In the context of the "de facto 155" in Catalonia and democratic regression

throughout the state, failure to understand that if the sovereignty process crashes we all crash has its hermeneutic merit: not letting reality spoil a good story.

So, who leads? Or, rather, who surfs on the Catalan sovereignty movement? It is clear that a sector of the Catalan political class (undoubtedly full of undesirable elements and little inclined towards a radical transformation of society) has ceased to represent the political interests of the Catalan bourgeoisie (although they continue to defend their economic programme) and maintains its aspiration of playing a leading role through its control over a part of the state apparatus and its ability to adapt to a process of independence.

Here again, it is a question of not letting the social mobilization process that is taking place serve as a heroic account to justify its social and economic project of austerity. The challenge here is not who is capable of describing more vehemently a leading sector of the process, but how we are able to articulate a common ground between the Catalan pro-independence and pro-sovereignty left and the rest of the state that allows a new hegemony: a Catalan republic and constituent processes is a perspective that 1 October could activate if there was sufficient political will.

Faced with the tendency to see the Catalan independence process as something homogeneous, it is interesting to explore its internal contradictions and see it as a field of struggles and an undetermined end. In a national-popular process, homogeneity is a fiction prior to the real struggle or conquered through a monopoly of the state: that is, the "national" tends to overcome all the class contradictions that exist in the "popular". However, when this national-popular process is set in motion and conflicts with the apparatuses of state domination, the first cracks appear, forms of struggle that go beyond those of the ruling elites of the national-popular process.

This leads us to the question of trying to define the social basis of the process. We suppose that nobody will claim that there are more than two

million bourgeois or politicians in Catalonia. It is true that the dominant matrix is the so-called "middle classes" (a concept which, in its own definition, emphasizes the heterogeneity of its components and its relation to certain class expectations rather than a strictly Marxist definition, i.e., relationship to ownership of the means of production) and that the "working class" in a classical sense is absent. That is to say, we are dealing with a multi-class movement, in which there are workers, small owners, government employees, politicians, professionals, small and medium company owners, and so on but whose relationship with the independence movement is not determined by the economic relationship they occupy, rather by national-popular adhesion to the project of an independent Catalonia.

This implies a programme full of contradictions: a sector of the process seems to have as a model of independent Catalonia a kind of southern Switzerland. For most of the popular base the example is a Mediterranean Sweden, where the market is controlled by an efficient and sensible state (a dream shared, by the way, with most of the social base of Spanish progressivism). A minority but significant sector (more significant at least than in the rest of Spain and elsewhere than in Europe) is committed to a clearly anti-capitalist outcome to the process. Therefore, the glue of the perspective of an independent Catalonia hides different projects. Is that so strange? Have the mass political and social movements that have emerged since the defeat of the labour movement by neoliberalism had no similar weaknesses? Is it not the absence of a "formed" working class with a hegemonic transformative project the main absence that marks the limits of our time? Undoubtedly, these obvious limitations prevent us from speaking of the independence movement as a socially revolutionary movement because it does not question the material foundations of capitalism: the subordination of collective interest to private property, and relations of production and reproduction.

But did 15M do this? Were the working class and its interests the

central protagonists, occupying the workplaces and radiating from the heart of capital a project of an alternative society? It is true that 15M carried a socially more advanced programme, but that only appeared later for that sector of the left that today looks with suspicion to Catalonia and that also at the time looked with suspicion at the 15M movement, for not self-defining as being of the left and because of the absence of the “working class”. This conception of the role of the working class is reminiscent of Laclau’s correct criticism of Kautsky and of the Second International in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*:

“His supposedly radical position, based on the rejection of any compromise or alliance, was the centrepiece of a fundamentally conservative strategy. Since his radicalism relied on a process which did not require political initiatives, it could only lead to quietism and waiting. Propaganda and organization were the two basic - indeed the only - tasks of the party. Propaganda was geared to the creation of a broader “popular will”, through the winning of new sectors to the socialist cause, but above all to the reinforcing of working-class identity. As to organization, its expansion did not involve greater political participation in a number of fronts, but the construction of a ghetto where the working class led a self-focused and segregated existence. This progressive institutionalization of the movement was well suited to a perspective in which the final crisis of the capitalist system would come from the bourgeoisie’s own labours, while the working class merely prepared for its intervention at the appropriate moment. Since 1881 Kautsky had stated: “Our task is not to organize the revolution but to organize ourselves for the revolution; not to make the revolution but to take advantage of it.” [8]

It is true that the absence of a working class as the central vector in the independence process is an obvious limit. To deny it would be to apologize for the populist multi-classism that today is the fundamental thing holding the process together. But if we want to bring the debate to a strategic

level, rather than postulate “socialism out of time” and empty slogans, we must shift the discussion and start thinking that politics is constituted not only by structural factors, but also by political agents.

The attitude of an important part of the left to the independence movement is, so to speak, pre-hegemonic in two senses. On the one hand, the majority of the Catalan left, or at least its most significant part with leadership functions, the group of Ada Colau and the Comunes, see the movement as something static, incapable of different and open developments, mutations through internal conflict. The left in Catalonia that remains at this critical time outside the sovereignty movement (despite being part of it) assumes a passive position that neither fights for the leadership of the movement itself nor incorporates new social sectors generating a class delimitation within the process itself. It maintains an ambiguous attitude, of waiting, hoping that the independence option loses its strength and its thrust, with a strategy based on collecting the remains as a lever for a more than possible neo-constitutional negotiation with the elites that govern the Spanish state.

Certainly, to the passivity of the “Comunes” left in Catalonia must be added the limitations of the CUP, which, despite their honest radicalism, have not endeavoured to play a liaison role between the left and the independence movement, preferring, in key sites such as Barcelona City Council, to adopt a sectarian attitude that would secure the entrenchment of its space in a risky alliance policy that would drag the Comunes into a joint fight against the convergent-republican leadership of the sovereignty process.

On the part of the Spanish left, there is a tendency to regard the sovereignty movement as a “farce”, as if it were not something serious, but a simple game between elites, which reveals a complete misunderstanding of that old much-quoted idea of Lenin (which in reality is present in any “politics of conflict”) that division with the ruling classes is a precondition for any social transformation. A “precondition” means that it is not

enough in itself, but that it is a necessary contingency, which opens a rift by which emancipatory policies, partisan subjectivities and class interests can break through. It is true that the sovereignty movement could end in a Lampedusian farce, but so could everything else. Nothing is born true, it becomes true in active struggle and conflict. It is passivity that creates the lies, the false and eternal verdict of accomplished facts: those on top will always win. Although, confronted with this, an active position does not guarantee the truth, it is again the precondition for any emancipatory politics.

Those from below always move into historically concrete social and political conflicts, where the cards are always marked by those above and where degrees of consciousness are diverse and contradictory. Anyone looking for a pure social struggle, clear of political, cultural or national contradictions, looks for a field of struggle that is not of this world, which only exists in the iconic imagination of the worst nightmares of socialist realism. The longed-for and absent working class will only be formed in political struggle, in and beyond the workplace, in contact with other classes, defining its interests in real processes of political struggle and postulating from there the hegemony of its interests as the best overall solution to a society in crisis. Because the working class as a political subject does not exist as such, it is formed: what exists is a multiform mass which we call labour power, and which is present throughout society, even though it is not conscious of itself as a force for emancipatory politics.

It is true that the attitude of certain sectors of IU, such as Garzón, and of Podemos is different: it must be recognized that Podemos has defended a referendum in its discourse while IU has not been able to propose anything other than an abstract “Federal State”. However, the Catalan settlement proposed by Podemos rests on an as yet unfulfilled premise: that Podemos wins the elections with an absolute majority, since co-government with the PSOE, being realistic, would be totally linked to denying that referendum.

It is not impossible that this would happen at some point, but it is difficult to believe that this scenario will occur in the short term. Because this is the great tragedy of “gradualist” strategies: to think of political time in a linear and monotonous way, without disagreements, as if the Catalan process and 1 October were annoying parentheses within a passive strategy of accumulation of electoral forces, instead of articulating the different temporalities that structure the political field of the state, and thinking of 1 October as the catalyst that could precipitate the fall of the PP government and open up an acceleration of political time that would propitiate a leap forward of constituent processes throughout the territory of the Spanish state that will finally bury the regime established in 1978 under the ruins of the valley of the fallen.

Every crisis is conjunctural: the regime crisis provoked by the Catalan situation will not last for ever and the independence movement, if it does not go all the way at this time of maximum opportunity, may not have another chance in a while. It seems unlikely that with the current leadership of the process it will be carried through to the end: a rebellious disobedience implies a degree of cohesion and determination that the Catalan political class seems unable to assume, while the Catalan and Spanish left are unwilling to take advantage of the process from the point of view of constituent democracy.

Perhaps the tragedy is that the hypothetical “failure” of the sovereignty process is potentially functional both for the left represented by Ada Colau in Catalonia and to that which is represented in Spain. In the words of Josep Mar  a Antentas, the Catalan sovereignty post-process scenario does not augur a situation of democratic radicalization, because passivity *“before the challenge of the independence movement indicate[s] an organization more inserted in conventional governability and institutional normalization than anything else. They[It] give[s] an image of a political force more favourable to an exit from the institutional crisis from above, in the form of a positive, but limited, transformation of the traditional party system, in favour of a new system where the post-neoliberal left has a greater weight than in the previous phase.”* [9]

There are still some decisive moments where things can happen. Perhaps the repression of the PP and post-Francoist state apparatuses will awake the majority from their passivity. Because opportunities happen and then the only thing left is the self-fulfilling prophecy of “no we can’t”.

In recent weeks there has been a qualitative leap in the level of conflict with the state and in the massive and spontaneous response of the population, with elements of self-organization and methods of struggle that go beyond what is usual for

institutionalized civil society in the process: the entry of the labour movement with the call for a general and social strike for 3 October, the decision of the dockers to refuse assistance to the military forces’ ships docked in the port, the student movement blocking traffic and occupying university buildings, different platforms promoting acts of solidarity throughout the state and a charter of social rights in Catalonia culminating in an assembly of Catalan social movements, signs of solidarity and demonstrations throughout the Spanish state.

To the extent that this happens, to the extent that defence of the right to decide of the Catalan people is placed in the world of labour and the social movements, the social agenda of these movements and broad sectors of the population hitherto absent will begin to have “constituent” force. This is fundamental to begin to construct and visualize a new balance of forces, a new political camp of strategic alliances, that challenges the neoliberal “constituent” agenda of Junts Pel S   on the one hand and forces the state-wide left to back the energies unleashed by the independence process as a destabilizer of the 1978 regime. The problem of Spain and the Catalan question will only be unlocked if the working and popular classes offer solutions and are the protagonists of what Gramsci called “grand politics”, that is, those facts that affect the “configuration of states”, the themes historically unresolved by the ruling classes.

Thirty-three years of youth camps

26 October 2017, by **Jonathan Simmel**

Thomas holds the record of having attended 33 camps since the first in 1984. For the last 15 years he has been one of the comrades responsible for the camp from the Fourth International leadership.

During this year’s camp we talked with Thomas about the basis for the camp, the historical development and where the camp is now. Of course we had time to take a trip down Memory Lane, for Thomas to share some of his experiences from the camps with us.

The common ground for the

summer camps

The first camp was in 1984 during a period of great optimism in the Fourth International both in its leadership and in the national sections. In the beginning of the 1980s, several sections in Western Europe had begun to build independent youth organisations in solidarity with the FI.

The Danish SAP founded the Socialist Youth League in 1981. As a part of building of youth organisations it was agreed to try to gather members of these organisations, for mutual exchange of experience and inspiration in a joint project within the framework of the FI - a summer camp of practical internationalism, where the members could meet each other face to face.

The FI and its sections later on have turned to build broad anti-capitalist parties and the historical developments have removed some of the 1980s grand optimism. The basic understanding, however, has not changed:

*the importance of building parties and youth organisations rooted in youth

* training new young cadres

* to facilitate they meet across nationalities and cultures.

Still political need for FI

Thomas considers the camp is still a unique opportunity despite the trend towards broader organisations. The alternative could be that the broad youth organisations organized their own camp.

This idea has also come forward in the European Left Party for example. But the political span from the Syriza Youth to Die Linke's youth to SUF in Denmark is too big - such a project would stall in the planning phase because of the lack of political common ground. Our camp offers a unique opportunity, which the common political framework within the FI can offer, despite the need to

gather broader parts of the youth. This framework makes it practically possible to organize the camp - the political programme can be broader than the FI itself, but still with a respect for the camp's starting point, and the security a common basic understanding also provides. [10]

Thomas gives an example from 1997. The camp gathered 500 people in France with a good political outcome on the basis of a common understanding of the how capitalism works and its development. This understanding could the participants further build and develop upon.

Later that year Thomas participated in an intercontinental meeting against neoliberalism in the Spanish State, 4000 were gathered. Like the later social forums, the goal was to connect movements and organisations fighting neoliberalism. But it was it was first of all the solidarity with the Zapatists that had really mobilised people. The consequence was that the participants' experiences from struggles in the different countries did not really come out in the debates.

Solidarity with the Zapatists was an important task and filled the FI youth camp that year.

At the same time as the intercontinental event, The World Youth Festival - which originates from the communist parties - was hosted by large delegations from for example North Korea, gathered 12- 13.000 people in Cuba for a festival where young people met to hear old people lecture them about the political situation and theory.

Thomas sees this as a clear example of the fact that numbers alone is not the decisive question. It requires a common political understanding to be able to organize further on the international level. It does not serve any purpose to think that the youth should be lectured to by old men. It is essential to build upon young people's own experiences and life situations as a starting point for organizing among the youth. Therefore, it still makes sense to try to gather the non-stalinist and non-reformist youth as equals with different international experiences.

The specific output of the camp?

Through its history the camp has played an important role in international initiatives recently in relation to the refugee and migrant movements. The camp has created crucial links to ensure the various national movements coordinate internationally.

In the 1990s, it was the joint campaign for a multiethnic Balkan and the various solidarity convoys for Bosnia. Before that it was the European campaign against nuclear missiles in Western Europe.

These are 3 examples from different periods in the camp. You could of course add a lot of current mobilisations to summits, COP processes, climate actions, boycott campaigns and so on.

The most crucial coordination is actually the more continuous exchange of experiences in relation to European movements and the continuous exchange of experience. The Red-Green Alliance's new program on feminism would certainly have looked quite different if not committed comrades had participated in the camp year after year and discussed a number of these issues with international comrades with other experiences outside of the narrow Danish context.

Furthermore you should be aware that it is a bad concept of how to make common European campaigns if, for example, the trade unions just translates the same 10 demands and mobilizes in all countries around them. The true international campaign is about common understanding of objective, which is set in the national perspective and thus also develops demands that can mobilize in different countries and fields of work.

The fall of the wall

Despite that the FI was a fierce critics of the Soviet Union, the fall of the wall and the subsequent crisis of the left

has of course affected the camp. The FI tried to use the camp as the initiative that could try to rebuild a European left after the fall of the wall through opening up and broadening the camp. It was attempted to gather the non-stalinist parts of the left, including groups originating from the Communist Parties. This gave among other examples our Italian comrades the opportunity to work inside the Rifondazione Comunista and in Denmark to build the Red-Green Alliance.

Especially, we tried to reach out to former Soviet countries in Eastern Europe, and as part of this, we held the camp in Czechoslovakia in 1991. It happened without a strong group in the country, that could lift all the tasks before and during the camp. It was an attempt to reach out to groups in the region. Unfortunately, the attempts to build a new left wing in Eastern Europe have not been a great success.

It is shown by the numbers of participants from Eastern Europe since then. Only Poland and Russia participated on a regular basis for a number of years. Taking part in the camp was also quite difficult.

The camps were held in Western Europe and there are tough economical conditions. An example of this is the comrades from Russia, who had to hitchhike all the way from Moscow to France for the camp. But it was a very difficult issue to hold a socialist camp in Eastern Europe just after the fall of the wall. It was a requirement that all the staff should be employed, problems arose concerning women receiving less food than men. It was difficult to change it as it was an external staff.

Since then, older volunteering comrades have served the food. They understand when practical tasks have a political side as well. This can be addressed by the camp's leadership.

The following years had some of the largest camps in the history of the camp. The years overflowed with initiatives and parties that collapsed, and only a few survived the crisis, including FI and the youth camp. The camp soon became a broader gathering place, where anarchist also felt they had a place to meet in.

Most memorable camp

But no matter the amount of experiences Thomas has had and no matter the amount of anecdotes, the answer comes immediately when his asked about what has been his most memorable camp - his first camp in 1984! Most of the explanation is, of course, that you always remember your first camp, especially when Thomas was only 14 - it was the first holiday without his parents. Furthermore it was the first FI camp ever. The whole base of experience and institution that's now built around the camp was not there yet. The organization was said to be at the least ... wobbly...

But besides the camp of 1984 as the greatest single experience, Thomas especially points out the travels to and from the youth camps, the incredible long bus trips. You are forced to spend maybe 24 hours with your comrades locked in a bus no matter how unpleasant it is in the situation.

Something is always happening on the trip, that makes it memorable. Not just when the bus burns right after you left the camp on your way home and you have a few days extra in Portugal, but actually also on the quieter trips. The compulsion to be together for up to two days it just makes people silly and that creates fun experiences that tie comrades together.

The camp now and

in the future

Thomas saw the Russian Revolution as being a long time ago, when he became politically active and went to his first camp in 1984. During this year's camp, we marked the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution, and the camp has now existed for on third of this time. It reminds us of that for the participants, the first camps are also far back in history before they were born. The world has changed a lot since then - so why does the youth camp still exist asks Thomas. The answer is that it still have something to offer - it's a useful tool. For the Fourth International, the camp makes the FI something concrete, a concrete experience, a concrete politics, that we do not meet in everyday life.

Take a look at all the people, especially in Europe, who have become leading comrades in the FI or in the national sections within the last 33 years. They have all been a part of the youth camp and they have also experienced the FI as something concrete with direct personal relationships with other comrades from all over the world. The personal relationships have given a deeper recognition of each others historical experience: understanding of the national contexts and differences. Personal relationships have built the foundation for a continued cooperation in relation to campaigns or exchange of experience in writing.

In a Danish context we are working to build and strengthen the SUF and the Red-Green Alliance.

Its also quite clear that a large number from the new generation and leading comrades in central bodies and in academic work, local branches etc draw on their experiences and learning from the youth camps, including those who have not joined SAP, but have only attended the camp.

Modernisation by a pre-modern bureaucracy? —The 19th Congress of the CPC

25 October 2017, by **Au Loong-Yu**

What is the significance of the 19th Congress of the CPC?

Headlines have focused on the way the Congress shows that Xi Jinping is further consolidating his power; but another important point is how it represents a total regression to aristocratic politics.

In Xi's report there is a section which reads, "to strengthen party building within the army, hence we shall promote education on the theme of 'passing on the red genes, taking up the responsibility to strengthen the army'". This refers to the legacy of the party; it was the party that founded the People's Liberation Army (PLA), not the other way round, and this legacy must be reasserted again and again. But the choice of the words "red genes" is also in line with an even more noticeable change recently. Less than three months ago, the party school newspaper published an article hailing Xi Jinping as the "nucleus of the party centre", and reminded readers of Xi's "in-born genes" and "red blood line" as he is the son of an old party cadre, Xi Zhongxun. [11]

From Mao's period until the 1980's, the CPC always avoided giving the public the impression that the children of the founding fathers of the PRC were making use of their family background to advance privileges, even if they were. Most people know that their children enjoy endless privileges but this rarely enters the public sphere. Even when it does, the term used is a neutral word *gaoganzidi*, or "children of high ranking cadres", which suggests no connection to the "red blood line", and hence is a very broad term.

Soon after the 1989 democratic movement was followed by the collapse of the USSR, certain aging top leaders concluded that if the CPC

wants to avoid the fate of its Russian counterpart, one way to do this was to pass power to their children. At the same time some of the children of old cadres started to circulate documents among themselves calling for the party to take direct ownership of state property. All these campaigns were carried out in secrecy.

This was also the time when outsiders, mainly those who fled to the west after the 1989 crackdown, began to give a different name to these "children of high ranking cadres": *taizidang*, or "Princelings", which carries a derogative tone and therefore never appears in China's media.

When the issue began to emerge in China's media, it was neither *gaoganzidi* nor *taizidang*, but *hongerdai*, or "second red generation", which is a positive label. This term is radically different from *gaoganzidi* since it explicitly points to the red blood line and is therefore much narrower than the term *gaoganzidi*. It practically excludes all those cadres whose parents were not old cadres.

The term started to emerge in the Chinese media during the term of Hu Jintao. But it was probably Bo Xilai, the former Chongqing chief, and son of another old cadre, who was brought down by Hu Jintao in 2012, who made the issue of "second red generation" even more visible, because of his high profile and his promotion of "singing red songs". Public acknowledgment of the existence and power of the "red second generation" by the media continues even after Bo's downfall in 2012, and has been picked up by Xi Jinping's cronies, although sometimes it is dressed in different terms such as "red blood line".

The fact that the CPC's top leader now has to stress his "red blood line" is in

line with the general trend within the party of the "second red generation", with all the political and economic power that they have accumulated in the past thirty years, now increasingly demanding a more secure position. This layer is far from homogenous; it is beset with differences in politics from liberals to die hard nationalists or even fascists; making full use of their "red blood line" is a common point for all those who are politically active.

Xi is no exception and now in order to consolidate his position as the "core leader" of the party he is using it to the full. This also means a certain break with the past, when the CPC was still talking about "the separation of the party from the government", "political reform is necessary", "upholding collective leadership", "democracy as a universal value", "lay low over foreign policy", etc. etc.

We now have a top leader who comes from the "second red generation" and who also loudly proclaims the ascendancy of this "second red generation" to absolute power, while displaying open contempt for "western style" democracy and "collective leadership". This is a total regression to aristocracy. A rupture in the CPC line has occurred.

But doesn't the fall of Bo Xilai also show that the second red generation is heavily involved in a dog eat dog fight amongst itself?

It does. Actually we have come to an interesting point in this regression. There are now two levels of political struggle going on.

Firstly, the second red generation is trying to rob more power from those bureaucrats whose parents are not old leading cadres. Secondly, amongst the second red generation most of them

want more power, but Xi wants absolute power, hence there is tension.

As the history of Imperial China shows, the absolute power of the emperor necessarily contradicts the power of the nobles. Absolute autocracy comes into conflict with aristocracy. The final solution for the emperor was the almost total destruction of the nobles as a class, and this is what mainly differentiates Imperial China's trajectory from European experiences.

The reason that Xi Jinping is so power hungry, leading him to defeat both the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao cliques and to gain all the power through this, is precisely because he began from a much weaker position than his predecessors when he began to rise to power. For the first time in CPC history the candidates for the top leader were chosen by Xi's peers rather than by old leaders such as Deng Xiaoping or Chen Yun who enjoyed undisputed authority (although the retired leaders Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao do play a role here, their authority does not match Deng or Chen's).

No wonder he was challenged by Bo Xilai, although secretly. Lucky for him, he had someone who did the job for him. Months before Xi succeeded to power he found himself in the middle of a fierce dog eat dog fight between Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin. This proved beneficial as he could use their fight as leverage to promote his own power, and eventually sent one Standing Committee member and three Politburo members - who are either cronies of Jiang or Hu - to jail.

This proves that Xi is a capable politician, if one remembers that he started from a much weaker position with no blessing from old cadres. But in order to stay in power beyond his two terms in office, if we are to believe wide spread rumours, he must constantly keep the aristocratic trend in check, and destroy those who even dare to challenge him, or else his autocracy will be undermined by the aristocracy. Recently, a credible Hong Kong newspaper, reported about how just and strict Xi is: he simply ignores requests for promotion from his old

"second red generation" friends. [12] Another report also described the same thing: that someone from the "second red generation" requested permission to set up a special association for the "second red generation", but this was rejected by Xi. [13]

Xi also needs carrots as well as sticks. Besides keeping the second red generation in check he also needs their support to fight off other forces within the bureaucracy. Hence he needs to strike a deal with that generation and allow them to share some clearly defined power. There are rumours that Xi's anti-corruption campaign mainly targets bureaucrats from humble backgrounds and rarely touches the second red generation. If this is correct then it is a good example of a de facto deal between the two sides.

There are other forces within the bureaucracy. Just how many factions do the CPC have right now? And what political positions do they represent?

I am not sure we should use the word "factions" for the inner party fight. I prefer to use "cliques". According to conventional wisdom, there is the Shanghai clique and the communist youth clique, with Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao as their leaders respectively. It is not clear if there are substantial political differences. Xi's success lies on the partial destruction of some main cadres from both cliques, consolidating his own clique in the process. But careful examination of the words and deeds of these top leaders could still lead us to certain hints as to the answers to the question of whether the inner party fights carries political differences with it. There are people within the party, for instance the former premier Wen Jiabao, who were upset with the "red blood line" trend, and who spoke of the need for "universal human rights".

The ascendancy of the "red blood line" obviously alarms those with humble backgrounds, and makes the division between the two different components of the bureaucracy even more visible. Independently from the question of the cliques and the kind of politics they represent, there are two kinds of

cadres. One is the "red blood" bureaucrats, who have come to power because of their parents. The second come from more humble backgrounds and only succeed in climbing up the ladder through good examination results, hard work and luck. It is not accidental that many from the second component also come from the Communist Youth League, itself considered by the party as the preparatory school for leadership.

Hu Jintao came to power through this channel. With the growing ambition of the second red generation, the bureaucrats from a humble background feel threatened. Xi used Hu to beat off Bo Xilai's attack, and after this succeeded Xi began to turn to dealing with the so called "tuanpai", or the Youth League clique by accusing the League of incompetence and cutting half of its budget. This is an unmistakable sign of the conflict between the two kinds of bureaucrats.

It does not yet necessarily imply real political differences, but it does mean that the rift within the bureaucracy is widening as a result of its regression to autocracy and aristocracy simultaneously. Perhaps it is not accidental that Wen Jiabao, who had made dissenting voices, also came from a humble background and worked his way up through his own hard work. People like him definitely have more to lose if the "red blood line" criterion comes first in choosing top leaders. These differences may play out even more visibly in the future if a political crisis erupts.

This is not new. In the history of Imperial China the tension between those bureaucrats who had noble backgrounds or who were descendants of gongchen (meritorious statesman; a person who has rendered outstanding service to the emperor) or were well established mandarins, and those from humbler backgrounds always existed. Sometimes this partially defined factional fights, for instance during the Tang Dynasty.

This is also the problem of bureaucracy when it enjoys supreme power: there is an innate tendency for the bureaucracy to regress into an aristocracy. But precisely because of

this it always provokes a reformist response; a response of countering the first tendency by upholding meritocracy, to ensure that the bureaucracy is able to reproduce itself through examinations and recruitment which are open to all, including people from humble backgrounds.

Most of the time the two kinds of bureaucrats can work together despite all the bureaucratic red tape and dysfunction, but when social and political crisis set in, the tension between them might become sharper and begin to have a bearing on political differences.

But how does this side of the story affect the future development of the CPC when all the power is concentrated in Xi's hands?

The moral of the story of Chinese history is that even if Xi can concentrate all the power in his hands indefinitely, which means successfully breaking the precedent of a fixed term of ten years, there is still an unsolvable problem. Behind the regression to aristocracy and the general degeneration of the bureaucracy etc. lies the general trend of the bureaucracy appropriating an ever larger share of surplus products produced by working people. The plundering of the country by the CPC has gone so far that today China's continuous growth heavily relies on debt. When the straw breaks the camel's back, it will lead to a time of crisis.

If we look at the history of the Imperial dynasty, it was always in a bad shape long before any uprising from below. It was already much weakened by its own centrifugal forces driven by general corruption, loss of discipline and the plundering of both public wealth and people's wealth. These were also the moments when the more sensible mandarins became more aware of the need for the bureaucrats collectively to stamp out corruption and put a limit on the plundering of social wealth. This started a vicious circle of reform and counter-reform and along with it the sharpening of inner struggles within the bureaucracy.

In some senses, we are arriving at a

similar situation today. Xi Jinping's efforts to stamp out corruption should be seen as similar to reforms in the past, although the accusation that his campaign's purpose is chiefly to get rid of his opponents may still valid. Xi may have temporary success in terms of his anti-corruption campaign, but in the longer run he is undermining state machinery by creating great insecurity among mandarins. The fact that most mandarins and lesser officials are trying to transfer their families and their wealth overseas is just one visible sign of growing centrifugal forces within the CPC.

Surely Xi has a lot more modern tools to control the bureaucracy and to mould it to his taste. Yet he lacks one very important tool in comparison to the emperors of Imperial China. While the emperor, the ultimate arbitrator of the bureaucracy, did not worry about the legitimacy of passing on his throne to his heirs, Xi does not possess the legitimacy to be a life-long dictator, let alone put a crown on his head.

If the great Chairman Mao needed to fight (and what a big fight it was) to achieve this, then one can hardly imagine a scenario where a lesser figure like Xi can just sit there and achieve the same result. All other cliques at both the level of the "second red generation" and the regular bureaucrats will try to resist Xi's attempt to become an emperor without a crown.

In other words, Xi's concentration of power in his own hands indefinitely will only result in further inner party fights in the future. Regardless of whether he wins or loses, what can be sure is that there cannot be long term peace within the party, even if the fight is temporarily over, and an apparently harmonious party leadership is on display during the congress where all former top leaders attend.

What if Xi is content with the previous arrangement, namely a ten year term for the top leader plus the privilege of recommending his successors, and steps down in 2022? [14]

This also means that Xi has to obligate himself to collective leadership as well. We cannot of course exclude the

possibility that Xi will opt for this choice, but this will bring the risk that Xi may meet the same fate as his predecessors Jiang Zemin or Hu Jintao, whose influence was eroded once they stepped down and even faced the possibility of becoming targets for retaliation. Given what Xi has done to other cliques, and that the question of "why him?" will continuously be raised by his peers among the second red generation, the choice to stick with the old rule may not be that attractive to Xi. Either choice is not a real solution.

We should remind ourselves that in March 2016, when Xi already had the upper hand, some party members were still able to get a letter calling for him to resign posted on the internet. Even though it was deleted later, no major retaliation has ever been reported. [15]

To sum up, I think the main contradiction of the CPC is this: it crazily promotes modernization but in itself it is a bureaucracy deeply rooted in a pre-modern political culture, so that in the 21st century it is still incapable of introducing a stable regime for succession to power which is acceptable to all significant mandarins.

The Soviet CP had more or less achieved this after the death of Stalin. This failure of the CPC has its origin in its medieval political culture, formed and shaped since it abandoned the cities and became a rural guerrilla force in the late 1920s. There was certainly a very strong element of Stalinism in addition to its medieval Chinese influence, but this was definitely no cure for the CPC's authoritarianism and the cult of personality around Mao, but only reinforced the latter. The CPC has certainly copied modern practices from its western counterparts as well, something which must not be overlooked, but instead of replacing old practices these modern elements seem to have adapted to the old practices well. There was once a larger moderate liberal voice within the CPC, but Xi's rise to power precisely represents the demise of this voice.

In the end we arrive at a scenario

where even if the CPC can impose “totalitarian” rule over the population and the prospect for a rebellion from below still looks dim, a break in the system may happen somewhere else. The CPC’s very inability to solve its

succession crisis implies an unstable regime, and it may prove that its own pre-modern political culture increasingly comes into conflict with and is also increasingly unable to deal with a rapidly urbanized and modernized population that have

higher expectations than their parents. There is going to be a long contest between an old China and a new China.

22nd October, 2017

Accounting for 40 years of market reforms

24 October 2017, by B. Skanthakumar

This shift from State control of the economy to marketisation was rationalised as the only alternative to overcome the fiscal and political malaise between 1970 and 1977, when the terms of trade turned against the island’s primary commodity exports and youth unemployment stoked social unrest.

The ‘open economy’ that evolved after 1977 is now firmly entrenched and has become ‘common sense’ in mainstream politics. The current coalition between Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe’s historically right-wing United National Party (UNP) and President Maithripala Sirisena’s faction of the traditionally left-of-centre Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) is but one expression of a larger consensus on the path to development and its terminus.

However, there is stubborn resistance among politicians, bureaucrats, academics and lobbyists to honest accounting for past performance following structural adjustment reforms, even as the advocates of neo-liberalism dogmatically demand their intensification.

Cure worse than disease

Indeed an overview of key economic indicators illuminates how the cure has been worse than the disease.

Growth in gross domestic product has been unspectacular, averaging 4.8% between 1978 and 2009, in comparison to 3.5% between 1971 and 1976. Some of this initial expansion was from massive inflows of grants and soft loans.

A third world country with impressive outcomes in literacy, longevity and social welfare, achieved in an era of modest growth, national capitalism and social democratic ideology, was now hailing the virtues of high growth, foreign investment and free market capitalism. Western donors and multilateral agencies were eager to reward its Government, even when State practice diverged from rhetoric.

Average household income has risen rapidly but so too has the concentration of wealth. Inequality has deepened: the gini coefficient that was 0.35 in 1973, worsened to 0.48 by 2012/13. The richest 20% of households command 52.9% of income, more than the rest combined; while the poorest 20% muster only 4.5%. The bottom 40% of the population survive on under \$ 2.50 per day.

Inflation has often runaway into double digits, whereas before 1970 it was under 3%, as the cost of living spirals and household debt escalates.

Negligible value

Manufactured goods have soared in share of exports from 13.4% in 1977 to 77% in 2016; but are dominated by ready-made apparels, which have negligible local value addition.

Industries that profited from textile and clothing quotas, duty-free inputs, tax holidays, free infrastructure, subsidised services and lax environmental and labour regulations, still depend on imports of raw and

semi-finished materials. This impedes linkages in the local economy and gobbles net foreign exchange earnings.

Export-oriented industrialisation is promoted as the cure-all for all ills. Its labour force is mostly of women in low waged and highly exploitative conditions; and where unions are not allowed to organise inside and outside the export processing zones.

Employment in this sector has only reached over 470,000 or under 6% of the labour force. This is the same number as those who leave every two years for foreign employment. Economic reforms have failed to create decent and secure jobs.

Declining agriculture

Agriculture has drastically declined in economic share to 7.1% in 2016 from 35.1% in 1970-71; and in export composition to 22.6% in 2016 from 94.6% in 1970-71. Still it matters in livelihoods, as over 70% of the population is rural and as marginally more are employed in agriculture (27.1%), than in industry (26.4%).

There has been limited diversification here too: tea, rubber and coconut predominate, as before 1977. Revenue from tea, plucked mostly by women, has slumped to third-place in export income. In comparison, migrant remittances of mainly women in domestic work in the Middle East amounted to nearly \$ 7 billion last year or almost equal to earnings from textiles, tourism and tea combined.

Women’s work is the basis of the

monetised and care economy but their labour force participation rate has plateaued at under 36% or less than half that of men.

Food insecurity

Sri Lanka's main food imports of wheat flour, rice, sugar, milk and milk products and fish and fish products are unchanged. Unsurprisingly demand for food has risen along with population increase and household income.

The rupee is currently trading at Rs. 153 to one US dollar (whereas it was Rs. 8.60 in 1977) but with no corresponding gain in export volumes and earnings. In 2015, income from exports only equalled 55% of the cost of imports, widening further the balance of payments deficit.

Chronic under-investment in food production has intensified dependence on imports and also insecurity as consumers are more exposed to world market price fluctuations. The withdrawal of state support in access to credit, inputs and extension services as well as in direct purchase, storage, transport and distribution has abandoned producers to predatory middlemen, aggravating agrarian distress.

Mounting debt

All regimes have bridged the chasm between income and expenditure with loans. External debt has ballooned to

\$ 46.6 billion (from under \$ 942 million in 1976), diverting resources from public spending to debt-servicing.

Foreign Direct Investment last year was only \$ 898 million, whereas foreign loans totalled \$ 1.287 billion. This has been the pattern throughout despite generous incentives to private capital and wage repression in the export sector.

Often, Sri Lanka's disastrous internal war between 1983 and 2009 is blamed for its sluggish economic performance. In fact its economic impact was diffuse, as export production of goods and crops was outside the conflict zone. Rather it was during the southern youth insurrection of 1987-1989 - itself a reaction to conspicuous inequalities post-liberalisation - that the economy took its worst battering until 2001.

Market fundamentalism

The 'Vision 2025' promise of "inclusive and equitable growth and development" is deceitful. It recycles the same market fundamentalist ideology that was supposed to answer the worries of the economy. Instead, 40 years later it is apparent, to those who wish to see, that economic

fundamentals are frailer and not stronger than before.

Growth is modest and its fruits are reaped by a minority. Inflation has not been kept under control and reached 7.9% in August, eroding the purchasing power of consumers. Industrialisation has failed to take-off and propel local manufacturing that could expand the home market and save on foreign exchange outflows. Agriculture is disregarded as a means to rural wellbeing and food security, but intended only to cultivate what cannot be eaten.

There was, and is, no deluge of inward foreign direct investment to stimulate production and employment. The debt mountain grows without remorse condemning future generations to live fearfully in its shadow. Gender norms that discriminate against women, including in their entry and equitable participation in the labour force, have not been substantially eroded within the 'open economy'. Indeed, the withdrawal of social welfare provisioning, and the decline of stable employment, has only intensified the burden heaped upon women.

The development model followed by successive regimes since 1977 has failed. Is it not past overdue to find one that works for the many, and not the few?

[Ft Lanka](#)

We defy article 155

23 October 2017, by **Anticapitalistes**

It is a coup d'état that comes on top of the attacks in the run up to October 1 and on the day itself, of the persistent deployment of the police under which we live; the demagoguery of the last week against those in the education sector who have been a spearhead of the movement; and, of course, in the imprisonment of Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sànchez, presidents of Omnium and ANC who we support.

The response to this series of attacks is a mobilized Catalonia, like almost half a million people who yesterday filled the center of Barcelona.

2. It is on the streets and through popular self-organization that we can make the right to self-determination effective, only from there can we withstand the threats and repressions of the regime. Not recognizing the authority of the PP to manage the

media, the police forces or the Catalan Parliament requires a leap forward in the mass civil disobedience we have experienced in the last month. To make this leap, we will have to respond consistently against Article 155; through mobilizations, general strikes, collecting funds to pay fines collectively, developing economic alternatives ... A range of initiatives that allow us not to leave anyone behind, to overcome the obstacles that

we live in and to counteract the strategy of fear.

3. Far from the return to "normality" that the regime claims to seek, the suspension of the autonomy of the Catalan institutions attempts to establish a constitutional restoration with a reactionary effect. In the face of this reaction, he will find a massive rejection in Catalonia where disobedience will be organized and large alliances outside Catalonia will be built to avoid isolation. To build alliances with the peoples of Europe that suffer from the authoritarian turn of the EU and its governments, but

also to rearm a democratic anti-regime block across the Spanish State that can infect the constituent impulse everywhere.

4. It is now an urgent task to make the sovereignty of Catalonia real to avoid constitutional restoration in the authoritarian framework and not to retreat in the democratic challenge emanating from October 1. This implies overcoming talk that independence is easy and collectively assuming the challenges we have in advance. We believe that the way of materializing this sovereignty is

opening up a popular constituent process, that those who defended the referendum will also be the protagonists of the new Republic. A constituent process that is not the mere drafting of a constitution, but a period to develop new institutions which grow from popular self-organization, which generate counter-powers to overcome blackmail, but also that allows the field of sovereignty to widen socially.

Disobedience and self-organization are our institutions; from them we open a constituent process on which to build the Republic.

Program and tasks for reconstruction

22 October 2017, by **Rafael Bernabe**

1. Immediate emphasis on rescue and initial stabilization

(provision of water, medical services, transportation, fuel and so on) in the interior of the island, where the impact of the hurricane has been greater for reasons both natural (because trajectory of the hurricane) and social (higher levels of poverty in these municipalities).

2. Suspension of any blockage to the assistance Puerto Rico may receive

We have heard denunciations (which we have not been able to confirm) that the arrival of support from Venezuela in particular is being impeded, perhaps from other countries as well. Any aid blockade must cease. Puerto Rico needs and should receive all available solidarity assistance.

3. Cancellation and repudiation of the debt because of force majeure, significant change of situation and state of necessity

It is necessary to complete a citizens' audit of the debt to determine which part is illegal, unconstitutional or illegitimate. [16] But the proposal to renegotiate the remaining part

according to the priorities of protecting pensions, essential services and the means necessary for economic recovery should now be replaced by the proposal for repudiation and cancellation of the debt due to force majeure, circumstance and state of necessity. [17] The passage of the hurricane has begun to force discussion of cancellation of debt onto the agenda. The government of Puerto Rico must act now with the audacity and decision that it lacked when it had to recognize that the debt was unsustainable (at the beginning of 2014, at the latest) and when it had to declare a moratorium (June 2015). Enough submission and passivity! [18]}

4. A significant federal contribution to reconstruction

The impact of the hurricane has opened the discussion about a federal contribution to reconstruction (which we had raised long ago). There is talk of amounts that were previously said to be impossible (\$ 7 to \$ 10 billion, or about \$ 30 billion that Federal Emergency Management Agency would distribute between different states and territories), but are inadequate in the case of Puerto Rico. If Congress can contribute the

amounts that have been mentioned this or next year, without causing it major budget crises, we must demand a reconstruction fund of at least \$5 billion annually. This is neither charity nor increasing dependence. It should be seen as compensation and reparation for the impact of a colonial relationship perpetuated by Congress, whose economic impact (poverty, permanent mass unemployment, over-indebtedness and so on) that colonial authority is, at least in part, responsible for. [19] Much of the product of work done in Puerto Rico has year after year left Puerto Rico. That has been the fate of the country, which, after each growth period, finds itself repeatedly dispossessed, decapitalized and left without the means to boost its economic development: this is typical of the colonial condition. [20]

It is time to recover some of that wealth for our reconstruction. As a recent study by the Center for Economic Policy states: "There is a substantial case for federal aid to Puerto Rico as well as sufficient debt cancellation to allow for speedy economic recovery." [21] Likewise, it should be pointed out that the current economic disaster costs the working

people of the United States, through the federal funds necessary to mitigate it: it is convenient for both the people of Puerto Rico and the people of the United States to equip the island with a healthy and sustainable economy, that does not need such compensations for levels of poverty and unemployment.

There is the precedent of the draft bill for decolonization introduced by Congressman Vito Marcantonio in 1936, which provided for this type of compensation. At present the draft submitted by Senator Bernie Sanders in 2016 "Puerto Rico Humanitarian Relief and Reconstruction Act" can be taken as a starting point (to be improved and amended). [22] Stop bailing out Wall Street and leaving the peoples to their fate!

5. The previous proposals involve the revocation of PROMESA as a narrow, inadequate and unfair framework to deal with the debt crisis.

The law provides no mechanism for economic recovery, as recognized by the president of the Fiscal Control Board created by the said law. It only provides for the application of austerity measures that are socially unjust and economically counterproductive. The approved fiscal plan does not foresee economic growth until 2024: another lost decade for Puerto Rico. The application of austerity measures that were previously unjust and counterproductive would be, after the hurricane, simply criminal.

6. No further measures against the working and impoverished people.

We cannot afford to use the current emergency or reconstruction work (as in New Orleans with Hurricane Katrina) to impose community displacement agendas (gentrification or embourgeoisement), privatization (of schools, for example, with the model of charter schools) or elimination of labor rights and protections. No more closures of schools without the active and informed participation of the affected communities and workers!

7. We should not confuse, as

employers' organizations do systematically, productivity with exploitation.

Puerto Rico needs more productivity, no more exploitation of its workers: it needs greater labor participation in the income and organization of work and services. Anti-worker measures must be stopped and those that have already been approved should be reversed, starting with the meager labor reform that brutally attacks private sector workers. Without these actions any mention of "unity of purpose" in the face of the crisis is pure hypocrisy that hides the existing terrible inequalities and policies that accentuate them.

8. No use of the crisis to impose employers' agendas.

We should make sure that large companies that have insurance for these operations pass on payroll benefits to workers, something that some companies have been trying to evade in the tourism sector. In the same way, it is necessary to reject and denounce attempts by employers such as GFR media, who, while raising editorial chants to unity of purpose, seek to remove from their employees the protections of their union contract, under threat of dismissal, and reduce their conditions of employment (overtime payment, holidays and so on) to those of the pernicious labor counter-reform. This use of the crisis to strip more workers of their rights is really outrageous.

9. Suspension of the Sales and Use Tax and progressive tax reform.

The crisis has caused the temporary suspension of the SUT. This should be a stimulus for a tax reform that reduces regressive taxes, such as the SUT (which affect more those who have less) and to recover for the country the extraordinary amount of wealth that today accumulates in a few hands and is dedicated to speculative and unproductive purposes.

10. A one-off tax contribution should be considered for recovery from the largest companies operating in Puerto Rico (a turnover or profit level can be

designated to determine which ones it applies to).

11. Governmental reform with labor and citizen participation

We cannot confuse efficiency and privatization. The crisis provoked by the hurricane has shown the need for universal health insurance and the gradual rebuilding of a public health system that is planned and comprehensive, as well as genuine public transport systems. Overcoming the waste and inefficiency existing in public services demands their democratization with labor and consumer participation, not the delivery of the public to the logic of the private gain of a few.

12. A plan of economic reconstruction

based on the funds released or recovered by the cancellation of the debt, the federal contributions, the reinvestment in Puerto Rico of the profits that are generated here (either by mutual agreement with the companies or by way of contributions), tax reform that recuperates unproductively monopolized funds and new foreign investment subject to well-designed priorities and conditions that are conducive to the country's development. It is useless to receive contributions and recuperate resources if we do not dedicate them to the creation of a self-sustaining, socially just and ecologically responsible economy.

13. Cabotage laws.

The hurricane has caused action to be taken that has been needed for a long time without action by the federal government: the temporary suspension of cabotage laws. This action must be a preamble for their elimination, as a limit to the economic recovery of Puerto Rico. [23] At the same time, land-based jobs must be guaranteed to workers who are now performing these tasks and residing in Puerto Rico.

14. The demands and proposals that we formulate in Puerto Rico (cancellation of debt, federal contribution for reconstruction, universal health insurance, programs

of creation of employment, renewable energy and so on) coincide with the demands and proposals that are also posed by movements in the United States, and that correspond to the interests of the working people in that country: proposals for taxes on large corporations and capital, projects to renovate infrastructure and create employment, cancel student debt and relieve indebted families, universal health, single-payer, insurance, reduction of military spending in favor of social spending, against oil pipelines and for renewable energy, rights for racially discriminated communities and immigrants.

We have to link our demands to these movements, to make our program, including our need for decolonization and self-determination as a people, a part of their program. Proposals for development linked as closely as possible to local consumption, rich countries' contribution to the transition to renewable energy in the poorest or least-resource countries coincide with those of the climate change movement. [24]

15. We must take advantage of the international interest in the situation in Puerto Rico as a result of the hurricane to alert public opinion to the situation here: that Puerto Rico has been a colony of the United States since 1898; which remains a colony in the 21st century; that Congress has never allowed the people of Puerto Rico to vote for different status options in a binding process; that under the existing relationship the economy of Puerto Rico has been dominated by foreign capital; that under such domination its economy has always been both unilateral and incapable of providing jobs for much of its workforce; that Puerto Rico currently has a labor force participation rate of 40%, more than 45% of its population below the poverty level, a per capita income of about half that of the poorest states in the United States and a stagnant

economy for a decade.

None of this is a result of limitation but of the unimpeded movement of money, commodities, and capital between metropolis and colony [25]; that the abyss between the two, after closing slightly during the postwar expansion has remained the same or has grown in recent times, that, therefore, emigration, massive in some epochs, increasing at present, has been a constant aspect of the colonial reality; that this also explains the magnitude of the informal economy, including (also thanks to wrongful prohibitionist policies) drug trafficking, with its violent consequences; that its working people have been subjected to austerity measures such as the SUT (regressive tax) in 2006, law 7 (dismissal of public employees) in 2009, law 66 (reduction of conditions and public labor rights) in 2014 and counter - labor reform (elimination of labor rights in the private sector) in 2016, among others; that Congress removed the insufficient mechanism of tax incentives (Section 936) without providing alternative mechanisms; that in spite of the stagnation and crisis the external corporations that operate in the island generate or declare profits of around \$ 35 billion annually, equivalent to about 35% of the GDP; that instead of recognizing its responsibility or co-responsibility for the economic crisis and the debt, Congress approved the law known as PROMESA that accentuates the colonial character of the existing relationship, does not provide measures or funds for economic development and that implements ever more severe measures of austerity (such as the drastic reduction of the budget of the public university) that are socially unjust and economically counterproductive; that Puerto Rico needs a reconstruction plan, the necessary powers to implement it, and the international allies necessary to overcome the impositions of big capital and the biggest creditors; that,

like other impoverished countries, Puerto Rico does not have the means to complete the accelerated transition to renewable energy that humanity needs to address the threat of climate change and therefore needs, like other countries in a similar situation, both debt relief and support from rich countries. [26]

All this should be explained with concrete data, arguments and examples, calmly but firmly, not as a result of the malevolent actions of the "Americans", a generalization without foundation, but of structures and policies that respond to the interests of the privileged classes that predominate in Congress, and who find allies in Puerto Rico, interests that are also opposed to those of the majority of American working people.

16. This solidarity and mutual support between peoples of different territories must occur between populations of the same country or nation and also between populations of different countries and nations, under the same political jurisdiction or under different jurisdictions: therefore, it does not depend on the status of Puerto Rico now or in the future. By collaborating with our allies outside of Puerto Rico we can build the democratic, solidarity-based, sustainable Puerto Rico that we need, whatever the status we choose. [27]

17. In order to resolve the colonial problem, it is necessary to convene, when conditions permit, a constitutional assembly on status, according to the model developed by the Puerto Rico Bar Association. Such a body must formulate non-colonial status options, negotiate with Congress on those options that require it, and submit to the people those options to choose between non-colonial alternatives. Taking into account the current emergency, the assembly could be approved in 2018 to be convened in 2019.

Solidarity with the LGBTIQ community in Egypt

21 October 2017, by **Joseph Daher**

Following the publication of images on internet social networks of the concert, political figures, political parties' representatives, members of Parliament and Al-Azhar religious scholars condemned the people waving the rainbow flags and pressured the state to put an end to "what they called" attempts to corrupt the youth. One church organized an anti-gay conference. Police and security forces began arresting dozens of individuals "either LGBTIQ or perceived as being" most of whom had no connection with the concert. At least 57 individuals have been incarcerated in Egypt since then.

The majority of those arrested were accused of "debauchery" or "promotion of debauchery," according to articles 9 and 10 of the anti-prostitution and debauchery law of 1961. Others face accusations of facilitating debauchery, and being a member of a banned group to disrupt provisions of the Constitution and the law by inciting "deviance." These laws are used by the courts to circumvent the absence of explicit penalization of homosexuality in Egypt.

Eight individuals arrested have already been sentenced to between one and six years' of imprisonment.

The arrests, interrogations, and indictments are similarly in gross violations of the right to a fair trial and its guarantees, in accordance with the Constitution and international conventions that have been ratified by the successive Egyptian regimes. Those imprisoned were not able to exercise their constitutional rights to contact their families and choose their lawyers. The arrested individuals were also subjected to threats and torture, including violent beatings, persistent insults in police stations, threats of

sexual violence and "anal examinations" to "prove" their homosexuality.

Egyptian media also have a criminal role in calling and encouraging the police and security forces to repress LGBTIQ individuals, or suspected of being LGBTIQ. They promoted a hate and discriminatory speech against these individuals by claiming that waving a rainbow flag, as well as any LGBTIQ person, poses a threat to Egyptian values and morals. In addition to this, they slandered those incarcerated by publishing their personal details in the news before interrogations are concluded or formal charges are made. As a reminder, in December 2014, TV journalist Mona al-Iraqi led a security raid on a bathhouse in Cairo, filming men who were arrested and publishing their identities.

The Supreme Council for Media joined this campaign by publishing a statement saying: "Homosexuals should not appear in visual, broadcast media or the Press." They argued as well that homosexuality is considered to be "a disease and a shame that is best kept hidden, not promoted."

The pop rock group Mashrou' Leila, committed to the cause LGBTIQ denounced in a statement on Facebook a "witch hunt." They declared "We cannot begin to explain how saddened we are to see yet another era of backwards tyranny creep over one of our most beloved countries and audiences."

Already persona non grata in Jordan, the very conservative Egyptian Musicians' union said the Lebanese group should not be able to perform in Egypt in the future.

The campaign of repression widened in the days following the concert and

included members of the National Council for Human Rights and members of parliament, some of whom submitted requests for investigations. A member of the Legislative and Constitutional Affairs committee in Parliament stated that the committee would look into reinforcing the penalty for homosexuality, despite this not being a crime in Egypt.

This campaign against LGBTIQ is not an isolated incident or a new one. 232 persons, either LGBTIQ or perceived as being, were arrested between the last quarter of 2013 and the month of March 2017. The overwhelming majority of people had been convicted in relation to the anti-prostitution and debaucheries mentioned.

At a time when we are writing "this witch-hunt," the worst in two decades, was continuing, while some people were hiding to avoid imprisonment. Activists who have denounced the recent crackdown, such as Sarah Hegazy, have also been arrested. Sarah Hegazy has been jailed, beaten by inmates, and could face a life sentence in an Egyptian prison if found guilty of "promoting sexual deviancy" and other charges tied to her alleged crime: waving a rainbow flag at a concert.

Until today, no Western government has publicly condemned or commented on this crackdown.

This is the worst crackdown against people based on their perceived sexual orientation since the mass arrests of 52 people following a raid on the Queen Boat, a floating nightclub on the Nile, in 2001. Sexual relations between two consenting same-sex adults, of course, should not be considered a punishable offense.

As argued very rightly by the Mashrou' Leila group "This crackdown is by

no means separable from the suffocating atmosphere of fear and abuse experienced by all Egyptians on a daily basis, regardless of their sexual orientations.”

The Egyptian regime have used widespread arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, and torture against political opposition members and perceived dissidents, many of them alleged members or sympathizers of the Muslim Brotherhood, but also leftist, democrats, human rights defenders, journalists and others. This is without forgetting, the massacre of more than 800 protestors of the Muslim Brotherhoods and its supporters in Cairo’s Raba’a Square in August 2013. The Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms (ECRF), an independent human rights group, has identified 30 people who died from torture while being held in

police stations and other Interior Ministry detention sites between August 2013 and December 2015. In 2016, the ECRF reported that its lawyers received 830 torture complaints and that another 14 people had died from torture in custody.

Egyptian authorities have also arrested a number of leaders of independent trade unions in recent weeks. Nine leaders have been arrested and of those, seven remain in jail. Other independent trade unionists are threatened to suffer a similar fate. The authorities have not recognized independent trade unions operating outside of the state-controlled Egyptian Trade Union Federation, while workers have been arrested for engaging in labor strikes.

Human rights groups in Egypt estimate that more than 60,000

political prisoners languish in the country’s jails. Twenty prisons have been built since Sisi took power.

The regime continued as well to prosecute people for defamation of religion, notably atheists, while religious minorities, including Coptic Christians, Shi’a Muslims and Baha’is, continue to face discriminatory restrictions in law and practice and inadequate protection from violence.

The Sisi’s regime is without any doubt the most counter-revolutionary actor in Egypt.

Down with al-Sisi’s authoritarian regime and all oppressors.

Solidarity with the LGBTQI and against all forms of oppression.

[Peace News](#)

Open Letter to the People of the United States-from Puerto Rico, a month after Hurricane MarÃaa

19 October 2017, by Manuel Rodr guez Banchs, Rafael Bernabe

A month after MarÃaa, dozens of communities are still inaccessible by car or truck. Close to 90 percent of all homes lack electricity. Half lack running water. Many of Puerto Rico’s 3.2 million residents have difficulties obtaining drinking water. The death toll continues to rise due to lack of medical attention or materials (oxygen, dialysis) or from poisoning caused by unsafe water.

The failures of U.S. agencies might come as no surprise, since the federal response (including FEMA’s) to other disasters, such as for Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, was as slow and inadequate.

You may have also heard President Trump state that Puerto Rico was

dealing with a debt crisis before the hurricane and that its electric grid had been allowed to deteriorate. As far as they go, these statements are true.

But President Trump also tweeted suggestions that Puerto Rican workers are lazy and that FEMA and other agencies cannot remain in Puerto Rico forever. This spins the notion that Puerto Ricans are themselves to blame and should not expect any more handouts. Trump aims to build a wall between us, which doesn’t come as much of a surprise either, by portraying us as a burden, as illegitimately claiming resources to which we have no right.

Through the media you may have also heard that Puerto Ricans are U.S.

citizens as well as a nation, a people with its own identity and culture, under U.S. colonial rule since 1898. Sometimes these facts generate confusion regarding Puerto Rico’s relation with the United States.

Dear friends, contrary to what the President would have you believe, Puerto Rican workers are neither lazy, nor do they want everything done for them (as he also tweeted). They wish for the same things that most American working people want: jobs and adequate income; appropriate housing, education, health services and pensions; dependable infrastructure and livable neighborhoods, along with protection of the environment. Working people in

the United States and Puerto Rico share the same interests. We have common needs. The effort to rebuild Puerto Rico should help us understand this fully, regardless of the political path Puerto Rico eventually follows, be it toward independence, statehood or some form of sovereign association with the United States. To better understand this joint agenda, we'd like to share a few historical facts.

Puerto Rico has been a colony of the United States since the Spanish-American War of 1898. Puerto Rico was legally defined as unincorporated territory, a possession but not part of the United States, under the plenary powers of Congress. Although Congress has reorganized the territorial government over the years, up to the 1952 creation of the present Commonwealth status, the colonial nature of the relationship has remained unchanged. Puerto Ricans elect their governor and legislature, but they only attend to insular matters. We remain subject to both federal legislation and executive decisions, even though we have no participation or representation in their elaboration. Since 1898, Congress has never, we repeat, never consulted the Puerto Rican people in a binding plebiscite or referendum on whether to retain the present status, become independent or a state of the Union. Having retained its plenary powers, Congress should assume responsibility for a territory it claims as a possession: yet it has often skirted that responsibility. This again should come as no surprise, as Congress has often ignored and overlooked many unjust situations in the United States (affecting workers, women, African-Americans, Native Americans, immigrants, among others), unless activism and mobilizations forced it to do otherwise.

But colonialism has an economic, as well as a political, dimension. After 1898, Puerto Rico's economy came under the control of U.S. corporations. Puerto Rico then specialized in producing a few goods for the U.S. market. One consequence has been the constant outflow of a significant portion of the income generated in Puerto Rico. At present, around \$35 billion leave annually. This is around 35 percent of Puerto Rico's Gross

Domestic Product.

This capital is not reinvested and does not create employment here in Puerto Rico. Thus, Puerto Rico's one-sided, externally controlled and largely export-oriented economy has never been able to provide enough employment for its workforce: not when sugar production was the main industry; not in the 1950s and 1960s with light-manufacturing that came and often went; not today, through capital intensive operations, among which pharmaceuticals are the most important.

This dependent and colonial nature of Puerto Rico's economy lies at the root of the high levels of unemployment, not the alleged laziness of Puerto Rico's workers, an old racist stereotype now taken up by President Trump.

At present, Puerto Rico has a 40 percent labor participation rate. That is to say, 60 percent of its working-age population is out of the formal labor market; they have abandoned all hope of finding a job. Of the 40 percent that are still in the labor market, around 10 percent are officially unemployed.

Mass unemployment depresses wages, which deepens inequality, and creates high levels of poverty. This helps explain the persistence of the wide gap in living standards with the U.S. mainland. After more than a century of U.S. rule, Puerto Rico's per capita income is half that of the poorest state, Mississippi. Around 45 percent of the people in Puerto Rico live under the poverty level.

Lack of employment has resulted in considerable migration to the United States, with the Puerto Rican population stateside now at 5 million. Historically, Puerto Ricans have been incorporated into the U.S. working class as one of its discriminated and over-exploited sectors, along with African-Americans and other fellow Latinos. Deeply connected and concerned with the situation of their homeland, they are also part of a multi-racial and multi-national U.S. working class.

Given the levels of poverty, it is not surprising that many in Puerto Rico

participate in federally funded welfare programs. That is to say: considerable public funds are spent to partially mitigate the dire consequences of a dysfunctional colonial economy. To put it otherwise: the present situation, while profitable for a few corporations, is a disaster for both Puerto Rico and U.S. working people. Therefore, it is in the interest of both that Puerto Rico acquires an economy capable of providing for its inhabitants without requiring such compensations.

Since 1947, certain exemptions from federal and island taxes was one of the means of attracting foreign investors. Yet, in 1996 Congress began phasing out federal tax-exemption, which was completed in 2006. Make no mistake: tax exemption was never able to guarantee development or employment. But Congress replaced an inadequate mechanism with, well... nothing. A broken crutch may be of little help to a limping person, but simply removing it is even worse. As a result, manufacturing jobs have fallen by more than half since 1996. Puerto Rico's economy has shrunk since 2006. More than 250,000 jobs have been lost; 20 percent of the jobs that existed a decade ago have vanished.

But Congress does not bear all the blame. As Puerto Rico's economy collapsed, its government did not re-evaluate its priorities. It did not seek, for example, to recuperate a larger portion of the profits leaving the island through taxation or other means. Instead, it took on massive debt. Meanwhile, electrical and other infrastructure was allowed to deteriorate, often to generate support for privatization. The situation could not be sustained: by June 2015 the government had to admit that its debt is unsustainable and would have to be renegotiated.

Congress then adopted the Puerto Rico Oversight Management and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA). It created a non-elected, federally-appointed control board, with broad powers over Puerto Rico's state finances. It provides no funds or measures for economic recovery. It enables austerity policies that deepen poverty while perpetuating the present depression. In other words, it is anti-democratic, colonial, socially

unjust and economically counterproductive. Under the fiscal plan it certified, no growth is foreseen until 2024! Again, this may not come as a surprise: this has been the formula (layoffs and cutbacks) applied against working people in dozens of budget crises, from New York City in the mid-1970s to Detroit in the recent past.

Proposed government cuts come after other austerity measures such as new sales taxes (IVU, 2006); mass government layoffs (Law 7, 2009); attacks on public sector labor rights (Law 66, 2014); reduced public employment through attrition (90,000 jobs eliminated since 2006) and rescinding labor rights in the private sector (2017).

What does Puerto Rico need? We need an adequately funded program of economic reconstruction (including the transition to renewable energy), the powers to carry it out and a true process of political self-determination. Congress can and should provide funds for reconstruction, which also requires the cancellation of Puerto Rico's public debt. This debt was already unsustainable; to collect it now would be criminal.

You might rightfully ask: why should Congress allot billions for reconstruction in Puerto Rico, when it does not do so in the states? Our answer: it should do so in the states as well! After all, working and poor people in the United States are suffering the social and environmental consequences of decades of neoliberal economic policies. As much as we do,

American working people need a vast program of economic reconstruction, geared toward creating jobs and addressing social needs.

We draw inspiration from the many movements with similar objectives in the United States: to tax corporate profits, for job programs, urban reconstruction, expanded social services, universal health insurance and free higher public education, renewable energy, student debt cancellation and relief for indebted families, reduced military in favor of social spending, to organize workers and revitalize the labor movement, to end all forms of racist, sexist, homophobic or xenophobic discrimination. We in Puerto Rico need these movements as much as you do. We count on you to build and expand them. And we ask that you include Puerto Rico's needs for economic reconstruction, debt cancellation and self-determination in your demands and proposals.

The limitations of one-sided dependent development are not the result of restrictions on movement of capital between Puerto Rico and the United States. They are, if anything, the result of the unfettered action of private interests. In other words, the dogmas of privatization, deregulation and free trade fundamentalism are part of the problem, not the solution. We need a planned reconstruction of our economy, with broadened public and cooperative sectors. Such plans must be elaborated in Puerto Rico, not by federal programs or agencies beyond our control or supervision.

The same holds true in the United States, where budget deficits are not the result of over-generous social programs, but of low corporate taxes, and, after the crisis of 2008, of government debt to bail out the banks from their own speculative excesses.

Over the years, much of the product of our labor has left the island, not unlike much of the wealth created by U.S. workers is taken by a fabulously rich corporate caste. This harsh reality demands that the fight against these ills -colonial and class exploitation- advance jointly. To those who threaten "No bailout for Puerto Rico" we respond: it is high time we invest in the people of Puerto Rico and of the United States -and stop protecting the privileges of banks and large corporations!

Let us work together then for justice: justice for working people in the United States and for immediate and adequate hurricane relief, as well as lasting economic reconstruction, debt cancellation and self-determination in Puerto Rico.

Sincerely,

Rafael Bernabe

Manuel Rodríguez Banchs

*Rafael Bernabe is a researcher and professor at the University of Puerto Rico. He is the author, with César Ayala, of Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898 (2007). Manuel Rodríguez Banchs is a labor lawyer and social justice advocate. Both belong to Working Peoples Party in Puerto Rico.

United action of the working class: against factionalism

19 October 2017, by **Amandla!**

Over the last few months, five Amcu leaders have died at the hands of assassins. We have noted the relative silence of the media and government

about these deaths, compared with their response to the political killings in KwaZulu-Natal.

The identities of the assassins may be unknown. But it's clear who benefits. The killings take place at a very particular time in the life of the

mining industry. Ten years after the global financial crisis started, South Africa's mining industry has sunk from the super profits of the 2000s. Commodity prices are low, and the failure to restructure the economy away from its dependence on extraction has left the economy acutely vulnerable.

Division serves the bosses

The mining industry lost 70,000 jobs in the last five years. Another 20,000 jobs are reported to be on the line at Sibanye Gold, AngloGold Ashanti and Bokoni Platinum. What better time, from the bosses' point of view, to have trade unions and workers at each other's throats?

And they are. Amcu and Num duly do battle over the interpretation of the killings. Num's Piet Matosa attributes them to internal Amcu factionalism. Joseph Mathunjwa from Amcu has another interpretation:

"We wonder whether a new campaign is being unleashed by the state and its allies against our militant and independent union...We wonder if this is a continuation of the dirty tricks campaign led by President Jacob Zuma and the National Intelligence Agency, which sponsored the building of an opposition union aimed at defeating Amcu".

He is referring to the Workers Association Union, launched in 2014, on Zuma's instruction.

We hear plenty of rhetorical calls for unity in the labour movement. "Unity is paramount", "Unity is sacrosanct". Too often the unity being talked about is the unity within a single union, or the unity of a federation. In the dust of factional battles, we lose sight of the imperative of the broader working class.

Unite to save jobs

Right now, the imperative is that all the unions in the mining industry genuinely and actively combine around practical programmes to

eradicate inter-union factional killings. The unions together must wage war on the assassins and their factional material interests. They must join together to demand that employers provide protection to workers where they live, lest this escalate into a cycle of killings and counter-killings that will be very difficult to stop. Management must be as concerned about workers' health and safety above ground as they claim (falsely) to be under ground.

The reason for this call is not a rhetorical one. It is very practical. Only workers who are united around a clear set of demands and a clear strategy can hope to fight successfully to save jobs in the midst of the current jobs bloodbath. Neither Num, nor Amcu, nor Numsa can do that job effectively on their own. And the employers know it.

Of course, unions and federations can look backwards at the splits and expulsions of the past and see more than enough reasons for continued separation and division. Vicious, inflammatory words were used. Cosatu leadership behaved as a faction when it expelled Numsa from its ranks. We will always condemn such wilful division of mass organisations of the working class, for factional "gain".

Those historical reasons will never disappear. But responsible, class conscious trade union leaders must be capable of seeing beyond factions to the interests of workers and the poor as a whole.

Saftu and Cosatu

In this context, Saftu's statement on the Cosatu stayaway is disappointing. It admits early on that it can't disagree with the strike's main demands

"The strike's main demands are "to push the President of the Republic of South Africa Cde Jacob Zuma to establish the Judicial Commission of Inquiry" and that "the state and all its institutions must refuse to deal with the predatory elite and in particular cancel all commercial dealings with the Gupta family".

Saftu cannot disagree with that..."

But nevertheless Saftu "cannot support this march". Firstly, Saftu was not consulted. We have no fundamental argument with Saftu on this. It would have been proper for Cosatu to consult the other federations with a view to a joint action. They didn't. But we know their factional history well. It's not a surprise.

The disappointment in Saftu's position does not rest there. Their reasons comprise a litany of Cosatu leadership's major sins over the last few years: abandoning the programme of Cosatu's 12th Congress, opportunistically picking up the issue of corruption having justified it for years, striking against a government whose election it supported etc. All sins properly recorded and absolutely true.

But what is it saying? We can't collaborate with you because you have behaved consistently badly in the past? What about the many thousands of ordinary workers who responded to the call to stay away and march? Surely we want to build unity in action with these workers - despite their rotten leaders.

And what would the state of Saftu be if all the unions which are opposed to Cosatu's alliance with the ANC said we cannot work with Vavi or Jim for their past sins of supporting Zuma? What prospects for Numsa's workers party if the left who never supported the Zuma project said we cannot link up with them because their leaders were uncritical of the SACP, which the workers party is now supposed to challenge?

United front of the working class

We recognise that it was not long ago that Cosatu leadership condemned Numsa for speaking out against corruption and calling for Zuma to go. Now it has a march in favour of those very same demands. That must be hard for Numsa and Saftu to stomach. But then it was not long before that that Numsa also changed its position,

from one of vigorously supporting Zuma's campaign for the Presidency, despite clear warnings of what would come.

It would be surprising if Numsa found it easy to cooperate with Cosatu. The offences for which Numsa was "surgically removed" have now become the new "policy". Add to the mix, rivalry between the SACP (Cosatu's ally) and Numsa's Workers Party and there is strong potential for a divided and weakened labour movement.

It would be equally surprising if Zwelinzima Vavi would find it comfortable sitting in a strategic meeting with S'dumo Dlamini. But that does not mean he should not be there.

How can we argue for a multi-class United Front, if we can't create a working class united front? The strategy of the united front was developed precisely for such situations. We don't have to like each other, or forgive sins of the past, to organise, for example, a joint campaign of all federations around defence of jobs and opposition to corruption. A joint campaign does not prejudice the federations' freedom in

all other areas. But it shows the employers and their political representatives that we can stand together when our interests are threatened.

This approach should be reflected at industry level as well – whatever we do separately, we must stand together against the employers.

We have talked so far of employers and workers. But what of the state? What of the political leadership of that state? Academics Bhorat, Haroon and others in a recent article say that there is:

"a political project at work to repurpose state institutions to suit a constellation of rent-seeking networks that have been constructed and now span the symbiotic relationship between the constitutional and shadow state. This is akin to a silent coup."

"Rent-seeking networks" fundamentally get their "rent" from extractive industries. In Venezuela, it is oil. In South Africa, it is a range of minerals including gold, platinum and coal. These "rent-seeking networks" benefit from the profits of mining. They are having their own factional

battle now, inside the ANC. On the one side, the first generation of corporate-connected black elite: Cyril Ramaphosa and Tokyo Sexwale. Much more connected to the traditional white ruling class as well as transnational capital. On the other side, the newer layer of the Gupta predatory elite. Capitalists who don't enjoy such strong connections with the corporate economy. Reliant instead on the ever-burgeoning procurement spend of the state, which now comprises 42% of the total public budget (R5 trillion – R5,000,000,000,000).

But they all benefit from the same extractive industry and therefore from divisions in the organisation of workers. In the 80s and 90s, first in KwaZulu-Natal and then on the East Rand, the state expressed an interest in fomenting discord amongst the black working class. The state today has a similar interest. Who is to say that the Third Force is a thing of the past? The only protection for organisations of the working class against such attacks is the united action of its mass organisations. Otherwise those organisations will be successfully pitted against one another. The price for the working class and the poor will be high.

What is to be done with 1917?

17 October 2017, by **Olivier Besancenot**

With this "counter-history of the Russian revolution," you adopt a critical perspective. How can we, as revolutionaries, suggest taking a critical look at a revolution that the ruling class systematically seeks to bury?

What I have tried to do, taking as my inspiration something Daniel Bensaïd wrote, "Communism against Stalinism", which was very important to me, is to take up a legacy and defend a memory against the partisans of the dominant ideology who want to organize the theoretical

funeral of the Russian Revolution, especially through the process of the "idea that kills," as if communism carried within it Stalinism and totalitarianism.

So it is a question of defending a line of descent, and defending it proudly: the thread that links us to 1917 is a thread that links us to the origins of 1917, and thus to those who made a revolution, of a particular kind, with an experience of self-management unequalled in time and space, and never repeated since then. Being connected to this founding event

enables us to adopt a critical attitude, since the first victim of Stalinism was the revolution itself, and also the revolutionaries...

I have therefore tried to explain to a broad public that we situate ourselves within a critical legacy of those who made the revolution, who fought against the White counter-revolution and who were subsequently victims of the Stalinist counter-revolution.

You place yourself not only in the continuity of the revolutionaries of 1917, but also of those who criticized very early, "from inside"

the bureaucratic degeneration and Stalinism. They were also revolutionaries, but their criticisms met with very little echo, unlike for example the much later book by Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, which was published in 1973.

Absolutely. In fact I was discussing this with Christian Salmon and Éric Hazan, in connection with a conference in Strasbourg. *The Gulag Archipelago* was a motive for censorship, including also the critical Marxist currents. From then on it was forbidden to go back over the experience of 1917, and we saw a real process of ideological selection on the part of those who were called the "New Philosophers", who pretended not to know that the critique of Stalinism started precisely from revolutionaries: we can think of Victor Serge, PanaŃt Istrati, Boris Souvarine, and of course Leon Trotsky, with *The Revolution Betrayed* in 1936.

There too, there is an ideological thread to be taken up again, and that is also why I like this idea of continuity: it's a battle, a struggle that we take up again, that we perpetuate.

Others, such as Daniel BensaŃd, whom you quote at length, also went back over the Russian Revolution on the occasion of commemorations of it. Are you just repeating the exercise in order to perpetuate the tradition? Because even if you do not claim to be writing history, you in fact find yourself speaking, in the present, about the past, and you must know that the past changes because of what we say about in the present.

I think that there are the two things.

We have to start again, it is a permanent process of starting again, and moreover that is how the idea of the book came about: it was the editor at Autrement who said to me, "the centenary of the Russian Revolution is coming, and it would be strange if you had nothing to say on this occasion". It is true that we, instinctively, do not go in much for commemorations, but there is a battle of memory that we must continue to wage.

But there is also, in fact, the idea that we find, for example, in Ernst Bloch, of the potential conjugation of the past and the present: not to think that the past is a chapter that is definitively closed, but on the contrary say to ourselves that that even in the past there are historical chapters that are forever open, that different options can be discussed, and that is still the case today, which let us glimpse "something else".

So we try to look at the past, and there again I am thinking of Ernst Bloch, as a future that did not happen, and to try to conjugate it in the present. That means both cleansing the memory of those who were defeated, of the revolutionaries who were victims of the counter-revolution, whether White or Stalinist, but also questioning the process that took place, in order to guard against, in the future, a degeneration such as the revolution of 1917 experienced.

Can you give us an example of this conjugation of the past in the present?

There is no question of going over history again in order to hand out good and bad marks, that would be pretentious, but of understanding certain problematics that at that time the revolutionaries were not thinking about, because they could not think about them, and to look to the future.

For example, when Lenin wrote *State and Revolution* during the summer of 1917, a brilliant book, still in many ways relevant today, particularly on the structure of the state apparatus, there is hardly a word, apart from the slogan "All power to the Soviets", about what exactly is the power of the soviets, as if it was a magical formula... And this is something that still exists today among some people, both in the most revolutionary left and in the most reformist left, this idea that once things start to change, everything will sort itself out, either by a power from below or a power from above.

However, the revolution is not the death of politics, an administrative management of things: quite on the contrary, it is a new way of managing discussions, confrontations,

disagreements... and that is why taking a critical look at what was done on the level of soviet power can be extremely interesting on the level of very contemporary problematics.

You do not fight against the bureaucratic phenomenon by the simple addition of political and democratic rights, however elementary those may be. The roots of bureaucracy lie in many phenomena: the division of labour, the separation of manual and intellectual tasks, the professionalization of power, multiple processes of domination and alienation, not only within the spheres of the market. All that also needs to be thought about again.

You said that the Stalinist counter-revolution did not come from the communist idea itself, or the revolutionary idea, since it is on the contrary a process of the negation and destruction of the revolution.

But that does not mean that it is not part of a context that encourages it: I want to speak here in particular of the absence of democratic culture in the Russia of the early 20th century, but also of the militarization of the revolutionary process.

In your opinion, what are the present-day phenomena that that could provide a basis for the counter-revolution of the 21st century?

In the developed capitalist countries, the most gaping fault line is probably not, in fact, on democratic questions. There is a change of period and context, and without having any illusions about bourgeois democracy, it is obvious that it has nothing to do with Tsarism and Russian society of the early 20th century, and that makes a very great difference.

Another difference is that we are faced with a bureaucracy tied into the capitalist state apparatus, which is very organized and which, without being a majority, can consist of hundreds of thousands of people, or even several million, and we are not going to combat it solely on the theoretical level: we have to find the means of imagining and organizing a new social model, taking account of

the existence of this adversary, and therefore thinking about the fault lines that can exist in what is a powerful and unavoidable social reality and not an abstract idea.

So we have to pose these questions and discuss them openly, and I confess that what makes me very worried relates to the questions of fighting against bureaucracy and against

bureaucratization, which are absolutely urgent. And it is not by proclaiming that we are fighting against bureaucracy that we make the political problems disappear; Jacques Rancière is absolutely right about that.

We have not got rid of the bureaucratic spectre that is haunting the communist project: it has not been born, but it haunts it, and in the most

reformist currents as well as the most radical ones, there is a sort of difficulty in accepting that we have strategic perspectives to discuss again, in particular concerning this question.

This interview was published in *L'Anticapitaliste*, weekly newspaper of the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA), number 397, September 21st, 2017.

New labour federation and the gender question

16 October 2017, by **Asanda Benya**

Saftu is marked by its refusal to endorse or align itself with any political party. Some have called it a militant alternative to Cosatu. The federation itself claims to be “democratic, worker-controlled, militant, socialist-oriented, internationalist, pan-Africanist from a Marxist perspective and inspired by the principles of Marxism-Leninism”.

Since there is no mention of a feminist or womanist perspective, one is left to wonder about their gender politics. How different will its gender politics be from Cosatu's? Will it resemble and reproduce Cosatu's gender stance? Or will it reject it, take seriously womxn [28] workers and appreciate the ways in which workplace struggles are gendered? It is, after all, many of the same people who once led the unapologetically macho Cosatu that are now leading Saftu. While I appreciate that it is too early to tell, there are some concerning signs from the vision and recent events.

Representation

We've seen already who the key and influential leaders in the new federation are. At its inaugural congress in April, [Ground Up](#) reported that the crowds and voting delegates were largely male. Not one of the

speakers in the three-day congress was a womxn. Out of five people who ran the congress' proceedings, only one was a womxn. It is therefore not surprising that at the end of the congress only two womxn were elected to be part of the federation's six-member executive.

Political and economic issues

Saftu leaders argue that they will not be locked in the same (shopfloor) logic as traditional trade unions who only focus on wage issues and conditions of work. They will embrace multiple struggles confronting the working class and the “poor”. This is evident in the campaigns outlined in Saftu's [declaration](#), and its recruitment and organising strategies. While attempting to address a broad number of issues, it is concerning that their priorities and strategies see their constituency as gender neutral at best, or masculine at worst.

For womxn, the personal is political. This assertion challenges the narrow “political” framework within which most union federations work. The challenges womxn experience in their daily “personal” lives are the result of systematic gendered oppressions and

massive structural inequalities. To embrace and champion a broad number of struggles, Saftu will have to take seriously the “personal” that is political for womxn workers.

They talk about “farmworkers” as if farmworkers experience farm injustices in similar ways. Farm workers have, time and again, emphasized that womxn farmworkers are worse off than their male counterparts.

Core campaigns

While Saftu's campaigns speak to crucial issues affecting the working class and the poor, none of them explicitly surface the gendered character of these struggles.

Take their demands for a moratorium on farm evictions, better houses and food security for farm dwellers (who produce the country's food). They talk about “farmworkers” as if farmworkers experience farm injustices in similar ways. Farm workers have, time and again, emphasized that womxn farmworkers are worse off than their male counterparts. They are the most vulnerable and precarious; they are the first to be laid off, first to have working hours and wages decreased,

and to be evicted. This is because farm owners, like their peers in other industries, find it easy to exploit and lay off womxn without any major consequences.

To champion campaigns that will address the struggles of farm workers without an appreciation of how these struggles are gendered is to be ignorant or insensitive to their actual circumstances. The new federation has very thoughtfully put forward land restoration to the landless black majority as one of its key focal areas. But we know that if the gender question is not dealt with, land will only be restored to men, leaving womxn landless, especially single mothers who are often in precarious employment.

Lessons from the new student movement

Judging by these basic, yet very telling signs, Saftu has either brushed off the gender question or thinks it can deal with it later. If that is indeed the case, it needs to learn a thing or two from the “new” student movements. To neglect gender or downplay its importance is to set the stage for your own failure. For Saftu, this could mean failing to attract womxn students who will be joining the workforce in the next few years. It could also make existing womxn workers wary of joining Saftu unions.

What then, might they do differently to avoid the Cosatu trap?

It is vital to remember that feminism is not only for womxn. It is for all people and organisations that see and equally value everyone. It is the belief in the social, economic and political equality of peoples.

Saftu prides itself on being a democratic socialist-oriented internationalist organisation. It must be all of these in ways that embrace all womxn. In other words, it must be unambiguously and explicitly feminist in its approach, including its programmes, its key priorities and its ways of organising. Saftu must take seriously the gender gaps that currently exist within its membership and build into its strategies ways of addressing them. It must also think about having separate feminist structures with power and influence within the broader federation, not the Cosatu model of peripheral, non-constitutional gender structures. As part of movement building and through these structures Saftu must, alongside the regular political economy education, push feminist political education for all its members.

It is the steadfast and archaic commitment to the “triple oppression” model that has held back progressive movements from thinking creatively about gender, along with either ignorance or rejection of an intersectional model of understanding oppression. If Saftu is to respond to the current moment, where its constituents are negotiating multiple socio-economic crises, it has to think differently about oppression. It must accept and strive to operate within an intersectional framework. Intersectionality is not a “fad” as some have argued. It is a productive way of analysing oppression by mapping the margins. If Saftu is serious about feminism, resource allocation should communicate that seriousness and the budget must reflect that struggles are gendered.

Not only are unions boys-clubs, but they are incredibly unsafe spaces for womxn. Just like in workplaces, inside the unions womxn are sexually harassed and told not to be “difficult” but to “appreciate” advances from men. They are objectified and sexualised. This translates into the kind of work they are expected to do for their unions; flowery work that showcases and values femininity and reinforces the sexist ideology of womxn’s domesticity. The price they

are often forced to pay for speaking up and calling out sexism and harassment by male unionists and union members is very high.

Saftu must deliberately inculcate a different culture, one that takes sexism seriously and abhors and acts decisively against those who sexually harass womxn. It must not be a space of further victimisation for womxn and safety for perpetrators. If the federation wants to protect and represent workers equally, Saftu, together with all its affiliates, must ensure that they are safe spaces for womxn workers, that they are against class exploitation, xenophobia, racism and sexism, but also homophobia in workplaces and in communities.

Gender will mark the dawn

The gender question, therefore, has to be addressed differently and creatively if womxn workers are to be fully serviced and better represented than they were under the old Cosatu vanguard. Without a deliberate effort, the new federation risks reproducing the gender ills of its predecessor and will not necessarily mark a new dawn for womxn workers.

If the new federation does not properly and seriously engage with the question of gender (in all its diversity), womxn are going to continue to bear the brunt of class exploitation. If Saftu leaders are envisioning a “[fundamentally different workers’ organisation](#)” and they want to build a true “shield” for workers, they must not only rethink how they do politics. They must also rethink how the ways in which they do politics can be informed by progressive gender politics. In other words, they have to recognise that the current crises are not only “political, economic and social” but that they are so in gendered ways.

May 2017

[Amandla-><http://aidc.org.za/new-labour-federation-gender-question/>]

Statement on the Korean crisis

15 October 2017, by **Fourth International Bureau**

I. Before the outbreak of the present Korean crisis, political and military tensions were already high in East Asia between China, Japan and the United States. With the Washington/Pyongyang conflict they have reached a level that has not been equaled for many years and already have profound implications in the region. They strengthen the dynamics of militarization, encourage the currents and regimes of the nationalist right (particularly in Japan), reduce the autonomous diplomatic capacity of the new South Korean presidency, and put the anti-militarist and pacifist grassroots movements under increasing pressure

US imperialism has been able to retake the initiative in East Asia against China. It is thus sending a message to all countries in the region. In particular, it is reminding Manila that alliances are not changed like shirts, while the Pentagon, in accord with the existing agreements, has provided multifaceted support to the Philippine army in the conflict with jihadist groups in Marawi.

The three major powers (the United States, China and Russia) are directly concerned by the Korean crisis, which has also given a new boost to the nuclear arms race. US imperialism is affirming its intention to re-establish its hegemony in this part of the world.

II. The United States bears a historical and recurring major responsibility for this state of crisis. The Korean War (1950-1953) aimed primarily at breaking the Korean popular movement and countering Maoist China. By refusing to sign a peace agreement, the US is holding a permanent threat of reconquest over North Korea. When agreements to freeze the North Korean nuclear program were signed with Pyongyang, Washington did not respect them.

From cyber war to economic sanctions

and joint military manoeuvres with Seoul, Washington has pursued a very aggressive policy against North Korea.

Donald Trump's apocalyptic statements are contributing to growing tensions. At the UN he even threatened to "totally destroy" North Korea. There is more to this than the excessive language specific to the President. The Korean crisis is helping the US Army demand a significant increase in its budget. The goal is not only to re-establish US hegemony in East Asia. As the established great power, the United States also wants to block the rise of the emerging power of China. The Washington/Pyongyang conflict has a global dimension.

III. Kim Jong-un's policy has disastrous consequences. It is true that the country is under threat and that the North Korean regime wants to guard against this threat. Seeing the fate of Saddam Hussein or Gaddafi, it concluded that only the possession of an operational nuclear weapon could guarantee its survival. In doing so, however, it has become an active factor fueling the never-ending spiral of militarization in the region and nuclear escalation.

Pyongyang could have chosen another policy: to respond to the offer of dialogue from the new president of South Korea, Moon Jae-in; oppose US diplomacy on the international level; rely on the pacifist sentiments of the Japanese or South Korean population and on the existence in Asia of numerous antimilitarist and antinuclear movements; thus avoiding being isolated by Washington.

Instead, Kim Jong-un chose the policy of the test of strength and a confrontation Pyongyang/Washington. This choice has contributed to its own isolation and the need to mobilize increasing resources in order to finance its armaments program at the expense of North Korea's working

population.

These political choices come from the nature of the North Korean regime, hyper-repressive, ethno-nationalist, dynastic and dictatorial. Its foreign policy reflects its domestic policy. It is very difficult for this regime to conceive of an international diplomatic battle or to appeal to popular mobilizations of solidarity.

IV. Experts fear that the escalation of "provocations" and "counter-provocations" may result in more or less controlled real acts of war involving the great powers. However, the evolution of the situation is very difficult to predict due to several unknowns.

Donald Trump has received sufficient support to carry out his policy up to the current level of tension. But in the United States, important sectors of the bourgeoisie also seem to favour diplomatic action to initiate de-escalation. What policy will be needed tomorrow?

The North Korean regime has shown much more resilience than Washington expected, but will it resist the pressure, notably the economic duress of the new series of sanctions?

How will the Chinese leadership try to retake the initiative in East Asia at a time when its influence on Pyongyang is very weak?

In any event, the situation is already so critical that progressive forces must mobilize on this issue.

V. There is an urgent need to block the spiral of tensions and initiate de-escalation. Washington must put an end to its threats and its military operations, including the US-South Korean naval manoeuvres. Pyongyang must suspend nuclear tests and missile launches. Talks must begin to ensure continued de-escalation.

VI. The responsibilities of the anti-war movement are great. From South Korea to Pakistan, Asian movements are now on the front line, but they need support from their sister organizations in the rest of the world. The Korean crisis must be put on the agenda of all.

The same applies to movements fighting specifically for the abolition of nuclear weapons. The arms race is resuming. China, for example, wants to respond to the installation of the Thaad anti-missile missiles in South Korea by deploying a fleet of strategic submarines which, unlike Russia, it does not yet possess. The nuclear non-proliferation treaty is a failure. The

alternative is simple: either nuclear disarmament will be imposed, or nuclear weapons will be used again, as they were in 1945 against the populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and as the Pentagon envisaged doing during the Korean War of 1950-1953.

The UN's adoption of a treaty banning nuclear weapons at the initiative of 122 countries shows that this struggle can be waged, as does the awarding of the Noble Prize to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN).

Based in particular on this rise in consciousness, all "normalization" of

nuclear weapons must be opposed. A mass preventive political rejection of the use of these weapons must confront all countries that envisage using them.

In some countries, radical left-wing currents, including from the Fourth International, are already heavily involved in nuclear disarmament movements (India, Pakistan, Japan, the Philippines, and elsewhere). Strengthening these movements is definitely a task of the hour that concerns all progressive forces.

Amsterdam

15 October 2017

Transforming Labour

15 October 2017, by **Veronica Fagan**

The context was the General election campaign in which Labour under Corbyn confounded many by its impressive showing. On conference floor, as well as in many of the myriad of fringe meetings, speaker after speaker used the manifesto as a visual aid as well as to quote. This was mirrored by conference's staging - for the many not the few was the slogan of the moment, finishing many speeches and always visible.

But other words were prominent such as transforming and transformation; eloquently summing up both what Corbyn has already achieved and his ongoing vision both for the party itself and for the country.

This was Corbyn's third conference as leader, but the first where that leadership was not being undermined by the right in the party. It's not that all the critics have been silenced - but that they are more isolated than they have been for decades.

Key moments included John McDonnell's speech with its promise not only to refuse to sign any new PFI contracts but to bring existing ones back in-house, and then Corbyn's

speech in which he talked of system change on three occasions, most sharply in saying of the horror of Grenfell:

It stands for a failed and broken system which Labour must and will replace.

A series of votes for internal party positions gives one snapshot of the balance of forces.

Before conference, Seema Chadwani and Billy Hayes were elected to the Conference arrangements Committee (CAC). Chadwani topped the poll with almost double the votes of her nearest rival, while Hayes got only a few thousand less. At Women's' Conference, Teresa Clarke and Jean Crocker took almost 80 per cent of the votes for Women's CAC with their pledge to make Women's Conference truly democratic. Emina Ibrahim and Anna Dyer took 35% of the votes each while incumbent Rose Burley could scrape only 16% And at the NEC during conference, UNITE's Jennie Formby was elected unopposed as Vice Chair.

The left might have reasonably

expected to win most of those contests but the scale of the victory was sweet.

The shape of conference is still largely determined by the legacy of Blair's "reforms". The bulk of time is structured around the report from the National Policy Forum - a flabby body created to undermine conference sovereignty. Over recent years, the different sections were introduced by members of the Cabinet or Shadow Cabinet, a few members got to speak and then the thing was agreed virtually unanimously.

Israel and Palestine

One part of the NPF report that was met with dismay by many before conference was the section relating to Israel and Palestine which was, as Ariel Pardess argued here, a retreat from the manifesto. So it was pleasing, if a little mysterious, that in the first Conference Arrangements Committee report, this was reversed by adding the section from the manifesto.

This was followed by a standing

ovation by conference when Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi's spoke [29] to welcome the correction, going on to talk about the legacy of the Balfour declaration, 100 years ago and concluding: We Brits need to take responsibility for the on-going Palestinian tragedy dating from Balfour's pledge.

And conference was brought to its feet again on the same subject by Jeremy Corbyn, in his leader's speech:

And let's give real support to end the oppression of the Palestinian people, the 50-year occupation and illegal settlement expansion and move to a genuine two-state solution of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Not all of us cheering agree with Corbyn on the question of a two-state solution, but it was a breakthrough in that, though the Labour leader is a long term patron of the Palestine Solidarity campaign, since he was elected leader he has not spoken out on the question of justice for the Palestinian people.

Distortions over antisemitism

As has been well chronicled [30], one of the most persistent direction of attacks on Jeremy Corbyn since was first elected Labour leader in September 2015, has been to conflate support for the struggle of the Palestinians with antisemitism. Such an offensive is part of an international attack on the Palestine solidarity movement but it's also an attack on Corbyn because of his record.

Antisemitism like all forms of racism, and all forms of prejudice against the oppressed, should have no place in the Labour movement. But what has been at stake within the Labour Party is by and large something else: the weaponisation of antisemitism to attack the left.

The advocates of this approach have been not only been the overtly conservative forces within the Jewish community as a whole, but an organisation affiliated to the Labour Party itself, the misnamed Jewish

Labour Movement (JLM). You can be a full member of the JLM without being Jewish, but not without being a Zionist.

As the battle has got more intensive, many Jews in the Labour Party decided that it was time to call a halt to this organisation claiming to speak for all Jews - and so Jewish Voice for Labour was launched over the summer. JVL is not an anti-Zionist group, as its chair Jenny Manson explains here, but in taking no position on the question, is challenging the JLM's claim to speak for all Jews in Labour.

The new group held its triumphant public launch during Labour Party conference, with over 300 people packed in to a Brighton ballroom. The atmosphere was electric despite the crush, and people listened attentively to the platform speakers. Excitement grew still further when two union General Secretaries, UNITE's Len McCluskey and ASLEF's Tosh McDonald spoke to pledge support.

One of the issues at stake at #Lab17, still to be debated at the time of this fringe meeting was whether Labour should adopt a rule change relating to allegedly discriminatory or offensive behaviour by members. Sounds straightforward? Unfortunately not.

This discussion went through different phases. A rule change was drafted by the JLM, an alternative was put forward by Hastings and Rye CLP. At the pre-conference NEC, the NEC started discussing its own proposals, and apparently part way through the meeting was presented with a further draft (which appears to have been agreed between Chakrabati and the JLM) which was then agreed unanimously.

Heated debate ensued. The JLM claimed their proposal had been agreed - while in fact what the NEC agreed was significantly different. Some left members of the NEC claimed that the JLM proposal been rejected. That wasn't true either - significant ambiguities that come from the JLM proposal remained in what was agreed - in particular reference to codes of conduct which don't actually exist, as Glyn Seeker explains here.

And there was concern that the JLM had been discussed with, while Hastings and Rye's alternative proposal had been cold shouldered.

Momentum, without any consultation, backed the NEC proposal. Huge pressure was put on Hastings and Rye to remit their proposal.

The rule change was being debated at conference the morning after the JVL launch. People were anxious to know what was planned, but things were moving too fast for the Hastings and Rye delegate to be able to say. But she made up for any frustration by her powerful speech from the rostrum the next day. She remitted the motion, but clearly explained the dangers with the NEC's wording.

The launch of JVL and the reception for pro-Palestinian speakers transformed an extremely unfavourable situation into a better one. But the JLM and their allies have not gone away, or been decisively defeated as is shown by the summary expulsion of veteran anti-zionist Moshe Machover less than a week after conference ended.

Assertive conference

Team Corbyn have rightly concentrated on developing policies to defeat the Tories at elections rather than on internal party rules. The misnamed McDonnell amendment - which proposed lowering the percentage of the Parliamentary Labour Party any challenger would need to back them originated before Corbyn's first successful leadership bid. Despite opposition from Labour First and Progress, it was overwhelmingly passed in an amended form put forward by the NEC; the threshold will now be 10% of the PLP rather than the 15% Corbyn had to achieve.

Last year a rule change was passed which allowed conference to refer back a section of the NPF report without rejecting the whole thing. No one predicted how extensively it would be used at #Lab17.

Three reference backs were agreed – on welfare, on education and on health. Each successful move came from the left, but wasn't organised. Individual delegates pointed out weaknesses in the report which would not arm the party to be a clear anti-austerity voice. First was welfare, rather a surprise as the delegates focus; that Labour needed to oppose all Tory cuts to benefits hadn't been previously raised from the rostrum. On education the delegate's point was that all schools needed to be brought under local authority control. On health, the NHS should not be the preferred provider but the only provider and all profits are excess profits. Thus conference sharpened policy on key areas.

One reference back was defeated, that proposed by the right on Brexit.

Contemporary motions

Another chunk of conference discusses 'contemporary motions'. CLP and affiliates can submit motions which must deal with matters not covered by the NPF report. Delegates vote in a priority ballot as to which topics should be covered, though composite motions have not yet been agreed. Then those that have submitted motions on the chosen subject composite and conference gets to discuss the motions on up to eight topics.

The time available is squashed not only by the usually unfocused time spent discussing the NPF in plenary but by a series of policy seminars which take up about another entire day of conference time – a conference that only runs these days for just over 4 days.

The left again showed its strength when the CLPs overwhelmingly prioritized the topics supported by both CLPD and Momentum: Health, Housing, Rail and Social Care. The unions were pushing Workers rights, public sector pay, Grenfell and Growth and Investment.

There was controversy about this because this didn't include the

question of free movement. Two motions on this question were subsumed in a topic called Brexit by CAC, where the majority of the motions were from the right. It's extremely unlikely that progressive policy on migration would have got into a composite authored essentially by Progress and Labour First supporters. A standalone composite on free movement was unlikely to be agreed. It's unfortunate, but Corbyn's speech reiterated his opposition to racism and the scapegoating of migrants. Organisations like the Labour Campaign for Free Movement can continue to play an important role in ensuring that defence of free movement remains an essential part of Labour's approach to Brexit.

Composite meetings demonstrate what has and hasn't changed in the last 3 years. I heard detailed reports of the meetings on health and on housing where party staff turned up with bland drafts composite which just said the manifesto was wonderful. The point of contemporary resolutions is to develop or to change existing party policy. But delegates were having none of it and ensured the composites put to conference reflected the proposals that crafted at the grassroots, reflecting campaigns.

Then one of the sharpest demands from the Housing composite made it into the leader's speech. The motion, overwhelmingly carried by conference says:

Support full 'binding' – ballot rights for estate residents in any ongoing and future regeneration projects. This would follow a comprehensive programme which fully involves residents and their representatives in understanding the economic, social and environmental consequences of any proposals.

Corbyn used the example of Grenfell to explain how the term regeneration has been misused:

Too often what it really means is forced gentrification and social cleansing, as private developers move in and tenants and leaseholders are moved out.

But then he continued:

But we need to go further, as conference decided yesterday.... councils will have to win a ballot of existing tenants and leaseholders before any redevelopment scheme can take place.

Apart from the leader's support for conference sovereignty, this is a shot across the bows to the hated Haringey Development Scheme, being pushed through by the Labour council leadership against the opposition of the local community, tenants groups, unions, and both CLPs and MPs. And while the scheme in that London Borough is particularly vile, other Labour councils have acted in ways that completely contravene this approach.

Deepening democracy

One of the irritating things about conference 2016 was the behaviour of conference chairs. The most notorious example was the refusal to take card votes called for by delegates – as had been custom and practice even before Corbyn's election. It didn't look good at #Lab17 when a question to the first conference arrangement committee report was ignored by the Chair of CAC – and when further pushed the chair of conference gave an indecipherable response.

But things have moved. Card votes were taken at appropriate times and the new practice of taking CLP delegates separately from affiliates when the first hand vote is too close to call made things more transparent and easier to understand. Claudia Webbe definitely won the prize for the best conference chair ever, being very responsive to the mood on the floor. She particularly dealt with the difficulty that delegates wishing to move reference back have no procedure through which they can make this clear – so it's a lottery as to whether they get called. She said they should let her know and would be called. Excellent – but it's why conference needs its own standing orders to ensure consistency whoever is in the chair.

That isn't to say that everything was perfect. The way most delegates get to speak is problematic. Many stand on chairs (not possible for all – and

dangerous for those that do) or waving a variety of large props for lengthy periods. The chair can't see across the whole swathe of delegates – especially those at the back. It discriminates against most disabled people – and is frustrating for everyone. Maybe it's time for electronic indicators – which could also be used to vote, and thus create more time for contributions from delegates.

The most important thing to come out of the pre-conference NEC was the democracy review which will take submissions from individuals and party bodies over the months ahead.

It's encouraging to know that they have already been in touch with CLP's who remitted their rule changes. The left needs to take this seriously. We need extensive discussion about what changes are needed not only in terms of conference but across the party as a whole. Seeds of such ideas already exist in many, from the proposals to give women's conference full authority and democracy advocated by Labour Women Leading, and the rule change, which was remitted, to replace Local Campaign Forums with strengthened Local Government committees, through which local parties can exert real influence over those supposedly representing them in council

chambers.

Developing far reaching submissions to the democracy review needs to be an important focus for the left over the months ahead, along with taking out the message of the last manifesto, further strengthened and developed by #Lab17, to the communities we live and work in. As the Tory conference further underlines the depth of the government's crisis, Labour is right to say "Bring it on". A year ago there was much speculation about how long Jeremy Corbyn would last as Labour leader, today the focus is when he will be in No 10.

For a popular constituent process in Catalonia

14 October 2017

1. In the last weeks we have experienced the greatest mobilizations since the 1978 transition in Catalonia. The dynamics of self-organization generated around the defence of the polling stations, as well as the day of general strike on 3 October have left an organized base that goes beyond the traditional *independentist* layer. This base made the referendum possible, confronted political and police repression by exerting massive civil disobedience and stopped the country by upholding its sovereignty. It is from this base of self-organized society and with the will to enlarge it that we can face the challenges before us.

2. The response of the regime to the strongest crisis since the transition has been impunity and denial of police brutality, warlike language and repression. A climate that has normalized and stimulated Francoist and fascist manifestations and nostalgia in Catalonia and all over the State. The reactionary turn of the regime as a whole seeks to solve the crisis it has suffered, crushing fundamental rights and freedoms. A

turn that attacks the population of Catalonia, but also that of the whole of the Spanish State. A reactionary turn that has found the complicity of Ciudadanos and a disciplined PSOE. The democratic forces of the whole of Spain, with the implication of Catalan sovereignty, must be rearmed by a perspective of constituent processes that respond to the woes of the popular classes, break the isolation of Catalonia and take back the streets and political initiative.

3. The easy independence that the parties of the Government and the pro-independence organizations had promised was exhausted by the events. The political culture of delegation in the Government has made the structures of popular organization to develop in the time of discount. The attempt to dodge the clash with the state with "legal disconnection" or the "law-by-law" approach had deprived sovereignist forces of a profound debate on mass civil disobedience as a tool to move towards the self-determination, its costs and the type of organizational tools and materials necessary to

sustain it. At a hurry, the Committees in Defense of the Referendum and other spaces try to prepare for situations where popular solidarity will be key if we want the sovereignist block to overcome fear and material difficulties. Boosting self-organization and coordinating the base spaces must be a priority for anti-capitalism, as well as maintaining unity in action.

4. In recent days, the Spanish government, in conjunction with the great powers of the regime, has threatened the application of 155 and exceptional measures. Capital has also threatened changes in the corporate headquarters of major companies and banks such as Gas Natural, CaixaBank or Banco Sabadell, among others. Six of the 7 "Catalan" companies of the IBEX (the index of the Spanish Stock Exchange) have applied this measure without practical effects, with the sole intention of making political pressure. The privatizations and externalizations created by the *Convergència* governments have weakened the public sector to face them. In addition, the lack of planning for a conflict scenario with the oligarchy has led to

not implementing mechanisms of self-government and economic control. Mechanisms that would have allowed the development of a public economic fabric that, combined with the social and solidarity economy, to be strong enough to face the threats of economic drowning and to avoid the feeling of anguish of the people. That is, the supposed “state structures” used to silence criticism of the neoliberal policies of the Generalitat have not in practice developed anything since 2012.

5. The silence of the international community, with few exceptions, and in particular the call to return to the constitutional order from the European Union, adds to the obstacles to recognizing the will of the Catalans. Fortress Europe has its own interests in the Spanish State and its capital, as it had with Greek capital facing the will of the Hellenic people expressed in their referendum. Confronted with capital's Europe, we must seek solidarity from the peoples who suffer from xenophobic and authoritarian attitudes. The desire for Catalan change must be in the centre of the outcome of the crisis favourable to ordinary people and internationalism in Europe. Any transformative attempt needs to break isolation and spread beyond its borders.

6. The Catalan Government decided to suspend the Declaration that stated that “Catalonia will become an independent state in the form of a republic”. As we stated previously, we considered that the results of the referendum, with 43% participation, were legitimate and gave a democratic mandate. A mandate that had to be read intelligently and continue to deepen the 3-O bloc that went far beyond the *independists*. The problem of the Government's decision was not dodging a Declaration of Independence that could not be implemented immediately, but it has led to a profound disorientation and disappointment among those who made the 1-O possible. In addition, unlike on 1 and 3 October, the role reserved for the social base of sovereignism was to be mere spectators, we can not allow to return to the offices and opacity. We believe that it was necessary to move forward with a proposal that would maintain the unity of the democratic bloc and did not give in to State repression: to proclaim the Republic and to open a constituent process.

7. A popular and radically democratic constituent process can lead to this situation and give back the initiative to the streets and popular

mobilization. A process that constitutes the Catalan Republic, without closing a possible relationship with the other peoples of the State. A political solution that does not send the social base organized around the referendum home, but makes it possible to broaden it further. This needs specific policy towards those popular sectors that have remained distant from the pro-independence and / or have less identification as Catalans. A binding process where we put the flesh on the 1 October decision, to decide the Republic we want. The role of trade unionism and the social movements that foresaw the crackdown on 1 October and proposed the general strike of 3 October as a response will be key. The contributions of feminism and the social and solidarity economy to this constituent power must allow to overwhelm any repressive means of the State and also any attempt to curb the process of self-determination and pact between political elites. Easy independence has come across as a break with the state. We need a constituent process not to write a mere Constitution, but to generate a new institutionality that emanates from the popular self-organization and that is able to guarantee the needs of the popular classes in the conflict against the Spanish State.

A “demo for all” against independence

14 October 2017

What is the political meaning of this event?

The demonstration on Sunday was terrible, there were 300,000 people. Some came from outside Catalonia, but the vast majority came from here. This is very bad news because it strengthens the reactionary bloc and prepares public opinion for the repressive measures that will happen this week.

Article 155 is not applicable without setting up an exceptionally strong system of repression. [31] They will therefore have to apply Article 116, which means a state of emergency or of siege. The first is more likely, they need the PSOE to pass that in the Madrid parliament, since it requires an absolute majority. This would allow arrests of 10 days before passing before a judge, listening, searches of premises and homes without warrant, suspension of the right to demonstrate, strike or even meet. A state of siege remains very unlikely

because it requires a two-thirds majority in Parliament ... but it would allow the intervention of the army and the curfews. The king's speech was undoubtedly addressed to them to discipline them.

All parties voting for self-determination or independence will be attacked, first the parliamentarians and then the leadership of the organizations. They risk doing as in Euskadi, with the pretext of ETA, banning the parties. It depends on what happens tomorrow.

There will be no vote, there will be a speech by Puigdemont, which he will try to make as soft as possible, but it will be a declaration of independence anyway. So, it is possible that the state of emergency will be applied from Thursday or Friday ...

What was the composition of Sunday's demonstration?

At the demonstration, there were "anti-nationalists", people from the centre-left, but also all the fascist parties. There were incidents with the fachos, who tried to attack journalists.

There were incidents at the metros, they stopped beneath buildings where there were flags, to threaten people. But this was hidden by the official media.

The numbers present shows that the right is afraid - remember that after 68 the right-wing demonstration was enormous - but also that there is not a clear majority for independence, many people were demonstrating for the first time. There is a reactionary bloc in Catalonia, that is clear.

What will happen tomorrow to change the situation?

For now, there is no call to strike this Tuesday, it will depend on events. The unions are divided, there were many workers at the demonstration on Sunday. It looked a bit like the "manif pour tous" in France, with a mixture of hard right, soft right and depoliticized people, with a very low cultural level. [32]

Puigdemont will speak on television, he will be obliged to say something, to make a solemn proclamation. We are already occupied by the police, so splitting is a form of political suicide for the government of the Generalitat: the elite of the Guardia Civil already controls the ports, airports, basic infrastructures ... There may be a hyper-reactionary impulse, faced with a strike or a strong demonstration.

Local elections sharpen defeat for the right

13 October 2017, by **Luis Branco**

Despite the predominance of local factors in the choice of the vote, there is of course a national reading of the electoral results of 1 October: for the first time in 32 years, the ruling party won the municipal elections.

The Portuguese last saw the ruling party win the municipal elections in 1985. The victory of the Socialist Party in 2017, with a gain of 10 municipalities, means it is currently running 159 of the 308 municipalities in the country.

The Socialist Party in Progress

These elections are the first since the 2015 legislative elections, when the PS arrived behind the coalition of the PSD-CDS right. But it was able to form a government with support of the Parliament of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP) and the Left Bloc. The right-wing PSD-CDS parties, responsible for implementing the

austerity policies of the troika, hoped that the electorate would defeat the ruling coalition. Following the electoral defeat for the right, the leader of the PSD and former Prime Minister Pedro Passos Coelho announced his immediate withdrawal from political life. [33]

Although the Left has increased its percentage in votes and elected representatives in these elections, not all parties have benefited in the same way. In fact, only the PS managed to win new municipalities. The PCP has lost 10 municipalities, almost all of them to the PS - notably in Alentejo, the historic bastion of the PCP - and the Left Bloc still does not control any.

Positive results for the Left Bloc

For the Left Bloc, the result was positive although it remains modest. It increased in votes (+ 50,000) and the number of municipal councillors

increased from 100 to 125, the number of parish [*freguesia*] councillors from 138 to 213 and the number of deputy mayors from 8 to 12.

The central thrusts of the Left Bloc campaign, based on local struggles, were transparency, defence of territories and protection of the environment, strengthening of social services and public services, and the end of precariousness for municipal service officers.

While acknowledging the important work still needed to develop its local presence, Catarina Martins, Bloc coordinator, highlighted the election for the first time of a candidate of the Left Bloc, Ricardo Robles, to the municipal executive of Lisbon. [34]

The current political situation of the city of Lisbon is the same as in 2007. The mayor, Fernando Medina, needs the support of the Left Bloc councillor to have a majority in the Municipal Assembly. Throughout the campaign,

Ricardo Robles laid down the conditions for Lisbon to be able to implement the same agreement as at the national level: a moderate rent

housing programme, construction of dozens of municipal crèches, an increase in the budget for schools, development of public transport. The

outcome of the negotiations that will take place in the coming weeks may lead, if there is agreement, to the post of deputy mayor for the Left Bloc. [35]

Land at the centre of President Zuma's Radical Economic Transformation

12 October 2017, by **Mercia Andrews**

"Access to land is a key priority for people in the countryside. We will therefore review the appropriateness of the existing land redistribution programme. We are doing this in order to speed up land reform and redistribution and to promote land ownership by South Africans." Thabo Mbeki, 13th AU Summit, 2009

Radical land transformation has been used as a jack-in-the-box that has regularly jumped up and taken centre stage of the government's political discourse over the past twenty years. The pattern that has emerged over the two decades indicates more noise than an actual shift in political will.

Movements, farm worker organisations and activists struggling and supporting the rural poor, the landless and farm workers have consistently argued for radical land and agrarian transformation. These forces have repeatedly demanded an end to the skewed land holding patterns, with arable land concentrated in the hands of 37,000 commercial farmers.

Many have argued that the ANC has no vision of the economic, political and ecological significance of implementing meaningful agrarian transformation that puts land in the hands of thousands of small holder farmers (women and men). Such radical agrarian transformation has to be accompanied by adequate infrastructure, finances, training, extension and technical support to radically transform the countryside and provide livelihoods for thousands. These demands have mostly fallen on

deaf ears, except during electioneering periods and moments when the ruling party has had to respond to pressures from below and from the left.

We are now in such a moment; hence the ratcheting up by Zuma of talk of radical land redistribution as part of the radical economic transformation. We must recall ANC speak on land transformation over the past two decades, much of which has tended not to go very far.

More noise than action

Over the past twenty years, the ANC has periodically returned to radical land transformation. The slow pace of land reform and the extent to which land holding patterns have not shifted has been a thread that has run through several "State of the Nation" speeches and government conferences.

The National Land Tenure conference in 2001 was one of the first to deal with radical land transformation. This was to be the first in a series of conferences on land reform where we were told that the ruling party was to review the "fundamentals of land policy". At the 2001 conference, government emphasised its objective of transferring 30% of white agricultural land to those historically dispossessed by 2014. Yet, to date only 9% of arable land has been transferred.

Just four years later in 2005, Thoko Didiza, and the Deputy President, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, hosted a National Land Summit in Johannesburg. This summit was significant in that it brought together many relevant stakeholders and also had buy-in from white commercial agriculture and commercial farmers' unions, trade unions and civil society organisations. At the National Land Summit, Didiza said publicly that the ANC's market-led policy in the form of willing-buyer-willing-seller (WBWS) was an obstacle to speeding up land reform. In her opening address, Deputy President Mlambo declared in front of 1,500 representatives, "today we bury WBWS".

Shortly afterwards in 2006, President Mbeki in his State of Nation address stated that the state would be playing a key role, as the "lead driver" in land reform. This call for the ANC to play a more radical role was echoed at the ANC's 52nd National Conference in 2007. Here again the ruling party called for the fast-tracking of a small-scale farmer strategy. The 52nd conference again emphasised the need to speed up and increase the pace of land reform. "Willing-buyer-willing seller" was buried for the second time. Since then, there were several more government conferences that spoke about land redistribution and placing land at the centre of economic transformation. It took the government almost 10 years after the 2005 Land Summit to shift policy slightly.

The National Development Plan was probably the most concrete of the

ANCs' policy proposal in this regard. More recently, in 2014, under the Zuma administration, yet another land conference was organised, where all the noise of the previous summits was repackaged.

At the heart of the lack of transformation is an ANC with an urban elite with limited interest in agriculture.

Real Proposals are far from radical

What is clear however is that, throughout these policy shifts, land holding patterns have remained largely unchanged. Farm workers and farm dwellers have generally been excluded "as beneficiaries" of land reform. Where farms have been redistributed, it has been without financial and technical support.

The reality of all these pronouncements and calls for radical economic transformation is that meaningful and far-reaching land redistribution is simply not on the ANC's agenda. The substance of ANC land policy has been the insertion and consolidation of a small coterie of black commercial farmers as part of the existing white commercial agriculture and agro-business sector.

President Zuma started office as president in 2009 by asserting: "During the election campaign, we made it clear that rural development and land reform would be one of our key five priorities." Again, in 2015 in his State of the Nation Address Zuma outlined a nine-point plan that was to create more jobs and boost the economy is indicative of this approach. Agriculture and agro-processing were at the centre of the job creation strategy. Some of the proposals spoke about:

• transforming the agricultural sector through the roll-out of Agri-parks in 44 districts

• fast-tracking the implementation of the Strengthening Relative Rights of People Working the Land (50/50)

• implementing the One Household One Hectare programme supporting 90 black commercial farmers through the Commercialisation Support Programme, which targets 450 black smallholder farmers by 2022.

The consistent failure to deliver on these proposals is not unsurprising when we consider that the budget for the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform is not only underfunded but that land reform receives the least funds in the government's overall budget.

Beyond budgets

Apart from the gap between public announcements and implementation, the ANC government has a narrow vision of land and agrarian transformation. Moreover, it is deeply divided on the question of land and agrarian transformation, especially when it comes to land expropriation. For the ANC, the land and agrarian question is embedded in private property and capitalist relations of production; hence the ruling party's inability to act decisively

Land redistribution requires a political will and a political leadership that will put measures in place that reverse the market-oriented, neo-liberal approach to land reform that essentially still refuses to address historical dispossession and injustices. Some of these measures imply expropriation of land without compensation. This is a position from which Zuma has very recently backtracked after his earlier populist promises. Speaking at the Indaba of Traditional Leaders, he said "the land issue must be resolved within the ambit of the Constitution and the law".

At the heart of the lack of transformation is an ANC with an urban elite with limited interest in agriculture. They lack a perspective on the role that radical land redistribution can play in transforming the economy and giving the rural poor access to livelihoods. It also lacks a

vision that restores the relationship between land, people and nature. The ANC does not have the will to challenge white land holding patterns - they have no faith in impoverished rural people and their capacity to produce food and ensure national household food security. All the policies show a focus on maintaining the status quo whilst ensuring that there is a small layer of black commercial farmers.

Of course, without significant progress, there may come a point when these the rural poor will tire of waiting and take matters into their own hands as we see from the recent spate of occupations in Suurbraak and other parts of the country.

Nevertheless, it is possible for the ANC, when faced with the prospect of losing power, to use land reform to regain popular support and maintain a hold over the countryside. This we have seen in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in Southern Africa. It will mean considerable political upheaval in the rural areas and possibly open a Pandora's box where they lose control of the forces they have unleashed to drive land reform.

Against ANC policy zig zags and policy failure what is required is a national movement of landless people and the rural poor that demands and mobilises around a comprehensive platform of radical agrarian transformation. Large agricultural land should be subdivided and land allocated to households and producers. Municipalities must play a leading role in supporting radical land redistribution. We require services and support such as restructuring of the Land Bank so that it serves the needs and interests of smallholder producers and agricultural households. It must act as a facility that enables them, especially women, to access grants and soft loans. Our focus and priority has to be local food production for local markets and local household food security before an export oriented agriculture.

July 2017

Amandla

“It is a curious war, in which Maduro constantly rearms his enemies”

11 October 2017

CQFD: In January 2016, in CQFD, you analysed with Marc Saint-Upéry the crises of post-Chavez Venezuela. How have things evolved?

Fabrice Andreani. The victory of the anti-Chavist opposition coalition Table of Democratic Unity (MUD) in the December 2015 legislative elections meant the loss by the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) and its allies of 2 million votes, mainly because of the abstention in the barrios, the popular neighbourhoods, demobilized since the death of Chávez in 2013. This was against a background of shortages of regulated or subsidized goods and recourse to the black market, with astronomic rates of inflation. But also brutalization and an unprecedented extension of state violence. After declining between 1999 and 2008, it began with judicial, police and militia harassment of PSUV dissidents (trade unionists, peasants, indigenous people), before spreading to the students and the parliamentarians of the MUD who were demanding the departure of Maduro between February and May 2014. It took on a much more lethal character in 2015, through a campaign, as illusory as it was spectacular, against ordinary popular kinds of illegal activities - especially small- and medium-scale smuggling -resulting in thousands of evictions from public housing and dozens of summary executions.

I was in Venezuela in the spring of 2016 when people started talking about a humanitarian crisis. Apart from local fruit and vegetables and bread here and there, the purchase of any basic product - flour, oil, milk, margarine, soap, nappies, sanitary pads, paracetamol, condoms... - implied waiting in endless queues or paying a high price to the local trader.

Emigration spread to all social classes.

Riots and looting, which had almost disappeared under Chávez, became commonplace, as well as the lynching of thieves, real or targeted as such. All of this in a context where the rate of homicide is fifty times higher than in Europe and 95 per cent of crimes and misdemeanours are unresolved.

Meanwhile, the MUD was deprived of a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly, which augured for a quasi-cohabitation. The Supreme Court of Justice, whose mandate was renewed before the legal date by the outgoing PSUV majority, effectively invalidated the election of indigenous deputies on suspicions of fraud (so far unproven), then annulled all the laws that had been adopted, including entry into the country of humanitarian aid, denounced as an "imperialist Trojan horse"... Maduro then took on emergency powers and declared a state of economic emergency. On the one hand, he set up a network of committees of PSUV militants who directly sell the food sent by the army. On the other hand, he launched the Orinoco Mining Arc, whereby 12 per cent of the country's territory is to be exploited via opencast mining, in order to extract minerals (gold, silver, diamond, bauxite, coltan, cobalt...), by a military enterprise linked to the entourage of Maduro and by Chinese, Russian and North American multinationals - in defiance of the vital rights of indigenous peoples.

Following these various irregularities, the MUD launched a procedure to revoke Maduro by referendum - also demanded by many Chavists. But the National Electoral Council (CNE) changed the rules several times along the way. Finally it cancelled it in extremis, after having suspended the regional elections, but also the trade

union elections, where the PSUV no longer controls the two major industries, oil and steel. So by autumn 2016, the demonstrations called by the MUD and the student organizations coexisted intermittently with popular protests. So that between two steps of salsa and jokes about his "diet" on TV, Maduro was forced to cut short at the last minute disastrous inaugurations of infrastructures in barrios - which was followed by arrests and convictions. Since the end of March, when the Supreme Court decided to take the place of Parliament and Luisa Ortega, the Attorney General - a Chavist - denounced a break in the constitutional order, the streets have not been empty. Especially since on May 1st, after some thirty deaths, hundreds of arrests and a series of penalties of ineligibility against MUD parliamentarians, Maduro pulled out of his hat the idea of an all-powerful Constituent Assembly. Unlike Chávez in 1999, he refused to submit to a referendum on the system of election, which was tailor-made for the PSUV [36]. The opposition boycotted the election of this Constituent Assembly which took place in August under conditions that were more than dubious.

The dissenting prosecutor Luisa Ortega has since fled the country, denouncing the corruption of Maduro and others. What political forces does the government actually have at its disposal? Is there any opposition other than the liberal right?

The first victory of the Constituent Assembly was to dismiss the "traitor" Luisa Ortega, who had been at the head of her ministry since 2007. Too well known to be found at home with a bullet in her head, she was given a warning by the abduction of her

daughter and granddaughter in February when she was in Brazil. In dissenting, she is well placed to know what risks she runs if there is no movement on the side of the PSUV: at best, she will finish in a minor position on the left flank of the MUD; at worst, she will rot in a military prison alongside people whom she did not much care about in previous years [37]. Or else she can take flight, at the risk of being forced, due to insufficient protection, to give names to the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), present in many countries of South America, in exchange for political asylum.

However, she explained that she could not demand that the protestors respect the law in the face of a government proclaiming "Whoever is not with us is a terrorist" (as Maduro put it), and while exactions have become the norm [38]. Before embarking with her files in a "go-fast" (a flight) to Colombia and then Brazil, along with her husband and colleagues who were equally threatened, Ortega said that of the more than a hundred violent deaths since April, about 25 per cent were due to the police and the army, and 40 per cent to pro-government paramilitaries. To this must be added the more confused causes of the deaths of rioters and onlookers, as well as the assassination of Chavist militants and representatives, as well as police and military personnel [39].

Today, "Madurism" is fundamentally based on the politico-military chieftainships of public administrations and enterprises, and on networks of currency, contraband and drug trafficking. To this must be added the support of a clientele of 10 to 15 per cent of the electorate, of which a minority deals the crumbs (from the oil rent) to the rest, provided that they stay in line. The monocolour Constituent Assembly probably mobilized not more than half of the 8 million voters announced - against a backdrop of widespread blackmail in relation to public employment and food aid.

In the face of Ortega's "betrayal" and the hundreds of cases of military insubordination, part of the PSUV and its allies doubtless hoped for a signal

from the higher ranks of the army, and vice versa. But notwithstanding the dissent of three PSUV deputies, the appeal to rebellion of a helicopter pilot over Caracas in July, or the civilian-military attack on a barracks in the popular town of Valencia in August 2007, the status quo prevailed. Whether it is the Platform in Defence of the Constitution, launched in mid-2016 by ex-ministers, intellectuals and high-ranking officials, or Marea Socialista (see the platform published on July 29th, 2017) a dissident political grouping of the PSUV, no anti-Madurist Chavist group can claim to have a significant popular base. The Socialism and Freedom Party, autonomous from the PSUV since 2008 and anchored in the trade-union movement, created along with Marea Socialista and collectives of barrios a Platform of the People in Struggle and Critical Chavism. But it still has to fight against the widespread idea on the left that occupying the street is playing the game of the right. On this point the anarchists close to the monthly *El Libertario* are in agreement.

Roughly speaking, the MUD opposition coalition gravitates to the centre-right - its parties range from the far left post-Maoists to the liberal-conservative right, through various forms of social democracy. But these labels generally remain in the background during mobilizations that bring together up to a few hundred thousand people. And it can be over a million, in a country of 31 million inhabitants, when students, private sector employees, health workers and teachers are involved. As is the case with any state or "body of armed men" (as Engels put it), who trick and mistreat in a "socialist" Newspeak, the "anti-communist" - and here, anti-Cuban - discourse is certainly present in the street, in particular among the students. But this is more in the name of a primordial political liberalism than an economic ultraliberalism that has never really caught on in this oil country [40].

There is also racism - based more on class than on race - in the wealthy fringes of the MUD, but it is too minor to explain alone the weak mobilization of the anti-Madurist Chavist base. In reality, the culture of street protest,

still strong in the barrios, is contained in it by the "social informants" of the PSUV and the paramilitaries. On the other hand, this same culture is totally foreign to the middle-class youth who supported the revolution. In short, behind the comfortable criticism of the leading contingents in the demonstrations, described as violent and right-wing - while being eminently plural - the fear of repression remains a great factor of deterrence.

Some observers argue that the situation, comparable to that in Chile in 1973, results from an "imperialist economic war". What do you think?

The April 2002 coup, followed by the oil and commercial lock-out the following winter, both backed by the private media and the United States, but defeated by a massive popular and military counter-offensive, forms the original matrix of the Chilean analogy. Chávez wanted to stop the rampant privatization of the PDVSA oil company and launch an agrarian reform. The managers of PDVSA and the big bosses then bet, mistakenly, on his fall. Hence the decision to reinstate exchange controls to prevent capital flight. But this, together with the complicity of the Chavist high officials, generated a hyper-profitable business, through the falsification of imports and the resale on the black market of petrodollars assigned by the state to pay for them. For the greater benefit of the bosses tied up with to the government, especially those in charge of public enterprises and subcontractors. The private sector, forced to be more scrupulous under the threat of nationalization, got into this business later on. Of the trifle of one trillion petrodollars accumulated over the period 2003-2013, nearly a quarter evaporated, even before it was counted by the state, and another quarter was lost in the operations of an allocation of foreign exchange to importers who speculate, in various ways, with the foreign exchange earned.

Besides, while the oil sector and nationalized enterprises (steel, cement, electricity, etc.) were slowing down - because of lack of maintenance, corruption scandals and repeated strikes - the rentier euphoria

was such that the state has continued to get into debt to finance a number of major projects: from TeleSur satellites to the hundreds of thousands of homes provided in the last campaign of Chávez (2012), and a number of infrastructures that have never been created (metro and train lines, bridges, etc.).

The PDVSA even incurred debts in kind China - something which was only viable if the price of oil remained high. Unfortunately, crude oil prices collapsed in 2014, making the gap between the official and unofficial exchange rates of the dollar literally explode - a gap that already provided profit margins of at least 100 per cent to "agents of economic war".

Although the fall in crude oil prices is partly a result of the growth of shale oil production in the United States, it is not the result of any concerted plan... No more than is the flight of capital, the shortages and the hyper-inflation, not to mention the disappearance of millions of 100-bolivar bills - worth almost nothing and used to make fake dollars (using "cleaned" paper).

As the Marxist economist Manuel Sutherland, who was sacked last year by the Bolivarian University, clearly explains, the Bolivarian Revolution succeeded in making currency trading "the most profitable business in the history of capitalism", and all the rest flows from that. It is a curious war, he adds, where Maduro and his consorts are constantly rearming their enemies whom they have denounced for so many years. The fact is that they prefer to pay, cash down, an "odious" debt, including to Wall Street, rather than restructure it - probably less through divergences with the IMF than to avoid any audit that would reveal the identity of the operators of this veritable robbery of the century.

However, it would have been enough to save less than a tenth of the loot stashed away since 2003 to pay for more than three years of imports at the staggering levels of 2012. Moreover, the fact that small Madurist groups advocate an agrarian neo-Stakhanovism in isolated communes has very little influence over the activity of the rest of the population, 90 per cent urban, half of them self-employed in the informal market sector.

Trump recently spoke of "a possible military option if necessary". Is it credible?

Neither the State Department nor the Pentagon nor the CIA take seriously any statement from Trump on international issues. All the regional leaders, allied or not, condemned these remarks. As did the White House National Security Advisor, and then the Vice-President. What is worrying, especially in Bogotá and Brasilia, is the possibility of a civil war, with a population exodus even more spectacular than the current one. A scenario all the more sombre in that it would correspond to a form of "Lebanonization" (as in Lebanon, with confrontations based on regions) of the conflict, which would be more multi-gang than binary. The extreme right-wing (narco-) paramilitaries demobilized in Colombia and present in the Andes, as well as the pseudo-left guerrillas of Llanos (South), would have as much chance of joining with representatives of the MUD as with the PSUV, for pragmatic commercial reasons.

This interview was first published on the CQFD site, and subsequently on the site [A l'encontre](#).

Note by A l'encontre

According to the AFP of September 16th, 2017: "Under the auspices of the Dominican government and the United Nations, the government and the opposition agreed on Thursday in Santo Domingo to the creation of a group of friendly countries to lead future negotiations. They will meet again on September 27th. The Venezuelan opposition added to these talks the respect of certain conditions, among which were an "electoral calendar" including the presidential election at the end of 2018, the release of 590 "political prisoners", the "respect" of the Parliament whose powers were confiscated by the Constituent Assembly and the lifting of sanctions that prevent some oppositionists from standing in elections."

Moreover, to give the appearance of independence against the dollar, Maduro asserted, two days ago, that sales of oil would be denominated in Chinese renminbi; which is, in fact, a demand of Beijing.

According to the AFP of September 14th, 2017: "Confronted with an unprecedented food and economic crisis, Venezuela seems determined to remedy its shortages. The government, led by President Maduro, announced on Wednesday that a new urban agriculture plan will be put in place by October 4th. This includes the "rabbit plan" whose aim is to develop the breeding of the rodent and encourage the inhabitants to eat it. "There is a cultural problem because we were taught that rabbits were cute animals," Agriculture Minister Freddy Bernal said on a television show this week. "A rabbit is not a pet. It is two and a half kilograms of high-protein, cholesterol-free meat."

"The popular classes must intervene with

their own tools of mobilisation”

10 October 2017

How was the 3rd of October strike prepared?

The coordinating space of the Catalan trade union left, together with student coordinations and unions, immigrant organisations, feminist associations and left political organisations, allowed a response to the repressive actions of the Spanish government. [41] This space also included Omnium and the Assemblea Nacional Catalunya (ANC), two associations of Catalan civil society which are relays of the pro-independence majority of the Generalitat (the Catalan autonomous government). The convening of a strike also exerted pressure on the CC.OO (Workers' Commissions) and the UGT (the two biggest union federations in the Spanish state), who have set up the Taula per la democràcia (Committee for Democracy), with, among others, associations of entrepreneurs in small and medium enterprises, the Catalan Association of Public Universities and the ANC. Initially this space did not wish to call for mobilisations on 2 or 3 October, but rather a halting of activity (“aturada”) for 5 October. In the end, all of these organisations called for a mobilisation on 3 October, but with nuances. All the alternative unions envisaged a strike, with the related rights, the Committee for Democracy spoke of a “stoppage of the country’s activity”, a sort of lock-out or of a strike negotiated with the Catalan institutions and enterprises. Because, for the CC.OO and the UGT, the word strike is politically loaded. For the more moderate, indeed right-wing sectors involved in the independence process, the lock out formula was more agreeable.

How were the committees for the defence of the referendum and the “Escoles Obertes” (“Open schools”) initiative involved in the preparation of the strike?

In a confused and partial manner. “Open Schools” have been more linked to the Committee for Democracy in the promotion of a stoppage of activity in the country. The defence committees were more centred on the strike and the empowerment of the working class. These territorially constructed committees could not as such generate strikes in workplaces, but they opposed it to the lock-out. In some places, notably Barcelona, they have led actions going in the direction of strike action, demonstrating to close the workplaces, blockading the main roads, explaining the reasons for the strike. And now the strike is over, the defence committees want to continue organising. As in Poble Sec, a neighbourhood in Barcelona, where meetings continue after having organised the defence of the polling stations on Sunday and the strike on Tuesday. This space of territorial coordination is necessary because it allows the intervention of the popular classes in the independence process to increase disobedience in relation to the state and to bypass the leadership of the independence movement.

How was the strike respected in the workplaces?

It was an “abnormal” strike which cannot be understood according to the classical criteria. Social and work-related demands were certainly manifested. But in general, the demands were democratic: against police repression, against the Spanish government, for the acceptance of the referendum results. The 3 October mobilisation combined elements of a lock-out in the small and medium enterprises with features of a strike and closure of administrations by the Catalan institutions. For example, most teachers went on strike, but the teaching institutions were closed by the Generalitat’s secretariat of education. Also, the universities were closed, but the students held

meetings. While the dockers struck massively, in the metal workers sector for example, influenced by the CC.OO and the UGT, the stoppage of production was relatively weak. However, millions of people were on the streets throughout the day. For example, in Manresa, a town of 70,000 inhabitants, 40,000 demonstrated. For the Generalitat, closing the administrations has been a means of controlling this mobilisation and highlighting its own role. But all this led nonetheless to a bypassing of the leadership of the independence process.

What impact did this general strike initiative coming from the trade union left and the social movements have on the independence process?

Its interest lies in the clear linking of democratic and social demands. Until now, it has always been the pro-independence right which has led the process. But on October 3rd, popular and democratic slogans appealing to the memory of class struggle have allowed the link to be made between defending democracy and changing society.

What is interesting is to see how the strike has allowed sectors of the population who do not organise through trades unionism to mobilise. The space of coordination of the general strike, with the feminist movement, the questions of the workplaces, the rights of immigrants, has allowed a transversal approach and debates. The people have had a mass experience allowing the discovery of the meaning of a strike of carers led by women, understanding why immigrants participated in the strike, or that people with Spanish flags also mobilised. On the other hand, the people have had the experience of disobeying the state, occupying the squares, blockading the roads or closing down commerce.

How can the working class and the social movements become the protagonist of the independence process?

The popular classes and the working class must intervene with their own tools of mobilisation, whether classic or more modern: the strike, the neighbourhood defence committee. Until now, the majority leadership of the process had a “citizenship” vision. But the referendum defence committees introduce an embryonic element of social and territorial councils.

In recent days those mobilised are talking more than ever of politics in class terms. The coordination of combative trades unionism, the social and left political movements allow unity of the popular classes beyond the acquiescent leadership of the independence process.

Thus, a space where most of the sectors calling for the general strike can be found is the March of Dignity. This coordination has proposed a Charter of Social Rights for Catalonia. [42] In the event of a hypothetical proclamation of the Catalan Republic, it will be necessary to debate what type of Republic we

want to construct: health and education systems, labour relations, women’s rights policies. This charter is a tool for debating the key elements of the possible construction of a new society, by combining local questions and connections at the level of the Spanish state. Concretely, this allows already having a debate with the concrete sectors of the working classes and going into the villages, where the social and associative tissue is weaker, where the pro-independence right is hegemonic and where a certain passivity exists, to explain and present this programme and our demands in terms of class.

Iraq Kurdish Independence Faces Threats from Outside and Contradictions from Within

9 October 2017, by Joseph Daher

Popular scenes of jubilation have also taken place among the Kurdish populations in neighboring countries to celebrate the results of the referendum. Residents of a number of cities, mostly populated by Kurds in north-western Iran, including Marivan and Baneh, challenged the threats of repression by the Iranian authorities and celebrated the victory of the “yes” by dancing in the streets and singing slogans praising the Kurdish nationalist movements. Clashes between demonstrators and security forces took place in the cities of Mahabad and Sanandaj. In Sanandaj, the crowd waved the prohibited Kurdistan flag in Iran. As a reminder, the Kurdish majority populated areas have been severely repressed in the last decades by the Islamic Republic of Iran, and many Kurdish activists languish in prison, often sentenced to long prison terms or death.

Similarly, in Syria, in the territories controlled by the PYD, the Syrian branch of the PKK, many popular demonstrations commemorated the victory of the “yes” in several cities such as Qamishli, Amouda and Derik

(Malakiyya).

Threats and acts of hostilities against the Kurdistan Regional Government

However, regional and international pressures and threats have escalated against the authorities of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), headed by Massoud Barzani. In an attempt to coax the Iraqi government and neighboring countries and calm the pressures on the Kurdish autonomous region, Barzani wrote a letter to the Baghdad authorities saying that the referendum did not mean an immediate announcement of independence or the imposition of a status quo on anyone. He added: “We are ready to wait for two years during which we can communicate through a deep and constructive dialogue to discuss all the

problems and subjects that can make us two partners in building a future for our two nations, without any de facto imposition in any zone.” This was not enough to reassure the authorities in Baghdad and neighboring states.

Since the announcement of the victory of the “yes” in the referendum, the Iraqi government has multiplied threats and hostile acts against the Kurdish autonomous authorities. Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi set as a condition of any negotiations the cancellation of the results. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani also declared his opposition to the secession of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Members of the Iraqi parliament voted in favor of the closure of border posts outside the authority of the Iraqi state and asked the Prime Minister, as head of the armed forces, to take all necessary measures to maintain the unity of Iraq. They also reiterated their demand for a dispatch of security forces in “disputed areas”, including the multi-ethnic and oil-rich city of Kirkuk. These contested areas include the province of Kirkuk (north), but

also parts of the provinces of Nineveh (north), Dyala and Salaheddin (north of Baghdad). Most of these territories were conquered by the Kurdish peshmerga fighters in 2014, as a result of the chaos after the offensive of the Jihadist movement of the Islamic State (IS). I've written about the [background here](#).

In the city of Kirkuk, tension continues to mount. Members of the Shi'a fundamentalist militias of the Popular Mobilization Forces, Hashd al-Sha'bi, have allegedly positioned themselves as "civilian," but are heavily armed. They are also present in some localities of the governorate of Nineveh.

On 29 September, the authorities of Baghdad imposed an air blockade on the Kurdish autonomous areas to force the KRG to relinquish control of its airports and cancel the outcome of its referendum on independence, to which the KRG refused. Flight connections between Iraqi Kurdistan and foreign countries have therefore ceased.

Turkey and the Islamic Republic of Iran react violently

Turkey, Syria and Iran, three neighboring countries with significant Kurdish minorities, have all condemned the referendum and called for the unity of Iraq against any division plans.

Turkey and Iran are the most vehement in their rejection of the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan and the intimidations of these governments have proliferated against Erbil. The Turkish Parliament had already extended the mandate allowing for the deployment of Turkish military troops in Iraq and Syria before the referendum on 23 September. This is a clear threat to the Kurdish authorities of Erbil. Ankara had already threatened military and economic measures in retaliation for the holding of the referendum.

Following the announcement of the massive victory of the "yes" to the referendum, the Turkish government reiterated its threats against the KRG, while announcing the cessation of military training of the Peshmerga forces in northern Iraq. Turkish President Erdogan also said that Iraqi Kurds "would pay the price" for their decisions and would soon be lacking everything, including food by "going hungry," if his country closed the borders and hence truck and oil traffic. Hundreds of thousands of barrels of oil every day are sold through pipelines from northern Iraq to Turkey, linking the region to world oil markets.

Tehran has pledged on its side to stand by Baghdad and Ankara against the outcome of the referendum for the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan. Ali Akbar Velayati, the chief adviser of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, declared that "Muslim nations will not allow the creation of a second Israel." The conservative press in Iran described the referendum as a "Zionist plot" to destabilize the region.

Similarly, Hezbollah, the Shi'a fundamentalist Islamic movement in Lebanon, through its leader Hassan Nasrallah, said that the Iraqi Kurdistan independence vote marked a first step towards the partition of the Middle East and would lead to internal wars and it was necessary to oppose it. He described the referendum as a US-Israeli plot to sow chaos in the region.

The collaboration between Baghdad, Ankara, and Tehran has intensified against the KRG in recent days.

An Iraqi military delegation visited the border of Kurdistan on the Iranian side and then Iran deployed a dozen tanks supported by artillery at its border with Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region on October 2nd. The deployment at the Parviz Khan border point was part of joint military drills conducted by the Iranian and the Iraqi armed forces in response to the referendum. Joint military exercises between the Turkish and Iraqi military forces had already been conducted at the border of Iraqi Kurdistan on the Turkish side on the days following the holding of the referendum. A small

Iraqi force was still deployed on the Turkish side of the border as part of joint drills with the Turkish army.

The Iraqi authorities also plan to take control of the borders of the autonomous region of Kurdistan in coordination with Iran and Turkey, the Iraqi Ministry of Defence said on 29 September. In a similar fashion, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi suggested that his government would take control of the revenues generated by Kurdish oil exports.

The United States and Russia, or the maintenance of stability at all costs

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said the United States does not recognize the independence referendum of Iraqi Kurdistan and calls for a halt to "threats of reciprocal actions." Western countries repeatedly reiterated their opposition to holding a referendum, fearing that a victory of the "yes" of the referendum would lead to more regional instability, weaken the "war" against IS, and lead to unrest in disputed areas such as the multi-ethnic and wealthy city of Kirkuk.

Russia, which invested over \$4 billion in the Kurdistan Region's energy sector, overtaking the United States as the largest investor, has been more cautious, saying considering "with respect the Kurdish national aspirations." Moscow considers, however, "that the disputes between Baghdad and Erbil must be resolved by dialogue with the aim of finding a formula of coexistence within the Iraqi state." The significant Russian investments in the energy sector might be one of the reasons why Turkey has not yet made good on its threats to shut down the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline, so to not harm its Russian ally. Rosneft, the Russian state oil company, expects the pipeline to be open for business, and Moscow expects revenues from the KRG as a return on its investment. Without the pipeline, open borders or payments from Baghdad to Erbil, the KRG will go broke, a disaster for the Russian venture. This might however not last for too long as Turkish government is ready to escalate rapidly its sanctions against the KRG if no solution is found.

Israel's support, or opportunism

Israel is the only regional state that had supported the independence of the Kurdistan autonomous region. A long historical political relation exists between the State of Israel and the Barzani family, going back to the sixties when the first Israeli special-forces aided Mullah Mustafa Barzani and his peshmerga rebels in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Massoud Barzani previously declared in a 2005 interview with the Saudi daily al-Hayat. "Establishing ties between the Kurds and Israel is not a crime, especially since many Arab countries already have links with the Jewish state".

Moreover, in Iraqi Kurdistan, Mossad agents or former Israeli soldiers have been quietly training Kurdish security forces. The KRG has also sold large quantities of oil to the State of Israel in recent years through international trading companies and without the approval of the authorities in Baghdad. In this affair, this oil passed through an oil pipeline to the Turkish port of Ceyhan, on the Mediterranean Sea. Turkey, allied with the Kurdish government of Massoud Barzani, has facilitated this long-standing affair. Ankara opened an account for Erbil in the Turkish public bank, Halk and stored Kurdish oil waiting for buyers.

Israel does not support the right of self-determination of the Kurdish people genuinely or because they have been oppressed, but they view an independent Kurdish state under the reactionary and pro-western imperialist leadership of Barzani as a way to find a new ally in the region against various regional actors, especially Iran. Israel has for example rather been silent of the faith of Kurds in Syria, Turkey and Iran. Prime Minister Netanyahu also said recently that Israel considers the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) a terrorist group, taking the same position as Turkey, the United States and the European Union. Israel's also played a role in the capture of the fugitive leader of the PKK Abdullah Ocalan in early 1999 in Kenya by the Turkish state.

On the other side, the Barzani clan and some of the Kurdish bourgeois leadership tend to see Israel as a role model for an independent Kurdistan, a small nation surrounded by enemies and bolstered by a strategic partnership with the United States. This feeling has been nurtured by decades of oppression against Kurdish people by the central authorities in the countries they are present (Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria). The lack of solidarity to the Kurdish issue among the populations of the regions, even among wide sectors of the left did not help. In addition to this, the various Palestinian leaderships organizations have generally stood alongside Arab authoritarian regimes against the Kurdish people. This situation was symbolized by the Israeli flag raised at several Kurdish rallies in Erbil and across Europe.

The internal problems of the KRG

The autonomous region of Kurdistan has experienced the worst economic crisis since 2003. It is clear, as I [mentioned previously](#), that the referendum was orchestrated by the leader Massoud Barzani to remain in power and divert the working and popular classes from socio-economic problems in the region. There must be no illusion about the bourgeois and authoritarian leadership of the ruling Barzani clan.

Similarly, all measures aimed at creating a new form of oppression against ethnic and religious minorities in the Kurdistan autonomous region must be denounced. Since 2003, Kurdish Peshmerga forces have relied on "intimidation, threats, arrests and arbitrary detentions" to secure the support of minority communities and establish control over disputed territories, according to report published in November 2009 by the human rights organization Human Rights Watch (HRW). Some have spoken of a process of "kurdification," by trying to create a form of allegiance on the part of minorities towards the KRG. In some areas, for example, opening schools where the

students learn Kurdish and recruiting civil servants for administrations newly created by the KRG.

In the governorate of Nineveh, for example, the Kurdistan Democratic Party of (KDP), controlled by the Barzani family, replaced undemocratically the mayors of two important Christian towns in the Nineveh plain, Faiez Abed Jahwareh of Alqosh and Basim Bello of Tel Keppe (Tal Kayf), who both opposed the holding of the referendum in their localities. DPK affiliated members took their seats. Numerous popular demonstrations were organized in these localities to denounce these measures.

The official structures and councils of the governorate of Nineveh and the Sinjar region have gradually been dominated by members of the KDP through various clientelist policies and intimidation's practices against members critical of KRG's policies.

Even worse, Human Rights Watch revealed more recently that during the war against IS, Kurdish Peshmerga fighters also tore down with bulldozers Sunni Arab villages in disputed areas of the governorates of Kirkuk and Nineveh.

Nothing can justify these kinds of actions, although of course, it is necessary to recognize and denounce the campaigns of "Arabization" in the past led by successive Iraqi regimes, especially under the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, in these disputed territories. This policy of demographic change resulted at the time in the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of people from their homes, especially Kurdish populations, in order to install Sunni Arabs. This is the reason why the KRG authorities and large sectors of the Kurdish society in Iraq claim to have historical legitimacy on these lands.

But in these disputed areas, other ethnic and religious populations also exist, including Turkmen, Assyrian and Chaldean Christians, Yazidis, Kakais, and Shabaks.

The authoritarianism of the Barzani clan did not stop during and after the referendum against the other Kurdish

political groups. Throughout the period leading to the referendum, the KDP branded any questioning and criticism about the way the referendum was organized and the date chosen for it as a sign of treason on the part of its political rivals. The Gorran Movement, the Kurdistan Islamic Group (known as Komal), and sectors of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) initially, before changing their position, in addition to Kurdish activists, denounced the objectives of the Barzani clan through the organization of this referendum, including its willingness to divert the Kurdish population from the socio-economic problems, the monopolization of power by the KDP, and the closure of the parliament. These parties and activists had a long history of struggle for the right to self-determination of the Kurdish people in Iraq, but wanted to create the best conditions for holding this referendum and preparing for the independence process, for example by opening once again the parliament, to improve the socio-economic living conditions of citizens and to reach a political consensus on this process of independence. Komal finally expressed its support for "yes" on the eve of the ballot, while the Gorran movement did not give any official position, but its leader, Omar Said Ali, announced that he had voted "yes."

Conclusion

The broad victory of the "yes" in the Kurdistan autonomous region is rooted in a long historical willingness by the Kurdish people to establish a state and also the consequences of a violent history of oppression of the

Kurdish populations in Iraq by the various previous Iraqi nationalist authoritarian regimes. The massacre by chemical weapons against the Kurdish population of Halabja in 1988 by the Baathist regime is particularly remembered. About 5,000 Kurds perished in this massacre. This attack was part of Operation Anfal launched by the authorities in Baghdad during this period, which killed 182,000 people and destroyed more than 90 percent of the Kurdish villages.

The Iraqi referendum also demonstrated, once again, the failure of the models of the capitalist, chauvinist and centralized nation-states of the region, which have consistently repressed, erased, and/or denied the plurality of their societies by affirming the supremacy and/or domination of an ethnic group over others, a religious sect over others or both at the same time.

That is why we must support the right of self-determination of the Kurdish people in Iraq and elsewhere and denounce the foreign international and regional pressures to prevent the Kurdish population of Iraq from their right to self-determination.

This support must also go through a clear opposition to the Barzani clan that will bring no good to the Kurdish popular classes at the level of democratic and social rights. Similarly, it is necessary to denounce the attempts of the KRG to impose a new ethnic domination and it should leave the populations of the disputed areas the right to choose freely, which state they want to belong to, how they want to organize themselves and choose their political representatives.

The will of the Barzani clan to convince Western imperialist states of the utility of an Iraqi Kurdistan on the regional political scene, not to mention [links with Israel](#) and the Barzani family, must also be combated. However, these elements can't be used to justify the refusal of the right of self-determination of the Kurdish people, as did some chauvinist left in the region. As the revolutionary Russian [Vladimir Lenin](#) said:

"The fact that the struggle for national liberation against one imperialist power may, under certain circumstances, be utilized by another 'Great' Power in its equally imperialist interests should have no more weight in inducing Social Democracy to renounce its recognition of the right of nations to self-determination than the numerous case of the bourgeoisie utilizing republican slogans for the purpose of political deception and financial robbery, for example, in the Latin countries, have had in inducing them to renounce republicanism."

This articulation between these two main different objectives (support for the right of self-determination to the Kurdish people and opposition to the Barzani clan) is a necessity for combining democratic and social rights in Kurdistan autonomous Region. We should bring our support to the most revolutionary and democratic sectors of Kurdistan autonomous region to build a progressive alternative.

3/10/2017

[Peace News](#)

The Marxism of C.L.R. James

8 October 2017, by [Paul Le Blanc](#)

There has been a flood of works by and about James since his death. There are now two biographies—one by "new left" historian Paul Buhle, and

a more recent product of Kent Worcester's careful scholarship. A massive anthology of his writings, edited by Anna Grimshaw, was

glowingly reviewed in the New York Times. A fascinating collection edited by Buhle and Paget Henry entitled C.L.R. James's Caribbean has now

been followed by a re-issue of his sports classic *Beyond a Boundary*.

Grimshaw and Keith Hart have also made available a major work by James, rich in pioneering cultural analysis, entitled *American Civilization*. Professor Robert Hill of the University of California at Los Angeles is projecting the publication of the *Collected Works of C.L.R. James* over the coming years, according to a front-page story in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. An important collection of essays by various scholars, edited by Selwyn Cudjoe and William E. Cain, *C.L.R. James, His Intellectual Legacies*, has just appeared.

The *Revolutionary Studies* series of Humanities Press has recently republished his 1937 classic *World Revolution* (a history of the Communist International), has published a volume edited by Scott McLemee and myself, entitled *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism, Selected Writings 1939-1949*, and plans to bring out his wonderful 1960 lectures *Modern Politics in the near future*.

James is generally acknowledged to have been one of the most original Marxist thinkers to emerge from the Western hemisphere, yet essential aspects of his identity came from the other side of the Atlantic, from Europe and Africa. As he explained to one African-American scholar, "I am a Black European, that is my training and outlook."

He offered penetrating analyses on the interrelationships of class, race and gender, and his discussions of colonialism and anti-colonialism could be brilliant. But C.L.R. James also embraced the heritage of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, the working-class and socialist movements of Europe and North America, and the Bolshevism of Lenin and Trotsky which transformed Russia and promised to liberate the world from all oppression. At the same time, his writings on sports deserve special emphasis—“which is something that can be said of few Marxist theorists. James began his writing career by writing about baseball’s distant cousin, cricket, first

in the West Indies and later in England.

Paul Buhle, following James, tells us that such sports are a means of "expression for ordinary genius," adding that James regarded cricket as "a fully fledged art form equal to theatre, opera and dance. To this claim James added a populist amendment: 'What matters in cricket, as in all the finer arts, is not the finer points but what everyone with some knowledge of the elements can see and feel.' It embodied the elemental human movement which ... constituted the basis and the source of renewal for all arts." (One can imagine that these insights could also be applied to modern-day basketball, music videos on MTV, and much else.)

Such things—“James felt—“come from the same deeply creative sources as more conventional great art and also as genuinely revolutionary politics. The mass popular response to such things, similarly, has something in common with the emotions and sensibilities associated with social revolutions, in which masses of people creatively transform reality.

James’s Political Involvements

James moved to England in 1932 from the West Indian island of Trinidad. In England he quickly made contact with the British working-class movement, becoming part of the radical Independent Labor Party and of a small Trotskyist organization within it called the Marxist Group. He learned his Marxism within this context, and some of his most enduring contributions to Marxism were made while he was part of the Trotskyist movement in Britain and the United States. James also became involved in the Pan-Africanist movement, becoming associated with such figures as George Padmore, Paul Robeson, W.E.B. DuBois, Jomo Kenyatta, and Kwame Nkrumah.

In 1938 James helped to found the Fourth International, the world-wide organization of revolutionary socialists, and was elected to its International Executive Committee. In

the same year he moved to the United States and became part of the Socialist Workers Party. Frank Lovell has offered this recollection:

"When C.L.R. James came to this country from Britain, where he was a leader of the Trotskyist movement, he was welcomed into the Socialist Workers Party and given leadership responsibilities. James was an impressive speaker with his British accent and his poise. He was a tall, handsome Black man... He spoke without notes, standing aside from the podium on the speakers platform. It was as if he were a great actor delivering a famous oration."

"At his first appearance he shared the platform with [the top leaders of the SWP, Max] Shachtman and [James P.] Cannon in the Irving Plaza meeting hall where Trotskyist meetings were often held. Shachtman was the first speaker and was not brief. James came on next and even though his talk was longer than Shachtman’s, he completely captivated his audience and received a big ovation. Cannon was the last speaker. Although he was the national secretary of the party and had been announced for a major speech, Jim had no intention of standing on his dignity or trying to hold the audience so late at night in order to have his turn. He put aside his notes, congratulated James on his speaking ability and welcomed him to the Socialist Workers Party." [James P. Cannon *As We Knew Him*, ed. by Les Evans (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1976), pp. 138-139.]

James remained part of the Trotskyist movement until 1951, adopting the party name "J.R. Johnson." In 1940, when Shachtman and many others split from the SWP and set up the rival Workers Party, James initially lined up with the Shachtmanites. At the same time, along with an energetic theorist-in-the-making named Rae Spiegel, later known as Raya Dunayevskaya, who took the party name "Freddie Forest," James formed a very distinctive political current: the Johnson-Forest tendency.

The Johnson-Forest tendency, which never had more than a few dozen adherents, mapped out an ambitious project for U.S. revolutionaries: to

develop an Americanized Marxism, and an Americanized Bolshevism, that would involve a dynamic interpenetration of the U.S. and international revolutionary traditions.

This was to include intellectual efforts that have had an impact on later scholars and social critics: the development of substantial analyses of U.S. history, studies of modern culture (including a serious attitude toward popular culture), historical and sociological labor studies, the development of Marxist economic analysis, and an awesome embrace of dialectical materialism which involved an immersion in the philosophical writings of Hegel. Among the contributions of the Johnson-Forest tendency was to produce the first English-language translation of Marx's important Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of the early 1840s.

Shachtman and those who were close to Shachtman had little use for the Johnson-Forest tendency, which attracted some of the more energetic young comrades and "among other things- sought to inspire them with the ambition to master the complexities of Marx's Capital and Hegel's Phenomenology of the Mind. As one veteran of Shachtmanites later recalled: "You would see these 17 year olds who could barely spell, and they were carrying Hegel." A one-time Shachtmanite youth leader agreed: "In the youth group, with Hegel, they would get up and start espousing Hegel, and it was utterly incoherent."

There were three other sins of the Johnson-Forest tendency that aggravated Shachtman and his co-thinkers: 1) the position that the African- American struggle, rather than being subsumed under the general struggle of the working class, had a powerful dynamic of its own and would be central to the socialist revolution in the U.S.; 2) the position that the American working class was far more radical, having a greater revolutionary character, than many of the Shachtmanites imagined; and 3) that the Socialist Workers Party of James P. Cannon was much better than Shachtman and others were willing to admit, and that the two groups should reunify.

This finally led to a split from the Workers Party in 1947, and the Johnson-Forest group returned to the SWP. While many SWPers were not inclined to accept much of the Johnson-Forest theoretical output, and especially rejected the Johnson-Forest notion that the Soviet Union was a "state-capitalist" society, the tendency's members were seen as serious and hardworking revolutionaries. The contributions that James had to make regarding the so-called "Negro Question" were also highly valued. And yet disappointed hopes regarding the failure of the U.S. working class to turn in a revolutionary direction, growing difficulties and frustrations brought on by the Cold War and McCarthy periods, and deepening political differences, caused James and his followers to leave the SWP within five years. In doing this, they also openly rejected Trotskyism and any commitments to building a Leninist-type party in the United States.

Shortly after this 1951 split, James "who was not a U.S. citizen" was arrested and thrown out of the country because of his revolutionary politics. In 1955, Raya Dunayevskaya and others split away to establish their own "Marxist-Humanist" News and Letters group; in 1962 the Johnsonites "known by the name of their own paper Correspondence" suffered another split led by James Boggs and Grace Lee Boggs. James and his cothinkers regrouped around the name "Facing Reality" (the title of a major Johnsonite document). By the end of the 1960s, the remnants of the Facing Reality group (led by James's close associate Marty Glaberman) decided to dissolve.

In the meantime, however, two of James's proteges in other countries "Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana and Eric Williams in Trinidad" assumed state power, and welcomed their mentor's support and assistance. To a limited extent in Ghana, and to a much greater extent in Trinidad, James contributed what he could "especially important writings" to advance the revolutionary struggle. In both cases, he was forced to break with the political course adopted by Nkrumah

and Williams, each in their own way veering off from the revolutionary-democratic and socialist perspectives which he represented.

In the final decades of his life, James was able to see his influence grow in England, the United States, and in the Caribbean among activists who were attracted to these revolutionary perspectives.

James's Method and Contributions

It would be wrong to allow James to become "as has been done by some over the years" a cult figure. He is not some sort of earthly deity whose judgments must be worshipped, but a comrade from whom one can learn (sometimes even as one is challenging him and clarifying a disagreement). Rather than offering criticisms or noting contradictions in his ideas and work, I want to focus on certain of his strengths and insights that I believe can be beneficial for the revolutionary socialist movement. At the end of this presentation, however, I will touch on one aspect of his thought which strikes me as somewhat problematical.

James's general approach to reality seems to me to be very dynamic and exciting. An essential aspect of his method is to make links between seemingly diverse realities, sometimes to take something that is commonly perceived as being marginal and to demonstrate that it is central, for example: the relation of the Haitian Revolution to the French Revolution and later to the fortunes of Napoleon Bonaparte; the relation of blacks to world history, Western civilization, and the class struggle; the relation of popular culture "sports, movies, hit songs, dancing, pulp fiction, comic books, etc." to more "refined" culture, to social realities and to class consciousness. James focuses on these so-called "marginal" realities in a manner that profoundly alters (rather than displacing) the traditionally "central" categories.

The attentive reader will find that such a methodological approach generates innumerable fruitful challenges which help to move one's

thinking forward on a variety of issues.

Among James's most substantial contributions was his assistance in making revolutionary Marxists aware of the centrality of "the Negro Question" to the class struggle and to any genuinely revolutionary perspective in the United States, and I want to give major attention to that. First of all, he insistently demonstrated that the history of blacks in the Americas was not simply a history of poor victims of oppression, but of a vibrant and conscious people that found innumerable ways to resist their oppression, assert their humanity, and periodically struggle for their own liberation.

But James went much further than this. On the basis of in-depth study and experience in black communities of the United States, creatively utilizing Lenin's views on oppressed nationalities, and in collaboration with Trotsky (with whom he had extensive discussions in Mexico), James developed a profound theoretical orientation to help guide the practical work of U.S. revolutionaries.

"The American Negroes, for centuries the most oppressed section of American society and the most discriminated against, are potentially the most revolutionary elements of the population," James explained in one resolution which he wrote in 1939. "They are designated by their whole historical past to be, under adequate leadership, the very vanguard of the proletarian revolution." He added that "the broad perspectives of [Trotsky's theory of] the permanent revolution will remain only a fiction" unless revolutionary socialists could find their way to the African-American masses.

The implications of this were that a consistent, uncompromising struggle for the democratic rights of African Americans (largely proletarianized) would necessarily challenge bourgeois power and capitalism, with a potential for growing over into a struggle for working-class power and socialism. Yet James did not leave things at that. A second resolution noted that African Americans might feel moved, on the basis of their own historic oppression,

to advance the demand "for the establishment and administration of a Negro state." He explained that "in a revolutionary crisis, as they begin to shake off the state coercion and ideological domination of the American bourgeois society, their first step may well be to demand the control, both actual and symbolical, of their own destiny."

Rejecting schematic definitions having to do with whether blacks in the U.S. constituted "a nation," James pointed out that "the raising or support of the slogan by the masses of Negroes will be the best and only proof required." Under such circumstances, revolutionary socialists should support the demand, the realization of which could constitute, as James put it, a "step forward to the eventual integration of the American Negroes into the United Socialist States of America."

James added: "The advocacy of the right of self-determination does not mean advancing the slogan of self-determination. Self-determination for Negroes means that Negroes themselves must determine their own future." It is worth noting that there are, in fact, two meanings attached to the term self-determination here. One meaning involves separation, setting up a politically-distinct nation—which may or may not take place, depending on what blacks themselves wish to do. The other meaning involves the right of an oppressed people to define what they shall be and to determine their own future—which, James insisted, must be a constant principle for revolutionary Marxists.

He also observed that "the awakening political consciousness of the Negro not unnaturally takes the form of independent action uncontrolled by whites. The Negroes have long felt, and more than ever feel today the urge to create their own organizations under their own leaders and thus assert, not only in theory but in action, their claim to complete equality with other American citizens. Such a desire is legitimate and must be vigorously supported even when it takes the form of a rather aggressive chauvinism." James's next point is of particular interest: "Black chauvinism in America

today is merely the natural excess of the desire for equality and is essentially progressive while white American chauvinism, the expression of racial domination, is essentially reactionary."

This general orientation was so advanced for its time that the SWP proved incapable of fully assimilating it, and even today many socialists, even some who identify with Trotskyism, don't accept it. But in the 1960s James's position provided a basis for understanding the rising tide of militant struggles and nationalist consciousness in the Black community. While these new developments proved to be unexpected by and utterly confusing to many observers, Trotskyist analyst George Breitman was able to draw on the earlier perspectives to provide a revolutionary Marxist explanation. Especially important was Breitman's ability to highlight, document and help popularize the profoundly revolutionary meaning of the ideas and life of Malcolm X—which would have been impossible without the kind of analysis pioneered by James a quarter of a century before.

As I have already indicated, James by no means confined himself to "the Negro Question." His approach to the world around him was comprehensive, multifaceted and penetrating. As a revolutionary internationalist, he concerned himself with revolutionary events in Europe, Asia, Latin America, Africa—and also with the real struggles of working people and the oppressed in the United States, in which he saw genuinely revolutionary qualities. There is a profound continuity in how he viewed these struggles and the manner in which he defined socialism. This comes through in this passage from a 1947 document of the Johnson-Forest tendency entitled *The Invading Socialist Society*.

The struggle for socialism is the struggle for proletarian democracy. Proletarian democracy is not the crown of socialism. It is its basis. Proletarian democracy is not the result of socialism. Socialism is the result of proletarian democracy. To the degree that the proletariat mobilizes itself and the great masses

of the people, the socialist revolution is advanced. The proletariat mobilizes itself as a self-acting force through its own committees, unions, parties and other organizations.

An essential aspect of James's approach is not that members of small revolutionary socialist groups need to persuade the working class to become such a "self-acting force." Rather, he insisted, the working-class already is such a force, carrying out innumerable forms of resistance and struggle in everyday life in their own workplaces and communities and personal lives whichâ€”while not necessarily conforming to the blueprints and schemas of revolutionary socialist groups, and often not noticed by these groupsâ€”effectively combat, undermine, subvert capitalist power, creating elements of a new democratic-collectivist society within the shell of the capitalist society around us.

In 1943 James expressed this outlook in a brilliant polemic against Sidney Hook (a pioneering post-Marxist whose 1943 volume *The Hero in History* is being echoed today in fashionable ex-leftist critiques of Marxism and Leninism). Here James wrote eloquently about the relationship between the working class and genuinely revolutionary socialist groups. Noting that one aspect of Lenin's strength was that he was an organic part of Russian culture, he went on to say:

"As to the outstanding role Lenin played inside his own party, even Marxist histories tend to give it a false significance. Lenin fought for the Bolshevik principles in 1903 and won. He was constantly winning, which means that he expressed ideas which stood the test of practice. The proletariat as a whole, at all critical moments, followed the Bolsheviks.

"More important than this, however, is the fact that the Russian proletariat taught and disciplined Lenin and the Bolsheviks not only indirectly but directly. Basically the organization of the party paralleled the organization of the productive power of the proletariat in revolution. In 1917, Lenin thought the struggle hopeless, and was thinking of giving it up. A few

weeks later came the massacre of January, and the magnificent response of the Russian proletariat revived the faltering leader. The proletariat created the soviets [democratic workers' councils]. The Bolsheviks learned here to understand the vitality and creative power of the proletariat in revolution.... The great change in policy in April was only a manifestation of the essential policy of the Bolshevik Party, to express and organize the instinctive desires and aims of the proletariat....

"The proletariat repeatedly led the Bolsheviks and gave Lenin courage and wisdom. Between 1890 and 1921 the interrelation between leader, party, class and nation was indivisible. The transformation of Bolshevism into totalitarianism is adequately dealt with in the literature of Trotskyism. The analysis is embodied in history, and the lessons are plain. With the proletariat or against it, that is the future of every modern nation. The secret of Lenin's greatness is that he saw this so clearly, and he saw this so clearly because this choice was the inescapable product of the whole past of Russia...."

We have here a vision of revolutionary organizations being organically connected with the history and culture of their own countries, and especially with their own working classes, the insight that a revolutionary organization must be able to learn from the working class if it hopes to be able to have anything to teach the working class, that it must follow the workers in order to be able lead, that the relationship between the revolutionary group and the working class must be profoundly interactive.

A Challenge to Revolutionary Marxists

Here I want to turn to a problematical aspect of James's thought, which hopefully will provide a challenging conclusion to this presentation. James never altered his analysis of and admiration for Lenin and the Bolshevik party. But by the early 1950s he discarded the conception of

building a revolutionary vanguard party in the United States because he felt this conceptionâ€”as understood by most U.S. Leninistsâ€”got in the way of cultivating the necessary interactive relationship between revolutionary Marxists and the actually-existing, self-acting working class.

He came to the conclusion that Trotsky and other revolutionary Marxists had been wrong about believing that, after a working-class revolution, a transitional period between capitalism and socialism would be necessary. He felt that before the working class made its revolution it would already have createdâ€”spontaneously, or semi-spontaneously, through its own activityâ€”democratic, collectivist, socialist relations through its resistance to capitalist oppression.

Even if the working class did not put a "socialist" label on its own consciousness, activities, and relationships, these were developing in a socialist direction within the very framework of capitalist society, through the class struggle whichâ€”as noted in the *Communist Manifesto*â€”is "now hidden, now open." The transition to socialism, he felt, is taking place now in the consciousness and struggles of working people in their workplaces and in their communities, and the transition will be completed (not begun) by a working-class revolution.

I believe that there are elements of truth in all of this, but that James took it too far. Socialism is not inevitable. There are countervailing tendenciesâ€”anti-socialist, anti-democratic, anti-humanist tendenciesâ€”in our society, in our culture, and within the working class.

The genuinely revolutionary and socialist tendencies that James points to are there in the consciousness, the struggles, and the everyday life of those who are part of the working class. But these can become triumphant only to the extent that they become conscious, are organized and mobilized—and there are no guarantees that this will happen on its own. Elements within the working class, including people like ourselves,

will need to work hard to help make it happen.

To be effective in this, we will need to organize ourselves, we will need to learn how to work collectively and carry out coherent activities that contribute to the growth of a working-class socialist movement, creating organizational structures that can facilitate all of this. This means that, contrary to what James argued in the 1950s and afterward, we will be moving to create a U.S. variant of the Bolshevik-Leninist party.

As we do that, however, we will be well served if we critically draw from the rich contributions offered to us by our comrade C.L.R. James. There is much that recommends him to us—his great intellectual breadth, which is reflected in the quality of his Marxism, combining a serious concern with philosophy, history, economics, culture, and practical political work. There is also his capacity to see things which aren't quite "there" yet, but which are in the process of coming into being.

Related to this is his capacity to identify fruitful connections between seemingly disparate phenomena, and his consequent ability to take what is

"peripheral" and show that it is, in fact, central to an adequate understanding of politics and society. In addition, there is the deep humanism which is essential to revolutionary Marxism but which James makes very much his own, which opens to us a crucial insight: socialism is not something that is simply thought up by brilliant intellectuals—it is an integral part of the reality around us. Essential elements of it can be found in the thinking, the perceptions, the values, the desires, the everyday life-activities, the many ongoing struggles of the human beings who are part of the working-class majority.

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[Against the Current](#)

Catalonia's paradox

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

October 1 has passed, closing a period of the shared history between Catalonia and the Spanish state and beginning an uncertain future. It was a day when all the tension building over the five-year independence process came to a head.

The numbers speak volumes. 2,262,424 votes cast. With an electoral roll of approximately 5.3 million people, that represents 42.5 percent turnout. We would have to include the votes seized by the police and from citizens who could not vote to calculate a final number. Of those

votes counted, 2,020,144 (90 percent) were in favor of independence, 176,566 (7.8 percent) against, and 45,586 (2 percent) left their ballots blank.

Next to these tallies, we must list another figure: the 890 officially registered injuries. The images say even more than the numbers — unprecedented [police violence](#) met historic popular mobilization.

The independence movement has emerged victorious, and, while the vote doesn't mean that pro-

independence forces will reach their goals immediately, they did gain momentum by demonstrating their determination and capacity for mobilization despite state repression and their opponent's decision to boycott. The [post-Franco](#) Spanish state is more discredited than ever in Catalonia.

The immediate consequences are clear. The Law of Transiency, which Catalonia's parliament passed on September 8, stipulates that, if the referendum results in a "yes" victory, the Catalan government would move

to proclaim an independent republic.

However, it is not clear how the government will proceed. Its decisions will determine the fate of the independence movement as well as the broader democratic bloc that supported the vote. How to keep that democratic bloc “which goes beyond the pro-independence forces” united is a decisive strategic question in this context. Catalonia’s independence hangs in the balance, and in the short term, the institutional and political struggle between the Catalan and Spanish states will only intensify the current crisis. Though the official independentist narrative claims that the main work for achieving independence is already done, October 1 marked the start of the most critical phase.

We should therefore see the October 3 general strike as October 1’s second act. Initially driven by small unions, the planned work stoppage eventually won partial support from the Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) and Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT), Catalonia’s two major unions. These organizations did not call for a full strike but for partial work stoppages, to which both workers and employers agreed. Eventually the Catalan National Assembly (ANC) and Òmnium Cultural “the mainstream independence movement’s leading organs” as well as the Catalan government threw their support behind the protest, though the ANC did so only reluctantly.

This “official” bloc rebranded the event as a cross-class “nation stoppage” that mixed a traditional strike with mass demonstrations and the voluntary closure of enterprises and public administration. Overall, the day turned into another impressive collective action in the midst of an exceptional political situation.

What will happen now in Catalonia depends not only on local actions but also on the impact that the independence movement, referendum, and mass protests have on Spanish politics in general. The situation’s complexity makes it dangerous to draw any hasty conclusions.

On the one hand, the People’s Party

(PP), which rules Spain, will continue to use Catalan independence to mobilize its conservative base. On the other hand, a section of the Spanish public, including Podemos and its base, has rejected the state’s repression and now favors a legal referendum.

Further, in those parts of Spain that, like Catalonia, have longstanding national “or regional” conflicts, the independence process may polarize pro-Spanish centralists and the respective nationalist movements.

All these factors create a complicated scenario for the Left, which will lose more ground in the long term if it gives up the defense of democracy in the short term. Behind these rapidly unfolding events sits an important paradox: Catalan independence poses the greatest threat to the continuity of the political and institutional scaffolding created in 1978, but it may also temporarily strengthen some of the state’s pillars, producing a framework that pushes Spanish politics to the right.

Madrid’s Strategy

The PP, working hand in hand with the state apparatus and most of the media, has taken an inflexible stance toward independence since the movement began in 2012. It will continue this approach because it believes that opposing Catalan sovereignty benefits the party in a number of ways: it boosts support in key regions of the Spanish state, unites its base, recovers ground from Ciudadanos, puts [Pedro Sánchez’s](#) “new” Socialist Party (PSOE) under pressure, and moves political debate away from the issues that help Podemos, such as state corruption and the ongoing economic crisis.

But for the umpteenth time since political turmoil began in 2011 with the rise of 15M, narrow partisan logic has prevailed over long-term thinking. The PP’s failures show the Spanish elite’s strategic limitations when confronted with the crisis of the 1978 regime. Resist and endure before all challengers “from Catalan independentists to 15M and its electoral offshoots. This has become

the ruling class’s mantra.

The PP’s scorched earth policy has an important precedent, one that coincides with the rise of pro-independence forces in Catalonia: the aggressive Spanish nationalism of José María Aznar’s second government (2000-4). While Aznar’s centralism was useful for the Right at the time, it actually triggered the current crisis, producing irreversible disaffection among the Catalan people.

The government in Madrid likely calculates that it should intensify its confrontation with the independentists until it can defeat their hopes for a quick independence process. Having used the stick, it will later try the carrot, offering some room to more moderate forces.

But the more the Spanish state’s policy entrenches the conflict, the more difficult it will be to change direction. When legitimacy fails, only force remains, but the use of the latter only further erodes the former. Today, the crisis of legitimacy of the Spanish state in Catalonia has reached its peak.

September 20 to October 1

Before the state [intensified](#) its repressive policies on September 20, the independence movement, led by the ANC and Òmnium, lacked self-organization from below. Only the [Candidatura d’Unitat Popular \(CUP\)](#) represented an anticapitalist and unofficial pro-independence current, but it did so at the cost of serious internal contradictions and enormous external pressures.

But the state’s repressive barrage and the imminence of the vote spurred popular self-organization, and neighborhood and municipal Committees of Defense of the Referendum (CDRs) joined the Escoles Obertes (Open Schools) in organizing volunteers to protect polling stations on October 1.

Neither the ANC nor Òmnium were overtaken by the push from below, but they may force these organizations’

militants to engage in more consistent civil disobedience. Up to this point, their approach remained quite timid, concentrating on setting up polling stations, and they had not planned any real system of defense to confront police harassment.

Large-scale self-organization emerged late. Without a doubt, if Catalonia en Com   had actively engaged more around the referendum, the process could have gone much further (though we should recognize that many of its militants played an active role beyond what the party officially did). What was achieved on Sunday was spectacular, but the absence of a unitary movement was felt in the months leading up to the referendum. The ANC did not want to promote a broader alliance, and the forces outside the mainstream could not initiate their own dynamic to align with the ANC. Only the events of the last few days changed the situation, launching a process of organization from below that had not existed before.

Phase Two

In the coming confrontation, the movement has four fundamental challenges.

First, it must expand its social base. It is difficult to evaluate the results of October 1 in detail thanks to the repressive conditions under which voting took place. No doubt, over two million “yes” votes constitutes an important social bloc. While not strictly a numerical majority, no organized or active counter-bloc has emerged to oppose it.

The independence movement exploded between 2012 and 2014 but has remained more or less stagnant, albeit at high levels of support, since then.

Some got tired of the eternal process that seemed to go nowhere, but, in recent days, new support developed, mainly because of the Spanish state’s repression. Some “yes” votes may have been cast in favor of democracy rather than independence. Further, we cannot know how many people who would have voted “yes” could not do so because of all the complications

of the day.

In terms of its social composition, the independence movement’s base pivots around the middle class and young people, though older voters were very visible in the polling lines on Sunday. The mainstream movement never captured an important part of the left-wing social base and, in fact, it did not try to do so: it simply expected they would eventually become convinced.

Catalunya en Com  ’s hesitant policy reflects not only its leadership’s views, but the social reality of its political and electoral base. This is worth noting explicitly, as it’s a key factor. Having a specific policy towards left-wing political and social organizations and their social base is necessary, which undoubtedly clashes with the project of the neoliberal right in power, the Partit Dem  crata Europeu Catal   (PDeCAT), whose weakness should be exploited to impose a left turn. We should roughly sketch the path to radicalizing the mainstream independentist movement: implementing urgent political and social measures as an anti-crisis package, prioritizing the start of a constituent process, and creating a framework that can include those who do not necessarily want independence but support some sort of constitutional rupture with the state.

Indeed, the absence of any alliance between independentists and those who support Catalonia’s right to decide has been one of the process’s biggest strategic weakness. This has one immediate implication: the Catalan Parliament must carry through the referendum’s popular mandate in a way that ensures the pro-democracy-but-anti-independence sectors who participated in the organization on October 1 feel included. That is, it must avoid fracturing the democratic-disobedient front that contributed to the vote’s success and thereby reducing its supporters to an alliance of independentist forces only, without distorting the meaning of what was approved on Sunday.

Second, the independence movement must maintain the strength shown after September 20, in the days leading up to October 1, and on the

day itself. Democratic grassroots efforts such as CDRs should continue in one form or another. Beyond the ANC and   mnium, the people should build broad committees that are not subordinate to those two organizations while still having a policy of unity toward them.

Until September 20, pro-independence action was limited to the impressive September 11 annual mobilization, but it had little capacity to respond in important moments or to go beyond the ANC or   mnium when they opted to react to events passively. The answer is not to return to normal but to sustain the dynamics of self-organization that began on the eve of October 1.

Third, pro-independence forces must develop a more complex perspective regarding the struggle, confrontation, and victory. The movement regularly uses the term “[disconnection](#)” to describe independence, a word that, while conveying a seductive image of quiet change, greatly simplifies what breaking with the state actually entails.

The official discourse has insisted that independence represents a transition from one legality to another, ignoring the fact that, if the former does not accept that change, what begins is a struggle in which brute force is decisive (recall Marx’s [remark in Capital](#): “between equal rights, force decides”). Force nevertheless is conditioned by the context and legitimacy of the one who wields it. Keeping all this in mind is important for the looming sustained conflict.

Fourth, pro-independence forces must look for and weave alliances across the entire Spanish state. The movement has welcomed the solidarity it received from outside Catalonia in response to the intensified repression, but it based its strategy on unilateral action, never seeking out support in other parts of Spain beyond the nationalism of the Basques or Galicians. In reality, unilateralism and the search for allies are compatible.

That support is more necessary than ever now. As long as the PP believes that the iron fist benefits it the most in the short term, it will maintain its

policy of repression. Independentism must articulate its struggle, without dissolving it, within the context of the broader battle against the 1978 regime.

Democracy, both by standing against repression and by being able to decide the future, should be the starting point. The recognition of a common adversary will be the second step.

The Internal Frontline

The independence movement confronts the Spanish state, but the movement has also faced an internal struggle. The most visible disagreement is between the two government parties, the right-wing, neoliberal PDeCAT and the center-left Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC). But, beyond their competition, the most decisive battle will take place over whether the radical forces within the movement can surpass the bloc formed by the Catalan government, ANC, and Òmnium Cultural.

Events since September 20, especially the self-organization from below and the movement's radicalization, may favor more left-wing forces, both politically (primarily the CUP) and socially. Finally, the role that Catalonia en Comú plays in this struggle will be decisive in determining whether this situation shifts left.

Until September 20, Ada Colau's party remained passive. When the government called the referendum last year, Catalonia en Comú expected the plans to collapse, hoping that every step toward the vote would be the last and that the government would push a unilateral referendum into the indefinite future. The party only explained its position when pushed, and then it opted to defend the referendum process as a mobilization without committing to its success or calling for a massive turnout.

After the state's repressive turn, however, Catalonia en Comú modified its position and joined the mobilization, but it did not

fundamentally transform its strategic orientation. Ada Colau's blank vote "neither 'yes' nor 'no'" summed up the party's discomfort with the independence debate.

Now Catalonia en Comú must choose: either it watches the fight from a distance, or it joins the confrontation with the state and supports a constituent process. It can take this active role with twin objectives: overcoming the centralized state and breaking the Right and center-left's hegemony over the independence movement.

To do so would not necessarily mean supporting full independence. Instead, it might prove that a rupture with the state has become the necessary condition for a federal solution. That is, without betraying its own programmatic positions, Catalonia en Comú can support the proclamation of the Catalan Republic and the opening of a constituent process.

If it stays on the margins, this could push it to the periphery of Catalan politics or, if independence is defeated, it may enjoy a rebound effect that gives them it a new medium-term success. But either way, if the party resumes the passive orientation it held prior to October 1 in the new stage that opens, it will severely affect the nature of its political project. It is not only Catalonia en Comú's position on the independence debate that is at stake, but its own constituent and rupturist drive. The discomfort of the independence movement with the Comu's position is understandable, but this should not make the party forget the need to have a unitary policy towards them, particularly on democratic and constituent issues.

Podem has had a more proactive and committed position toward the referendum. It denied the vote's binding nature and even called on its base to vote "no," but these positions contradict the party's proposal to open a constituent process.

Now Podem must decide if it will stay outside the next phase of confrontation with the state, or if it will have an active policy towards the sovereigntist bloc and help to try to

overcome that bloc's right wing.

Thus, the Left must complete three interrelated tasks: maintain the independence movement's unified action against the Spanish state, articulate a democratic and anti-repressive bloc that moves beyond independence, and fight to re-balance Catalonia's political forces to favor the Left.

This last point gets at a more fundamental question: what does the term independence mean, and how does it relate to the concept of sovereignty? The mainstream movement has presented independence as the solution to all of Catalonia's problems while leaving the concept empty of concrete content. In fact, official independentism, both in its neoliberal and center-left forms, could produce independence without real sovereignty in a state that is formally independent but remains subaltern to the European Union, favorable to international trade agreements like the TTIP and to policies that serve multinationals.

The Catalan left must insist on sovereignty with all its national, social, economic, and health dimensions, not to mention its relationship to notions of democracy and solidarity against reactionary nationalism. Put another way, the Left must figure out how to link a proposal for political change with a proposal for another social, economic, and institutional model, to go beyond the change without change that mainstream independence embodies.

Contradictions

Those on the Left, both in Catalonia and the Spanish state, who have [remained](#) opposed to or outside the independence movement have often pointed out, with more or less authority, the process's innumerable contradictions. The most notorious of all, of course, remains the presence of a neoliberal party at the head of the Catalan government, a defender of a strict policy of social cuts that never used to support independence. I have already pointed out [some limits of the Catalan political process](#) "in terms of the social base and the contending

forces.

But the constant insistence on the process's contradictions reflects an excessively scholastic attitude toward social reality itself and unfortunately often appears in many Left analyses of phenomena that fall outside their authors' predetermined schemas.

All social processes produce contradictions to a greater or lesser extent. This comes from the very complexity of human societies and how they express conflict. A movement not only contains contradictions and limitations, but its evolution will always produce contradictory and limited results. This observation brings us back to what **social theorists** call the unintended consequences of social action.

Any anticapitalist strategy needs to learn how to work in the context of contradictions and limits to try and resolve the former in an emancipatory direction while widening the confines of the latter. The purest strategy is precisely the one that knows how to handle itself in an impure, contradictory, and complex world.

"Whoever expects a 'pure' social revolution will never live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is," **wrote Lenin** wrote in 1916 about the Easter Rising. Today, we are not facing a revolution, but his words nevertheless apply to the Catalan reality.

Faced with the imperfections of the Catalan independence movement, the Left has two options: opt for a passive policy that will involuntarily exacerbate the movement's deficiencies, or follow an active policy that intervenes in reality and pushes the process in a more progressive direction. The first option leads, depending on the case, toward abstract radicalism, propagandism, or institutionalist routinism. None of these outcomes have anything to do with a serious attempt to change the world.

The contradictions and limits of the five-year independence process have prompted the abrupt emergence of striking paradoxes, a term that can take on both comic and tragic valences. Certainly, the days leading

up to October 1 were days of paradox. Disobedient parties called for order and calm, while leftists turned to the Catalan police. Right-wing forces appealed for institutional disobedience, disguised as complying with the new Catalan legality, while activists and anarchists lined up to vote. A reactionary government accused its citizens who wanted to organize a referendum of plotting a coup.

When social processes accelerate, as they have in Spain, all strategic thinking that does not want to be fossilized must plunge headfirst into these paradoxes, where things are not what they seem and where the consequences of actions may not always be clear.

The paradox of strategy is that it can often be overcome by the paradoxes of reality itself. And the paradox of the paradoxes of real politics is that they can, at times, stimulate a strategic thinking that overcomes the paradoxes that previously undermined it.

Barcelona, 3 October 2017

Some Lessons of the Hurricane

7 October 2017, by Rafael Bernabe

We begin with the admirable: the presence of solidarity, of community, and of generosity that continues to exist in our country in spite of three decades of neoliberal practices and depredations that served private interests over public interests, put competition above collaboration, egoism above community, immediate gains above long-term considerations, and fragmentation above democratic integration.

I could give dozens of examples: the ride they've given me when walking to some event (because of lack of gasoline), the food they've given me on trust (because I had no cash), the coffee offered by my neighbors, the use of a hotplate loaned to me to

warm food so I could give my baby something to eat, the doctors and other health personnel working in a hospital that had been left without electricity (when we had to go to the emergency room the day after the hurricane).

There is no doubt that our people understand and feel, despite everything, that human relationships, even with unknown people, are more valuable and should be more valuable than the cold connection of cash.

But there are problems and challenges which demand reflection: we cannot leave to one side the most urgent tasks, but neither can we fail to analyze the situation, above all if from

the beginning we want to reconstruct a Puerto Rico which is different and better. That reconstruction has begun and we cannot leave reflection for later.

To begin with the most immediate issue. There is no doubt that the preparations for response to the disaster were inadequate. We can't ask for miracles. But without a doubt, it was necessary to have a plan or plans to maintain the water supply, food, health services and the provision of fuel necessary for all of this, being aware of a predictable and anticipated collapse of the electric system. Was such a plan and foresight possible?

Without a doubt, at least to a greater

degree than we have been able to observe. The reality is that we had already had the experiences of hurricanes Andrew and Katrina, experiences that were not adequately taken advantage of. (We will return to the roots of this lack of foresight.) But it is certain that the plans, as good as they may have been, could not solve everything. There are other problems certainly that also had to be attended to, but those are not emergency plans. For example: gasoline and health.

The desperate search for gasoline, with the chaos and uncertainty that we have lived through, is the result, in the last analysis, of our nearly absolute dependence on the private automobile as our means of transport, which has so often been criticized for environmental and urban planning reasons.

Readers should think how different our situation in which we found ourselves would have been with a dense and efficient network of mass transportation; constructing such a system would be a difficult task, but without a doubt it would permit and guarantee the re-establishment of access and of movement to people much more rapidly than trying to provide gasoline to millions (yes, millions) of automobiles.

That is, the hurricane's strike accentuated the necessity that had already been proposed before the hurricane. Let's not forget this as we reconstruct. (Ironically, one of the reasons that mass transportation had been and continues to be suggested is because of the necessity of reducing the burning of gasoline in order to deal with the threat of climate change, one of the effects of which is precisely an increase in the frequency of extreme events such as a Category 5 hurricane.)

Another example is our health care system. I shouldn't say a system. We had a system until the decade of the 1990s. It was a logically designed system, with diagnostic and treatment centers and primary, secondary and tertiary care facilities in a kind of pyramid. It had its weaknesses and should have been improved, but it was a minimally coherent system. In a crisis such as this, it could prepare,

engage and coordinate, once again with basic coherence and efficiency throughout the country.

But that system no longer exists; what exists now is the fragmented, chaotic and dis-articulated result of privatization. The task of preparing for and responding to the crisis is therefore much more difficult. (One of the more unfortunate experiences has been a pharmacy which refused to fulfill an existing prescription for my baby because the system was down and for that reason they couldn't bill my health care plan.)

The lack of foresight and the inadequacy of the initial response also falls on FEMA (the Federal Emergency Management Agency). Since Katrina, the inadequacy of this agency has been demonstrated; it is an apparatus that functions, if not with the logic of business as usual, with that of disaster as usual.

Wasn't it perhaps foreseeable that the electrical and communications systems would collapse and that dozens of large generators for hospitals and other key points would be necessary, for example for re-establishing communications between physicians? Neither the government of Puerto Rico nor FEMA took into account the hard lesson that reality had taught us. Puerto Rico is an island, different than Louisiana, Texas or Florida, and it needs special plans for a situation like this, not the usual model used in other places.

Those of us on the island immediately realized the inadequacy of the response, but the great majority of us didn't then have, and still don't have, many means of protesting. Here the diaspora, Puerto Rico outside of Puerto Rico, had played a key role in criticizing the situation and in demanding that Puerto Rico not be abandoned to fate and that it receive the support of all people as the circumstances demand. Thanks to this, it generated a scandal beyond Puerto Rico and the response improved.

I am not a member of her party and I did not vote for her, but in the same way we have to applaud the protests of the mayor of San Juan. Before she

complained he had shown a complete indifference to the Puerto Rican situation.

The response of Trump, both obnoxious and rude, was to be expected. In one of his first tweets he had the indecency to mention the payment of the debt, and now he attacks the Puerto Rican workers who according to him are lazy (something that some people repeat in Puerto Rico, and finding themselves on the side of Trump, perhaps they may pause to reflect.)

But what should be expected of this gentleman? Trump represents political reaction and the negation of all that is good, decent and generous in humanity, including the part of humanity that inhabits the United States. His planned visit, as someone said to me waiting in a line, is a bother; any resource used to take care of that is one resource less for the recovery. His visit will not help the situation nor coordinate the recovery. It's a photo-op. We have to declare that this racist individual is not welcome in Puerto Rico. The era has now passed when the governing bodies depend upon his favor and grace, to be gained by the good behavior of the subjects.

Now, thanks to these protests both inside and outside Puerto Rico, more resources for reconstruction have begun to arrive. The greater part of this help, a considerable part, is arriving via the military. We now have a photo of generals directing reconstruction.

On the one hand, we must take advantage of any aid and support that we can in this moment of extreme need. But this too gives us pause for reflection. There are three things to note. First, it is unfortunate that the budget for resources to deal with these situations are in the hands of the military and not of civilian agencies. But this isn't strange; it is typical of the priorities of most governments, including the United States, in the world in which we live.

Much more is spent, much, much more, on the military apparatus than on education or social well-being. They can maintain an enormous

arsenal, but not provide universal health care. This military apparatus isn't the savior of people affected by disaster; it is an apparatus that normally scoops up an enormous quantity of the resources that should be used for other ends.

The fact that we received support by way of the military doesn't mean that we have to turn a blind eye to the bitter and dark side of this reality. Nor do we forget it for a second. Redouble our struggle for other priorities in Puerto Rico, in the United States, and in the world.

In the second place, it remains interesting that following the hurricane's strike (and the denunciations and demands mentioned), multi-million dollar resources to attend to Puerto Rico's reconstructions did appear. But, why now and not before? For some time now we have argued the need for substantial federal assistance for the reconstruction of Puerto Rico (in general and, among other things, in order to transform the energy system). Why was it necessary to wait for a natural-social disaster in order to take measures such as these?

We have to say the same thing about the laws [the restrictions imposed by the Jones Act] of maritime commerce: how many times has it been argued that it was necessary to eliminate them in order to contribute to economic recovery? If eliminating them now helps the recovery, why maintain them in the future?

Ironically, the hurricane resulted in things being done (federal support for reconstruction, suspension of the maritime commerce laws) that for some time many of us have proposed as necessary (although not necessarily in the form they now take). I'll take up the third reflection on the military aspect later.

Now that Trump himself has raised the issue of the debt in one of his tweets, and now that the president of the Control Committee [over Puerto Rico's finances, created under the PROMESA Act] has proposed that now many things must be rethought, we have something to say about this. In a few words: anyone who attempted to

recover payment of the debt in these circumstance commits a crime against humanity.

Hurricane María "in addition to destroying housing, workshops, businesses, and infrastructure" destroyed the debt. It is now necessary to revoke PROMESA [Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act - an act of the U.S. Congress] and to annul the debt.

The legal doctrine for this is clear: force majeure, a fundamental change in circumstance and a state of necessity, which I don't have enough electricity in my computer battery to explain here, but which applies perfectly to the case of Puerto Rico after María (see Eric Toussaint and Demain Millet, Debt, the IMF and the World Bank [New York: Monthly Review, 2010, pages 246-47]). How is it possible to think about collecting this debt, which was unpayable and unsustainable?

Nothing of what is needed will be possible without complaints here and in the diaspora and from our allies outside of Puerto Rico: all the movements for social justice in the United States and in the world. Here, as I said, the hurricane's strike has led to what is necessary now and in the future: mobilization, denunciation here and outside to demand the means of economic reconstruction, above all the cancellation of the debt and federal support to which we have a right and which Congress owes us (among other things, as corresponds to the situation in a territory over which it maintains colonial control).

The disastrous privatization of our health care system, the inability to undertake seriously a planned economic development according to the necessities of the country, is the other face of this culture with its lack of foresight, whose consequences we are living. If the invisible hand of the market and competition arrange everything efficiently, then why plan? Why look ahead?

This private management, which is also disconnected from the productive apparatus, from an infrastructure that has been for some time now and every

day more social and interdependent, in normal conditions generates inequality, corruption and environmental destruction (in the case of Puerto Rico it also generates a one-sided economy, incapable of promoting employment, etc.)

These normal results become, in a crisis, converted into chaos. One has to be struck by the declaration of a telephone company executive: "It is not the time to compete." Only acting as a collaborative network can we advance. What we really need are social, collaborative responses to our problems, now, and also in the Puerto Rico that we want to reconstruct.

And here I return to the third point that I wanted to make above about the issue of the military role in reconstruction: the other advantage that this apparatus has, which has admirers and even worshipers, is that it is an integrated, planned, coordinated system, in which the parts act (or are supposed to act, I'm not going to idealize) not in competition but rather in collaboration with the others.

The problem, of course, is that this is a centralized, authoritarian apparatus whose essential ends are destructive (I don't refer to the intentions of many rank-and-file soldiers, who have become part of the armed forces for a variety of reasons, but to the apparatus).

But the admiration for efficiency of the army is a form of admiration for this functioning that doesn't obey the sacrosanct laws of the market and of competition. We take the best from this - planning and integrated coordination of resources - and we mix them in the future not with a military and authoritarian management, but with one which is civilian and democratic.

I don't doubt that the same voices who insisted before María that Puerto Rico couldn't resolve its own problems, that we had to put them in the hands of the Control Committee so that it could give us the appropriate punishment - I don't doubt, I repeat, that these voices, will now double down, demanding that we put ourselves in the hands of other federal

agencies, including the army, so that they can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves, given that we are incompetent.

There is no point debating with them. They are incorrigible. What we have to do is take from all of this the good and the bad, the lessons for the reconstruction that we want and need.

Now that we are yearning â€” myself included â€” for a minimal return to normality, we will not permit that this feeling be manipulated in the future, so that when electricity arrives we think that everything is continuing and will continue as before.

I hear with some anxiety the announcement in the press that experts are coming to bring and share their experience with Katrina in New Orleans. While, of course, we should learn what we can, one has to remember that the Katrina recovery was used to privatize schools, eliminate labor rights, displace communities, and to gentrify (I think the word in Spanish is “aburguesar,” that is, to bourgeoisify) neighborhoods. The use of disasters to push these agendas is typical of what Naomi Klein in her famous book called *The Shock Doctrine*.

To a certain degree, the proposals made before MarÃa remain valid, since MarÃa sharpened to a degree the extreme problems that already existed: the need for a plan for economic reconstruction, the need to renegotiate the debt, the need for

federal assistance for reconstruction, the need for a democratic reorganization of the government and public services, the need for transportation and public health and renewable energy, the need to revoke PROMESA, the need for mobilization both within and outside of Puerto Rico to achieve all of this.

While it hasn’t been mentioned, I don’t want to leave in the inkwell or on the keyboard the unequal effects of the disaster: those who are worse off are those who had less before MarÃa. Reconstruction should be a reconstruction that leads to greater equality.

It’s important to note that economic reconstruction will be the greatest need. A question in the near future will be the reaction of the great corporations that generate huge profits in Puerto Rico (and pay few taxes) after the hurricane. Will they continue operating here? I think that at least some of them will perhaps decide to leave.

In a private economy, as we know, these decisions that affect the whole community or country are taken without regard to anything but the profits of the companies involved. Once again, if Puerto Rico already needed a new economy, the hurricane’s blow has only accentuated the situation.

The situation in Puerto Rico today reminds us of the beginning of the

decade of the 1930s: battered by terrible hurricanes (San Felipe and San Ciprián) and engulfed by an economic depression. We got out of that crisis thanks to great movements for social justice that proposed agrarian reform, the creation of public services, labor rights, economic reconstruction, and national self-determination, and which also searched for allies outside of Puerto Rico.

The leader of the greatest of these movements, the Popular Democratic Party, later abandoned all that it had defended. We are constructing today the equivalent of those movements and those alliances. We have the steadfastness that others lacked to remain true to the program that the country needs. This steadfastness can only arise from the working people organized in defense of their interests.

This organization is today weak, fragmented, and battered: reconstructing it is the fundamental task for the reconstruction that we need. We hope that the hurricane may also have swept away the obstacles of division, sectarianism and personal ambitions that have held us back. My greatest desire is for the safety, security and recovery of all the men and women across the length and breadth of Puerto Rico.

San Juan

2 October 2017

This article was translated by Dan La Botz for [Solidarity](#).

Brics summit in China: A missed opportunity

6 October 2017, by Patrick Bond

SP: It’s The Real News Network. I’m Sharmini Peries coming to you from Baltimore. The ninth BRICS Summit concluded in China on Tuesday. The host, China’s Prime Minister, Xi Jinping, called on developing countries to stay together and work harder for South-South cooperation and

sustainable development. At the same time, he also urged countries to resist tendencies towards protectionism.

BRICS is the acronym for five countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. Together, they represent nearly half of the world’s

population, and 22% of the world’s GDP. While the BRICS countries summit was taking place in Xiamen City, China, a counter summit was held in Hong Kong, organized by Hong Kong People’s Forum. Although some have heralded the BRICS as an alternative to U.S. dominance and imperialism, the People’s Forum

argued that it is just a continuation of U.S.-led neoliberalism, that Russia, Brazil, China, India and South Africa are a critical part of.

Joining us now to analyze the latest BRICS Summit is Patrick Bond. Patrick attended the Hong Kong People's Forum where he did a keynote address, and just returned to his home in South Africa. He is the co-editor of the book *BRICS: An Anticapitalist Critique*. Thanks for joining us today, Patrick.

PB: Great to be back with you. Thanks, Sharmini.

SP: All right, Patrick. So, let's begin with the People's Forum that took place in Hong Kong. They have now developed a fairly extensive critique of the BRICS Summit. What was the atmosphere like and what were its objectives?

PB: Well, Sharmini, it was an atmosphere of anger, particularly at the opportunity missed to really challenge corporate-led globalization. Indeed, as Donald Trump has adopted the so-called paleo-conservative and protectionist rhetoric, although, it seems that a big chunk of that constituency inside the White House has now departed, but Xi Jinping, the Chinese leader starting at the world economic forum in Davos, Switzerland, and continuing through the G20 meeting two months ago in Hamburg, and certainly at the BRICS Summit in Xiamen, was very much the proponent of globalization, free trade, and a critic of even the protectionism that here in South Africa has been imposed increasingly against Chinese dumping of steel just to save the steel industry. In fact, a Russian company, the number two company, went bankrupt last year, and the number one company, owned by an Indian, that's ArcelorMittal, is threatened with bankruptcy this year.

I think these are the kinds of contradictions, that in the spirit of economics, meant the Asian people's movements, and the labor movements, the environmentalists, women's movements, the youth, the students, were expressing anger that an opportunity to remake the world and to reform global governance in a

progressive way has been missed.

SP: Right. Xiamen City is also a site of contestation for the very issues you're talking about. That is where the meeting took place, the official meeting of BRICS. Tell us a little bit about the kind of struggles taking place there.

PB: For many years, the highest profile struggles in Xiamen have been about environmental justice, pollution, explosions, but there have been many labor conflicts. The group in Hong Kong that helped to host us, including the Labor Federation and several of the labor support networks, research groups, have been monitoring the mainland's labor unrest. As you know, there's not a very free trade union movement, but there are tens of thousands of wildcat strikes and protests by workers about the exploitative conditions on the mainland. What's exciting about BRICS from below is to begin to link not just those activists in the countries, the five BRICS countries, who regularly do meet and exchange information, but increasingly too from the hinterlands, from the neighboring countries where especially Chinese firms have penetrated into Southeast Asia.

Similarly in 2018, South Africa will host the BRICS and there will be plenty of regional activists who are concerned about South African and other BRICS countries' companies in the region. These are very exploitative companies. It seems that they've taken Western, neocolonial strategies of extraction in continents like Africa, Latin America, and Asia, and made these even more extreme with fewer opportunities for solidarity because of the repression in places like China and Russia. That's one of the challenges for BRICS from below, a summit like they just had in Hong Kong is to find ways to express that solidarity, because unlike say, fighting the world bank or a London company, it's very difficult to find the kind of cadres who can extend campaigning and build the solidarity. These are the tasks ahead.

SP: One of the issues, Patrick, that the countersummit explored were the problems that BRICS countries have in holding together as a

unified force. China's prime minister Xi Jinping also addressed this importance of unity and solidarity and so on. I understand that that was one of the topics you spoke about at the counter summit. Why is this a problem here?

PB: It's a difference between centripetal and centrifugal forces working on the BRICS. The centripetal coherence and the divisions of labor that should link the BRICS, making overlapping and interlocking economies and political interests, aren't nearly as strong as we thought. There are huge fractures. It was really only the Monday before the BRICS met, six days before they actually arrived in Xiamen, that a deal was done between India and China to have both countries troops back off from the Bhutan border, and a very tough conflict coming up in the years ahead will be over Kashmir, where the Chinese want to build a massive transport infrastructure to get to a port in Pakistan on land that India claims is its own. It's also an area of Pakistan where the United States has been bombing mercilessly civilians in their search for Taliban.

In that area, including Afghanistan, the BRICS should have more unity, but until this summit they were very fractured. Even last year the BRICS summit, Narendra Modi, the Indian prime minister had failed to get Russia and China to support naming Pakistan as a state that support terrorists. In this summit, there was a declaration that some of the groups operating in Pakistan and Afghanistan, mainly Islamic groups, are indeed terrorists, enemies of the BRICS as a whole. I think the expectation we've had is that Donald Trump and his odd, unpredictable kind of geopolitical agenda will have a centrifugal, a break up, impact.

So too are forces within the BRICS, like Chinese overcapacity and overproduction, the huge debt crises that are emerging all over the world, especially here in Southern Africa where Mozambique and Zambia have missed debt payments. There's talk of even South Africa having to go the INF or the alternative, the contingent reserve arrangement, which does look

very much like the INF because once you've borrowed 30% of your quota you have to go to the INF.

Similarly, deglobalization as a problem for the BRICS, who are largely export driven, represents for example lower rates of trade, much lower than the 2008 and 2011 peaks. Lower foreign direct investment. Lower levels of cross-border financial assets flowing. The deglobalization of capital that's been underway for about four or five years is something that Xi has been especially worried about. These are the centrifugal, breaking forces that mean that coherence within the BRICS, along with the geopolitical dynamics, along with the need to oppress the people, and along with the fading popularity of leaders like Michel Temer, the Brazilian who has less than 10% popularity and barely survived impeachment, or Jacob Zuma here in South Africa, who last month barely survived a no confidence vote in parliament. Those are at least two of the five leaders who are really on the rocks. These are the kinds of forces out there that weaken the BRICS as a coherent block, as the alleged building bricks of the 21st century as Goldman Sachs once said, predicted.

SP: Sadly, or to the benefit of the Brazilian people, I think Temer's favorability ratings are even lower than you state there in our recent reports from Brazil, further strengthens your point you're trying to make.

Patrick, another aim of BRICS is to reform multilateral institutions such as IMF and the World Trade Organization, WTO, yet BRICS is creating or replicating these organizations. For example, there is now a BRICS bank established to lend money to countries like South Africa, and I understand South Africa has actually received one of those big loans. How do these efforts on the part of BRICS differ from say the IMF? I understand even in terms of establishing the loan criteria, they essentially borrowed the model from IMF.

PB: That's right, Sharmini. This attempt to make multilateral policy rather different and less oriented to

the interests of Washington, London, Berlin, Tokyo, has failed entirely, and that includes a BRICS New Development Bank, which as you say made a loan to South Africa for renewable energy extension, and yet the loan has not been taken out. It's been put into abeyance, it was announced three weeks ago. There is a new BRICS bank, Africa Regional Center, a regional branch, but they have no director. The former finance minister Nhlamhla Nene was meant to take the job, but it was a bit of a farce and he turned it down, so they've tried twice to advertise for the branch manager and failed. They've just got some staff from the Shanghai head office.

These are reflections that the New Development Bank isn't really new and different. It was set up by men, including from South Africa, who have a strong association with Goldman Sachs, Barclays, and Bank of America. I think the BRICS New Development Bank deal a year ago with Jim Yong Kim, the World Bank president, was revealing insofar as co-financing, sharing of projects, and even personnel is part of that deal.

That takes us to the INF, which the BRICS said they were going to reform in terms of the voting power, and four of the five BRICS did indeed achieve much greater voting power in the INF in December 2015. However, they did so by standing on the heads of poorer countries, so even South Africa lost 21%. Venezuela lost 41%. Nigeria lost 41%. Many African and Latin American and a few Asian countries lost dramatic shares of their INF votes. That reflects a deal making process in which the BRICS, at least the BRIC countries there, not INF, wanted to join rather than fight.

That was proven again when Christine Lagarde was convicted of corruption in a 400 million euro deal with the former Adidas owner. That meant there was an opportunity last year to get rid of her. She came up for another five year term, but the BRICS directors had voted unanimously, even the same day as the corruption investigation led to a conviction, that she should stay on. At the WTO, the BRICS basically voted to end food sovereignty.

Maybe worst of all, Sharmini, is the climate negotiations at the Paris Accord in December 2015 as well. The BRICS sided with the US and the EU, and there are two critical components that serve their interests altogether. Those would be the agreement not to have binding or accountable provisions within the Paris Agreement. You can, as Donald Trump did on June 1, just walk out or you can violate your pledges. Secondly, there's no climate debt, and the BRICS are right up there with the EU and the US, in fact China is the number one emitter. Historically now we're seeing the BRICS emerge as climate debtors. They're not in net terms the victims; they're the beneficiaries of excessive green house gas emissions. They put into the Paris Agreement that there's no liability for historic climate debt.

These are the things that taken together allow a description of the BRICS not as anti-imperialist, as the rhetoric sometimes has it, but rather as sub-imperialist.

SP: Finally, Patrick, you indicate that, and you point this out well in many things that you have written, that the economic engines of these countries, the BRICS countries, is sputtering. Why is that, and what does it mean for BRICS?

PB: The general problem, Sharmini, of capitalist economies is that they overproduce. Once that happens, the surpluses go into either geographical expansion, and in the case of China it's the Belt and Road Initiative that is anticipated to take over from all of the ghost city construction, all of those empty cities, as a way to mop up all the overproduced cement, steel, chemicals, other infrastructural activities that have huge overcapacity.

Geographically there's a move to the West, and that is creating some of the tensions I mentioned, especially with India. I think secondly the surpluses go also into financialization, so big bubbles in stock markets have developed across the BRICS, and huge levels of debt. These are the economic contradictions that mean instead of some sort of alternative to capitalism, it's kind of a capitalist crisis tendencies emerging. These, according to even economists from

major banks in the last two weeks, Citibank and HSBC and Morgan Stanley, could well lead to a recession if not something worse, the crashes we saw in 2008, 1998, 1987. These do come around under capitalism.

This time I think it might well be the weaknesses in some of the BRICS economies that set them off. We've just come out of a recession in the last couple of days in South Africa. India and China are growing fast, but Brazil and Russia are still very weak. They've had long recessions they've just come out of. These are not economies that represent strength, but rather a desperation to hold on to whatever huge investments China will be making in the Belt and Road as the last gasp of a commodity boom that lasted from 2002 to its peak around 2011, and then from 2015 has left some of the poorer economies in the world in desperate straits as they were dependent on Chinese consumption. That's now very much in question.

These are the sorts of contradictions that we had hoped a new generation of leaders, new countries, would come

up to challenge the West as they went into their capitalist crises, but instead it turns out the philosophy has been such that the crisis tendencies are actually amplified through the BRICS.

SP: They assume that they can do neoliberal economics better than the United States, I guess.

PB: And yet, the protestors in so many of the sites of struggle, whether democratic movements in certainly Russia, Brazil, those had street protests this year that are formidable though unsuccessful, or the labor movement in a place like India, a year ago there were 180 million workers on strike, the greatest strike in world history for just one day. South Africa has huge numbers of protests and regularly rates as the World Economic Forum's number one site of class conflict, where workers are most confrontational in the annual surveys. China has more than 100 thousand protests per year.

So look, these are countries that are facing such intense inequality, South Africa, the worst in the world, a Gini coefficient of more than .7, overtaking

Brazil, and growing inequality in all the others. An extreme environmental degradation, male patriarchal power that is being challenged. India's had enormous protests against rape, example. If you look across the spectrum of social, ecological, economic, and political unrest, you'll see the BRICS from below very, very strong, even if the linkages are still to be made. The BRICS from above have a lot of the power of persuasion, resources, media attention, but I think it's fairly apparent that their agenda isn't to fight the system of world capitalism but to join it and to amplify its many problems. That means, for sure, more resistance to come.

SP: All right, Patrick, I thank you so much for joining us today and really appreciate your take on all of this, just fresh upon landing in South Africa. Thank you.

PB: Thank you, Sharmini.

SP: And thank you for joining us here on the Real News Network.

September 6

[Real News](#)

Let us support the struggle of the Catalan people

5 October 2017, by **Fourth International Bureau**

A rebellion has begun with massive social support within the European Union itself. This strengthens the possibilities of moving towards the Catalan Republic, a goal that requires the greatest degree of popular self-organization and the development of a constitutional process capable of stopping the counterrevolution announced by King Felipe VI's speech on 3 October.

Political victory of

the referendum, the State locks itself into repression

The admirable determination of a very large segment of the Catalan population, which managed to resist peacefully, brought the strategy of the 1978 regime to a major political defeat in Catalonia in the eyes of the rest of the world. This was a blow, not only for Rajoy's Popular Party, but also for

the stability of the Spanish monarchy and its main agents since the reform of the Franco regime that was called transition. The structure of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), the right-wing Citizens Party (Ciudadanos), the military, repressive and media state apparatus, as well as the actual powers of big capital, constitute a power bloc that cannot be reformed.

The monarch Felipe VI as Head of State and Rajoy, his government and corrupt party, with the support of PSOE and Ciudadanos and the mainstream media have begun a

campaign of slander, lies and smearing of the Catalan popular movement. There is no need to despise this; it is a factor of indoctrination of the popular classes of the Spanish State (and of the European Union) to set them against the Catalan people and to cow them with the excuse of the "unity of the Spanish nation". The objective of this power bloc is to justify in the eyes of the people of the Spanish State, and at an international level, new and greater repressive measures that may lead to the arrest of Catalan social and political leaders, the closing or muzzling of the few media not yet brought into line, the suspension of the Catalan institutions and the prolongation of the presence of police and military forces controlled by the Spanish government in Catalan territory.

Catalan republic and constituent process

A faltering institutional rupture has begun, which is sure to radicalize under the repressive coups of the state. It is difficult to predict the rhythms and formulas that it will eventually adopt, but confrontation is inevitable. Two elements are key: to strive to maintain as non-violent a strategy as possible, avoiding provocations, in order not to give any pretext to the Spanish state government for triggering even more severe repression and splitting the movement, for which they are more than ready to seize the chance; and to work to develop resistance to repression both within the labour movement in Catalonia itself and through a broad anti-repressive, democratic alliance for freedoms in the whole of the Spanish State, as well as the broadest possible solidarity internationally.

From double legitimacy to a

momentary double power

Since 6 and 7 September there are two opposing legitimacies and legal orders. The gap between them can only expand irreversibly. The lack of clarity, firmness and decision of a large part of the left can only give support to the counterrevolution and obstruct the left turn of the republican movement in Catalonia. The left who identify with socialism and the labour movement have the duty, both in Catalonia and Spain to take their responsibilities. The challenge they face is to promote a process that deepens the democratic rupture throughout the State, bearing in mind that the situation and the rhythms are different in Catalonia to the rest of the Spanish State. In Catalonia they will have to fight for the political leadership of this incipient rebellion, placing social, democratic, environmental and emancipatory questions at the centre of the constituent debate that will open in the coming weeks. That will have to be done, we hope as soon as possible, in the rest of the Spanish state. It is also the duty of the left and the labour movement internationally to organize broad campaigns supporting the Catalan movement and denouncing the campaign waged against it by the ruling class and its media.

General strike, self-organization and going beyond

Active participation of the working class as the main actor is essential at this crossroads to ensure a process that is favourable to popular interests. The possibility of pushing the struggle of the working class with its own agenda and thus achieving a new anti-capitalist social hegemony depends on the capacity of the workers' movement to act politically in relation to the rest of the social classes to solve a great national question, breaking with corporatism and passive economism. We must work hard in a forced march close the gap between what is necessary and what is possible.

The mass mobilization that we saw on 3 October with the general strike that paralysed Catalonia is laying the foundations of a growing irruption of the organized labour movement in the political process and of the generalization of dynamics of self-organization in the neighbourhoods (the Committees for Defence of the Referendum that now seem to be converted into Committees of Defence of the Republic), the localities and in some workplaces. The social base of the movement has massified; the nationalist parties, the Catalan National Assembly and Omnium Cultural, which until last month had exclusively led the "independence process", are seeing the rise of more dynamic, worker and radical sectors.

Democracy and the 1978 regime are already incompatible: we must open a second front

The current crisis is not only a Catalan rebellion, it is also a state crisis in which the, for the moment, minority consistent left (fundamentally our Anticapitalistas comrades and significant currents of the left union, social movements, Podemos and parties for change, as well as leftist nationalist currents), and the far right have begun a race against time for occupying the street. It is likely that in the short term, in the rest of the Spanish State, the forces that will benefit most from the crisis are the latter. Hence the urgency for the emerging left to be able to open a second front to relieve repressive pressure on Catalonia by taking initiatives against repression and by breaking with the 1978 regime. The nature of the power bloc that controls it forces a confrontation to effectively defend freedoms and a perspective of destitution / constitution.

There is a historical bifurcation between respect for the legality and respect and deepening of democracy. Conciliatory attitudes and abstract

appeals to dialogue are having little real resonance among both political actors and citizens. It is necessary to articulate a joint action of the lefts and the Catalan popular movement to achieve the democratic objectives and for the repression.

Unilateralism and solidarity, indispensable requirements for victory

The so-called “unilateralism” of the Catalan referendum is not incompatible with the search for solidarity and synergies with democratic and popular forces throughout the Spanish state and internationally. In this sense, it is increasingly evident that self-determination in Catalonia will be stifled without constitutional rupture(s) in the whole of the Spanish State and that there is no possible regime change in the state without a democratic and fraternal solution to Catalan aspirations.

Create two, three, many Catalonias

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Che Guevara, an example of a revolutionary with an internationalist vision, it is appropriate to be aware that it is more than time to break the reactionary dialectic that drags on Europe and the world and affects all regions of the planet. Institutional scourging in Latin America, racist and Islamophobic populism in Europe and the United States, fascist jihadism in the Middle East ... threaten the entire world and are reminiscent of the geopolitical chaos of earlier times.

That is why it is fundamental to support the Catalan process insofar as it is the most impressive example of mass civil disobedience of the last decades and constitutes a true laboratory for the 21st century citizen revolutions that could contribute to breaking the spiral towards barbarism in which the decadence of the world capitalist system has trapped us. At a time when workers and popular classes are suffering hard attacks driven by capitalists throughout the European Union, with deep attacks against democratic rights, the rebellion by the people of Catalonia is a sign of hope for regaining confidence in collective action of the oppressed and exploited.

It is more than a mere historical anecdote that the Catalan independence flag is directly inspired

by the flag of the Cuban revolutionaries who defeated the Spanish colonial army on the island in the late 19th century, a defeat that would decisively contribute to the ruin of the first Bourbon restoration. The struggle in Catalonia has certainly hurt the second and a republican victory would allow us to imagine a new rise of the popular movement and an update of the anti-capitalist and eco-socialist perspective in Catalonia, the Spanish state and throughout Europe.

Solidarity and mobilization

We call on all workers', popular and democratic organizations to support the struggle in Catalonia, to denounce the repression of the Spanish State, to pressure their respective states to recognize the act of sovereignty that is taking place and recognize an eventual proclamation of the Catalan Republic or Declaration of Independence

Towards the Catalan Republic. For popular self-organization and the initiation of a constituent democratic process

Executive Bureau of the Fourth International

4 October 2017

Detroit's Rebellion & Rise of the Neoliberal State

5 October 2017, by Jordan Camp

In 1967 hundreds of uprisings circulated across U.S. cities with unprecedented power and intensity. Almost always the provocation was racist police violence “ranging from arrests to beatings to shootings. The expanding geography of the 1960s urban insurrections amid growing resistance to the U.S. war in Vietnam

focused increased attention on the material conditions of the poor, working class, and people of color both at home and abroad.

Sparked by the self-activity and collective struggles of the masses on the move, the working class organized itself as communities of resistance in this decisive moment. Between 1967

and 1971 working people engaged in the most intensive strike activity in the postwar era in cities like Detroit. Race and class conflicts were being resolved by an urban proletariat led by organization such as the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW). Many workers began to turn to historical materialism to understand

and confront the relationships between race and class, the police state, and capitalist political economy.

The overturning of Jim Crow, capitalism, and U.S. imperialism seemed like a possibility. Taken together these events represented a critical turning point in U.S. history, one from which there was no going back.

According to movement intellectuals and activists, the Detroit rebellion of July 1967 was essentially a working-class revolt. It was met with deadly force once state officials ordered National Guard troops, federal soldiers, and police officers to treat people deemed looters and arsonists as enemies of the state. Over forty people were killed.

While response to the events demonstrated the repressive power of the state, the rebellion also exposed the vulnerability of the auto corporations to the pressure of class struggle at the point of production. Nine months after the July rebellion in May of 1968, over four thousand workers shut down the Dodge Main plant. These events led to the formation of the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM), which later became the League.

The rebellion fired the imaginations of young organic intellectuals who made up the League such as Mike Hamlin, Kenneth Cockrel, John Watson, General Gordon Baker and Marian Kramer. As part of an effort to organize the energies unleashed by the insurrection and wildcat strikes into a social force at the point of production, the League printed leaflets, produced a newspaper *Inner City Voice*, distributed the Wayne State University paper *The South End*, and produced the independent film *Finally Got the News*.

They theorized strategies and tactics relevant to the workers' struggle at the point of production in the context of an entire community fighting for liberation. They demanded an end to racism in the plants as well as in the unions and were willing to call strikes on their own behalf.

The League consciously drew on

collective memories of what W.E.B. Du Bois called the "general strike" of 1863-65, when one million Black workers freed themselves from slavery and sparked one of the most successful interracial working-class movements in U.S. history. In that period workers ruptured a racial and labor regime that had been centuries in the making, and initiated the most dramatic effort at democracy, waged by the poor and for "the working millions that this world had ever seen."

These episodes of working-class self-emancipation in the 1860s and the 1960s were, as C.L.R. James put it, "historical events of the first importance in the history of Black people at any time and today."

In what follows, I offer an analysis of the struggle over the meaning of the Detroit uprising of 1967. I begin by looking at how the state and mass media interpreted and depicted the dramatic events. In turn, I explore how artists, activists and intellectuals connected to Black freedom, radical labor and socialist movements engaged in a class struggle in culture and ideology over the memory of this decisive turning point in the rise of the neoliberal carceral state. I conclude by suggesting that these interventions demonstrate that there could have been, and still could be, a different world in the making.

Insurgency and Counterinsurgency

Detroit's political and expressive cultures were perhaps more interwoven than in any other North American industrial city. Dance halls and nightclubs provided spaces of leisure for industrial workers subjected to backbreaking labor as a workforce. On July 23, 1967 the Detroit rebellion began in a near West Side club.

The insurrection was sparked as city residents witnessed police harassment of a homecoming party for two Black soldiers returning from the U.S. imperialist war in Vietnam in a so-called "blind pig" (after hours club). All eighty-five people at the party were

arrested. It did not take long for the working people of Detroit's slums and nightclubs to resist this criminalization "on their own terms."

Photos of the revolt documented what Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin described as "systematic and integrated looting" among Black and white workers "shopping for free." Yet it was depicted in outlets such as the *New York Times* as a "riot" waged by "Negroes in Detroit," which they asserted created a rampage of crime, violence, and chaos.

Soon after the uprising, U.S. attorney general Ramsey Clark was contacted by Michigan Governor George Romney in order to request federal troops be sent in to crush the rebellion. On July 27 President Lyndon Johnson addressed the nation, as part of an effort to ensure that order would be restored. His words offered no restraint: "First â€" let there be no mistake about it â€" the looting, arson, plunder and pillage which have occurred are not part of a civil-rights protest ... That is crime â€" and crime must be dealt with forcefully, swiftly, certainly."

The President cited the Insurrection Act of 1807 as the legal basis for the deployment of troops in domestic territory. The revolt was met with deadly force as Detroit police officers, National Guard troops, federal soldiers and paratroopers fresh from battles in Vietnam shot people deemed looters and arsonists in the burning streets of Detroit.

Johnson's attempt to distinguish between a legitimate civil rights protest and crime while calling on the Insurrection Act should compel us to reconsider the struggle over the meaning and memory of the moment. By defining the ghetto revolt against joblessness, police violence, and exploitation at the point of production in the way that it did, the narrative of counterinsurgency endorsed the expansion of militarized-carceral solutions to the crisis.

This counterinsurgent narrative depicted the event as an instance of crime, violence and chaos. In fact, it purported that the revolt was not about civil rights violations or

motivated by working-class grievances, but rather an outburst of criminality. This definition of the situation provided a distorted image. This distortion has had material consequences that are particularly critical for understanding the historically specific and contingent relationships between racial ordering, capitalist restructuring, and the formation of the neoliberal carceral state.

Such narratives depicted resistance as violent, irrational and futile expressions that justified violent reactions by the state apparatus to impose the rule of law and restore order. The capitalist state's subsequent expansion of counterinsurgency in cities can therefore be understood as a reaction to the crisis of hegemony.

Counterinsurgency and uneven capitalist development had been articulated as part of U.S. political and economic policy throughout W.W. Rostow's tenure as the U.S. national security advisor under President Johnson between 1964 and 1968. Rostow's "stages of economic development" theory purported that capitalist development first required security forces to impose order.

In the wake of the Detroit rebellion, Rostow wrote to President Johnson: "At home your appeal is for law and order as the framework for economic and social progress. Abroad we fight in Vietnam to make aggression unprofitable . . . [to] build a future of economic and social progress." In Rostow's words, national security counterinsurgency policies had a direct impact on the policing of the urban crisis.

Journalistic narratives often reproduced the state's counterinsurgent logic by deploying myths that had been used to rationalize military intervention in Vietnam. Consider for example Time and Newsweek's take on the events in the earliest hours of July 23: "The trouble burst on Detroit like a firestorm and turned the nation's fifth largest city into a theater of war. Whole streets lay ravaged by looters, whole blocks immolated by flames. Federal troops â€" the first sent into

racial battle outside the South in a quarter of a century â€" occupied American streets at bayonet point."

Such narratives of burning and looting purported to legitimize the military occupation of domestic space. "If there is one point that has been proved repeatedly over four summers of ghetto riots," Time magazine suggested, "it is that when the police abandon the street, the crowd takes it over, and the crowd can swiftly become a mob. It happened in Watts, in Boston's Roxbury district, in Newark and in blood and fire in Detroit."

It was in this context that President Johnson gave a speech calling for the establishment of a commission to determine the causes of the events. He appointed Illinois governor Otto Kerner to lead the inquiry that would eventually be published as The Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. Made up of representatives of political and economic elites from industry, government, labor, police and mainstream civil rights organizations, the commission was a critical force in the development of new strategies of crisis management.

When the document was released in early 1968 with a foreword by New York Times columnist Tom Wicker, it was extremely well received and sold as many as two million copies of the paperback edition. The Kerner commission provided a definition of the urban crisis of the 1960s that has become taken for granted. In one of its most often quoted phrases, the report claimed, "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one Black, one white â€" separate and unequal."

It famously argued that "what white Americans never understood â€" but what the Negro can never forget â€" is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it." The Kerner Commission's conclusions were based on data primarily gathered during the Detroit rebellion, and were widely circulated in mass-media narratives.

Despite the commission's findings

based on what most experts agreed was a sound assessment that white racism and poverty were the key factors shaping the urban uprisings, the report still asserted that structural inequality could not fully explain the causes of the rebellions. It shifted its focus from politics and economics to family structures by claiming that conditions of unemployment among Black poor people produced a "culture of poverty."

It claimed that a "culture of poverty . . . generates a system of ruthless exploitative relationships within the ghetto. Prostitution, dope addiction, and crime create an environmental â€"jungle" characterized by personal insecurity and tension. Children growing up under such conditions are likely participants in civil disorder."

In doing so, the report sanctified the common sense that criminality in poor communities of color was the product of their own "culture." It further argued that counterintelligence units "staffed with full-time personnel should be established to gather, evaluate, analyze and disseminate information on potential as well as actual disorders. . . . It should use undercover police personnel and information."

As such, these recommendations distorted the report's message of race and class inequality conveyed in the two-nation thesis â€" and this distortion had a logic to it. The Kerner Commission's call for expanding police surveillance as a tactical response to rebellions represented a shift in the hegemonic form of racialized crisis management, one that simultaneously named racial inequality as a problem and made counterinsurgent appeals to security to secure its legitimacy. Thus its definition of the crisis should compel us to consider how it dramatically clashed with the perspectives of Black Freedom, radical labor and socialist movements.

"Finally Got the News"

Filmed in the context of the events of 1968, and following the rebellion of

the previous year, the film *Finally Got the News* provides an insurgent perspective voiced from within working class communities themselves. Produced, directed, and distributed in association with League members such as Cockrel, Watson and Hamlin, the film offers a class critique of the material conditions.

As an instance of independent filmmaking, the film delineates a distinct way of seeing how American Fordism's promise of high wages and full employment was contradicted by the fact of punitive policing, precarious labor, perilous housing and structural unemployment in the period. It therefore serves as an alternative archive of this decisive historical moment.

In the opening vignette, set to a dramatic drumbeat, *Finally Got the News* presents a series of historical documents illustrating how the surplus produced by Black workers under slavery gave rise to U.S. industrial capitalism and imperialism.

Inspired by the historical and theoretical frameworks in Karl Marx's *Capital* and W.E.B. Du Bois' *Black Reconstruction in America*, it provides a cinematic representation of how the self-activity of Black workers quickened the step of the working class as a whole. As the intensity of a drumbeat increases, the audience is presented with scenes from the history of the class war that ultimately culminated in the formation of the CIO during the 1930s, when the working class created mass power of a kind unparalleled.

Emphasizing the dialectics of insurgency, these images are juxtaposed with the pervasive and persistent forms of state repression. These representations of the history of the class struggle provide the context for the film's depiction of what was known among the working people of Detroit as the "great rebellion."

In sharp contrast to the narratives of criminality, chaos and illegality presented in the narrative of counterinsurgency, the film presents images of workers engaged in a struggle for dignity against the police state. The uprising is depicted as a

return of militancy among the working class. In these ways *Finally Got the News* expresses the radicalism sparked by the uprising in culture.

No one could have predicted how prophetic the League's analysis would remain a half-century later. They theorized earlier than most how capital would respond to the crisis of legitimacy by abandoning the workers and region that had been the source of its wealth and power. In the aftermath of the events, League members saw Richard Nixon ride a law and order agenda into the White House. Nixon's ensuing "war on crime" fanned the flames of white populist anger to legitimate authoritarian resolutions of crisis.

The racialized terms "riots," "looting" and "lawlessness" soon became symbolic for class antagonisms during the restructuring of the political economy. Spaces in cities once depicted as safe became redefined as dangerous territory that required security measures to control. This emergent carceral urbanism was defined through narratives of law and order.

Rather than being distracted by state discourses of crime, the League's analysis enables us to interrogate how the narrative of law and order displaced the anxieties that had been produced through economic insecurity. In this analysis, they were critically prescient.

The League's materialist analysis of the relations of forces has been vindicated, as the resulting unemployment devastated cities and hit the Black working class particularly hard during the neoliberal turn. While their victories in their struggle against racism and for economic justice represents a genuine historical advance, militants were not able to stop plant closures, capital flight, structural unemployment or the unprecedented expansion of policing and prisons in the political economy.

At the very moment that the victories of freedom and labor movements gave working people a new terrain from which to fight, the economic crisis of the late 1970s led to increases in poverty and unemployment not seen

since the Great Depression. The prison population grew from about 200,000 people in the 1960s to over two million by the 2000s, despite declines in crime rates in the same period.

Increased spending on incarceration occurred alongside the reduction of expenditures for public education, transportation, healthcare, and public employment. Prison expansion coincided with a shift in the racial composition of prisoners from majority white to almost 70% people of color. The unemployed, underemployed, and never-employed Black, Brown and poor have been incarcerated at disproportionate rates.

With the highest rate of incarceration on the planet, U.S. prisons incarcerate more Black people than South Africa's did at the height of apartheid. These numbers bespeak a collision of race, class and state power without historical precedent, but certainly not without historical explanation.

The unprecedented prison expansion over the last four decades is inconceivable outside the context of mass antiracist and class struggle. The state's crushing of the urban insurrections of the 1960s was a critical turning point in the buildup of the largest carceral apparatus on the planet, but it was not an inevitable outcome. Through alternative archives, radical histories, and Marxist social theory we can begin to grasp how alternative responses were possible.

Against analysts who would parrot counterinsurgents and define the event as a riot that created a chaotic rampage of lawlessness, however, we need to engage directly with the perspectives of freedom, labor and socialist movements. These provide a distinct challenge to the counterinsurgent logic that circulates not only in official state documents, but more insidiously through narratives circulated in magazines, newspapers, television, film, radio and even some scholarship.

These movements relay the types of visions and strategies needed to counter the hegemony of the neoliberal carceral state. That is not to say that "the arm of criticism" can

"replace the criticism of arms," since as Karl Marx put it, "material force can only be overthrown with material force, but theory itself becomes a material force when it has seized the masses."

As such, we need to take seriously the politics of historical excavation and theoretical explication, attending to the contested meaning of the urban insurrections of the 1960s. This theoretical labor is critical for understanding the unfinished business of freedom, labor and socialist

struggles in confronting authoritarian politics and austerity economics. To do so, we need to listen to the voices who have suggested that another city is not only possible, but a burning necessity.

[Against the Current](#)

After the referendum of 1 October

4 October 2017, by **Anticapitalistas**

2. The Catalan people have demonstrated, both on 1 October and in the last few weeks, a collective will and a capacity for enormous self-organization. It has created a massive peaceful civil disobedience movement: community-based school and college occupations, reserve in the face of police provocations, local committees for the defence of the referendum, a broad mobilization that has included working and popular classes, going beyond the framework of official policy. The fact that the referendum was held successfully demonstrates that we are not dealing with a simple set of operations of a political elite. We are faced with a broad movement, in which ordinary people have expressed their determination to decide on the relationship they intend to maintain with the central state.

The sovereignist movement in Catalonia has placed on the agenda two elements that are becoming increasingly difficult to deny. On the one hand, the impossibility of reforming the Constitution and the 1978 regime towards a federation (that is, accepting the free will and sovereignty of the different parties). On the other hand, the demonstration that only the massive exercise of civil disobedience can be the instrument with which the working classes can go beyond the institutional limits.

3. The tripartite PP-PSOE-Ciudadanos [party of Catalan origin led by Albert Rivera] regime systematically refused to propose a democratic and peaceful solution to the demands of the people

of Catalonia. Their strategy was a lamentable failure. The referendum was successfully held in a scenario in which the authoritarianism of the PP government broke the bridges of dialogue, with the result that today an increasing number of people in Catalonia understand that there is no possibility of "integration" [a Catalan State integrated in a federal State] in this Spanish State. The PSOE, in its subordinate support to Mariano Rajoy, was unable to propose a different path. The alleged renovation proposed by Pedro Sánchez [leader of the PSOE] is nothing but a cosmetic change that does not translate into an alternative political proposal to that of the PP.

4. On Tuesday, 3 October, the trade unions called for a general strike in Catalonia in the face of the repression of the State and in defence of the Catalan people's right to decide. The action of those from below is fundamental to ensure that the Catalan constituent process challenge an economic model that benefits only a minority. It is in this struggle against those from above that the working and popular classes will find themselves. And we will be at their side.

5. The Spanish elites have failed to resolve the "Catalan question". They have only made things worse, provoking hatred, weakening democracy and using brute force against ordinary people. Among the elites, the weight of the PP and the government of Mariano Rajoy was decisive, opting to block any solution

to the Catalan question in a democratic form and dialogue. This position of the reactionary bloc is useful for him in the rest of the Spanish state to consolidate the decline in social, labour and environmental rights that we have been experiencing since the beginning of the crisis.

No one should be mistaken: the strengthening of Mariano Rajoy around the Catalan question is a weakening of our rights in the rest of the country. This is the issue outside Catalonia.

Another country can only be built in without the PP in government. We must therefore work now to force Rajoy out of the Moncloa [seat of the Spanish government]. Faced with this dilemma, Sánchez's reaction has been a lukewarm defense of the Rajoy government, demonstrating the real limitations of a policy that would count on him to create a constituent bloc working for an alternative in favour of the social majority. This can only disappoint those who saw in him an option for "transforming" the PSOE and confronting the PP. In this situation, it is increasingly evident that a new project for the working classes will only be possible by promoting constituent processes that go beyond the 1978 regime.

At the present time, it is therefore urgent to promote a democratic movement which defends the legitimacy of the decisions of the Catalan people and which, at the same time, confronts the reactionary

offensive of the PP. Only in this way will we be able to build a social majority capable of doing what the regime cannot: dialogue among

equals, without repression or padlock, in order to struggle to build a free and united democratic cohabitation, where those below are the actors and where the will of the those concerned

constitute the elements of mutual relations.

Madrid, 3 October 2017

After the German election

4 October 2017, by **Angela Klein**

Both parts of the governing grand coalition have plummeted in popularity among voters. With 26.8 per cent the conservative CDU/CSU got the worst result of its history; it lost 2.5 million votes. The social democratic SPD reached its historical low as well; it got 20.5 per cent and lost 1.75 million votes. This is a clear rejection of a renewal of the grand coalition (with a higher turnout of 76.2 per cent – 2013: 71.5 per cent). The CDU/CSU has a net balance of 1.3 million votes that it lost to the liberal FDP and almost one million votes that it lost to the extreme right-wing AfD. The almost 2 million votes the SPD lost split more or less equally (400,000 to 450,000 votes) between the FDP, the LINKE (Left Party), the AfD and the Greens. The Greens profited least from the SPD losses.

The break-up of the grand coalition triggered a political swing to the right. The far right AfD, which marginally missed entry into the federal parliament (Bundestag) four years ago, triumphed with 12.6 per cent of the votes. It gained 1.8 million votes from former non-voters and from various small right-wing parties, but also almost one million votes from the CDU/CSU and some 400,000 votes each from the SPD and the Left Party respectively. The AfD is the third strongest force in the new Bundestag.

But also the FDP's return into the federal parliament is part of the political swing to the right. The FDP wants to set a time limit for the protection of refugees and to create an immigration law which follows the Canadian model. It wants to change the EU treaties so that countries like

Greece can be expelled from the monetary union, and 'in the long run' it wants to abolish the European Stability Mechanism (ESM). The FDP is also against the energy turnaround. Thus in relation to both issues there is a race for right-wing positions between the Bavarian CSU, the FDP, and the AfD.

With 8.9 per cent of the vote the Greens are the smallest parliamentary group in the Bundestag.

Because the SPD announced already on election night that it did not want to continue the current grand coalition government and because all parties exclude a coalition with the AfD there is numerically only a possibility of a so-called Jamaica coalition, i.e. black-green-yellow (CDU/CSU-Greens-FDP). It can be anticipated that the Greens will suffer the most losses in such a coalition. Presently they behave rather statesmanlike presenting themselves as guarantors of a stable government.

The AfD

The AfD was founded as a conservative opposition to the former CDU/CSU-FDP coalition's policy on Europe during the financial crisis. Yet during the 'summer of refugees' it was able to establish itself as the political voice of the racist Pegida movement. Since then, its main topics are a walls-up policy against refugees and its hatred against muslims. The founders of the AfD left the party long ago. The AfD is now led by a coalition of right-wing currents tolerating openly fascist and antisemitic positions within the party's ranks.

Before the election the party was able to keep the inner-party conflicts under wraps. But after the election these conflicts came into the open. They are mainly over the question whether the AfD should be prepared for a opposition role for some time gathering the discontented around far right and fascist positions until it is strong enough to set the course of a government – or whether it should aim for an entry into a government coalition as soon as possible.

The former party president Frauke Petry is for the latter alternative; she wants to realize a 'conservative turn' in Germany until 2021. Immediately after the election she announced that she will not be a member of the AfD parliamentary group in the Bundestag and that she will leave the party. Probably she aims to form a new party. In light of the experiences of her predecessor and founder of the AfD, Bernd Lucke, the chances of success for such a new party seem to be very limited. Whether the extreme right-wing current of the AfD can survive a party split is also not clear.

The AfD achieved 10 per cent of the votes or more in the federal states in the former GDR, in Berlin, and even in Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg; in Saxony it has become the strongest party. In East Germany there is a deep resentment above all against the CDU: the party that during the fall of the GDR promised East Germans blooming landscapes took care that 27 years after German re-unification wages and pensions in the east remain lower than those in the west – including the public sector – and that

90 per cent of assets are in western hands. Even a starting point for an independent industrial development in the east like the solar industry has been destroyed because of a cheaper competition from China. However, these reasons hold not true for the two southern federal states which are among the richest in the republic.

The best results for the AfD correspond to the biggest losses of the CDU/CSU. In the three eastern federal states Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia as well as in Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg of southern Germany the CDU/CSU suffered their biggest losses. In particular it is a bitter defeat for the CSU in Bavaria (losing 10 percentage points) because it had tried to limit its losses to the AfD by a hard-line policy against refugees.

Taken all in all the grand coalition was successful for the bourgeoisie. But in recent years Angela Merkel, Chancellor and CDU president, has been criticized within her own party: She is supposed to have social-democratized the CDU beyond recognition and to have abandoned basic conservative values (e.g. the opposition to same-sex marriages).

The SPD: unswerving loyalty does not pay

The SPD's losses result from the fact that it did not bring into play any other government option other than the grand coalition. When Martin Schulz was chosen as the leading candidate of his party he, for a short time, created the impression that he would distance himself from the Agenda 2010 policy by choosing 'social justice' as his battle cry. Immediately the SPD surged in the polls by 10 percentage points - with an immense hype around Schulz's candidacy. But soon he backed down. He did not want to risk a break with the Agenda 2010 and his concretizations of the 'social justice' issue were rather poor. At the end, during the TV duel, he appeared more as Merkel's partner than as her opponent. From the moment the grand

coalition fell into disfavour with public opinion.

The leaders of the trade unions wanted a continuation of the grand coalition. Yet, what the SPD could get accepted within the coalition was meagre: Most important was the introduction of a statutory minimum wage - for the first time in German history. Its structural significance for the stabilization of wages in the sectors of precarious jobs can hardly be overestimated. The federal government disregarded the massive protests of the employers. But the level of the minimum wage is ridiculous - presently 8.84 euros - and its observance is insufficiently controlled.

The successes of the SPD in the pension issue were equivocal. Only the core workforces of big enterprises with an uninterrupted employment biography can enjoy a retirement age of 63 after 45 insurance years, which has also been fought by the employers. Simultaneously the resistance of the unions against the raising of the retirement age to 67 was bought off and company pension schemes as a second privately financed pillar of the pension system have been developed by SPD labour minister Andrea Nahles. The trade unions are now, together with the employers, involved in the administration of those pension funds reducing most probably their willingness to fight for a statutory pension insurance based on solidarity.

The strategic weakening of working people and their trade unions becomes even clearer through the bargaining unity legislation introduced by the grand coalition with the support of the big trade unions. With more than one trade union in a firm or factory (e.g. at airports or in hospitals) the collective agreement bargained with the biggest union will be effective. This is directed against 'occupational' unions organizing employees with high qualifications like train drivers and doctors who are very combative due to their strong position in operating procedures. In recent years they have been able to prevent the loss of their 'privileges' on several occasions.

Thus the participation of the SPD in

the grand coalition has led to a stronger integration of the trade unions into the co-management of the long-term neoliberal restructuring of social security systems.

Die Linke

Die Linke was able to increase its share of the vote slightly to 9.2 per cent. In all western federal states it surpassed 5 per cent and it was especially successful in the city states of Hamburg and Bremen as well as in the Saarland with over 12 per cent each. In Berlin it became even the second strongest party with 19 per cent. Among voters under 30 years it got 11 per cent. But in the eastern federal states the party suffered heavy losses, the biggest in Thuringia and Brandenburg. In both states die Linke is in a government coalition with the SPD. Obviously in those regions it is no longer seen as an 'eastern' party that especially takes up the cause of the East German population.

Economic situation

The economic situation of Germany is contradictory. On the one hand GDP has been rising slightly but steadily since 2010. There has been an upturn on the labour market as well: For three or four years real wages are rising again after their constant sinking or stagnation between 2000 and 2013. But the rise is more due to the very low inflation rate than to significantly higher real wage increases, which are still the lowest in the EU.

The official unemployment rate of less than 6 per cent is the lowest since 1990; the employment rate is on the historically highest level. But it is bought with a growing share of people earning less than 10 euros per hour: they represent 20 per cent of the active population in Germany, in East Germany over 30 per cent. The national household budget and those of some federal states are full, even the social funds record surpluses. But some federal states like North Rhine-Westphalia, Bremen and the Saarland are highly indebted.

Exports account for half of GDP; in 2016 export surpluses rose to obscene 256 billion euros – a figure named ‘dangerous’ even by the BDI, the German employers’ federation. It’s a dance on a volcano.

At the same time 25 years of privatization have left their mark. The infrastructure is increasingly desolate. The railway shines with its new high-speed route between Hamburg and Munich, but the regional trains for the daily commuter traffic are overpriced and overcrowded and often cancelled. 6,000 road bridges are desolate (among them 78 motorway bridges) – the concrete is crumbling. School buildings deteriorate; the country lacks 5,000 teachers; every seventh adult is a functional illiterate.

The trade union Ver.di threatens to strike because the hospitals chronically lack nursing staff. There is a lack of 150,000 apartments, especially of affordable housing, because the public sector is no longer funding social housing. At the same time rents in major cities have been moved upwards to record levels; a mechanism against unhindered rent increases that was introduced by the government does not work.

The public treasury is full but the government cedes the development of infrastructure to private companies which would go bankrupt and want to hold the government liable if their profits do not correspond to their expectations. Therefore the development of intelligent power grids, the infrastructure for electric cars and the construction of fibre-optic networks for a faster internet transmission don’t make progress.

Social inequality has increased in Germany since the SPD-Green coalition came to power in 1998. Germany is, together with Greece and Portugal, the EU country with the largest income disparities before taxes and social transfers – and it is the country with the largest income gap between men and women. Wealth inequality is even larger: 10 per cent of private households own more than half of the assets. Those at the risk of poverty total 16 per cent; the rate of child poverty is 19 per cent, in East Germany 25 per cent. The status is

passed on. Long-term unemployment represents 36 per cent of all unemployment and remains roughly constant for the last eight years despite good economic performance.

The sum of these factors produces divisions that make the formulation of common class interests difficult – above all between the decreasing group of well-paid workers with permanent contracts doing everything to keep their jobs and the new and growing layer of low-wage workers. The latter often have several mini-jobs and work overlong hours and nevertheless they often have to apply for welfare benefits in order to make ends meet (this affects almost 600,000 persons).

But these factors also produce a mood characterized by a mixture between a withdrawal to the coping with the personal everyday life, a passive discontent with everything ‘that goes wrong’, anxiety about the future and a vague hope that ‘we will make it’ due to the strength of exports and the high-tech orientation of Germany’s industry. For most Germans – including workers – to keep Germany’s top position within the international competition is the only way not to share the fate of the southern European countries.

No ‘carry on as before’ – but what else?

Chancellor Merkel’s slogan during the election campaign was essentially ‘Carry on as before!’ She emphasized that the Germans are well off compared to people in other countries and regions. Like Hillary Clinton she was forced to conclude that such a reasoning is dangerous since it is no longer true for a growing number of people. In East Germany she was often received with hatred during her election campaign.

But there will be no ‘carry on’ after the election. The phase of a rather good economic performance will not last for ever especially since none of the structural economic problems have been solved: industrial

overcapacity, insufficient control of the finance markets, lack of productive investment opportunities for capital, structural shortage of secure jobs, etc.

At the same time there are the first signs that the German industrial model, based above all on the automobile industry, has no future. Dieselgate is far more than a large-scale fraud. It is the proof that diesel is no alternative to petrol because there is no such thing as clean diesel. Petrol is above all responsible for the high carbon dioxide emissions, diesel for the fine dust pollution through nitrogen oxide in major cities.

Fine dust concentration has increased massively so that mayors see a driving ban as the only possible solution – a disaster for the automobile industry. Though the latter has realized that the electric car is inevitable it envisages long transitional periods and is firmly committed to increase the production of private passenger cars. But in public there are already many considerations about mobility without private automobiles. For the carbon balance the model ‘continuation of the mass production of private cars, but with electric motor’ is a catastrophe because the required electricity can no longer be served exclusively with renewable energy. Thus a pressure is built up to run the lignite plants beyond the presently set time limit of 2050.

In its present form the industrial site Germany is definitely called into question.

Starting points for a system change

If one adds to this the impending massive job cuts due to the digitalization of production we see that there is a systemic crisis. This crisis must be concomitant with a social system change if the climate targets are to be reached and the social needs of the population are to be met. The combination of both aspects allows to react against the capitalist crisis management in a manner that is not exclusively defensive manner and to introduce ecosocialist alternatives into current struggles. The focal point is the issue of industrial conversion with the

creation of jobs in new sectors.

It is an issue that is no longer only theoretically but also practically put on the agenda. Thus actions of civil disobedience against the exploitation of lignite mines in Brandenburg and in the Rhineland led to conflicts with trade unions like Ver.di (public services) and the IGBCE (energy). In particular the latter tried to mobilize workers against environmentalists. But during the conflict there were also common debates with great participation by the local population. Within Ver.di an initiative of trade-union activists has been formed that turns to the employees of electric plants and to municipal administrations that are shareholders of the electric utilities company RWE and use the dividends as a part of their local budgets. The protest movements against the fine dust pollution in some major cities have a similar potential.

A further area in which labour conflicts are must be combined with social alternatives in order to be successful is the struggle against the nursing crisis in the hospitals. The trade union Ver.di tries to force new employment through labour contracts, but a first attempt at the Berlin Charité did not lead to significant improvements. In Hamburg a coalition has been formed taking to the streets together with patients and scientists. Only individual locals of Ver.di are

part of that coalition. The trade union does not pursue the line of combining labour conflicts with social mobilizations. They fear being accused of launching political strikes, which, however, are illegal in Germany.

The nursing crisis is an issue that moves the public very much. It is an opportunity for the women's movement - or what remains of it - to fight, together with nurses, childcare workers etc., for a radical revaluation of reproductive work.

Most struggles are defensive struggles though they are sometimes successful. This is above all the case with struggles against the privatization of public services like electricity and water. In some cities privatizations could be annulled with the help of local referendums. The very broad mobilization against TTIP is one of those defensive struggles.

Labour conflicts - above all those against miserable working conditions and low wages or against the harassment of works councils - remain often isolated even if public opinion is on the side of the workers. Poverty wages are not socially accepted, but the employers often succeed in mobilizing the media against pilots, flight controllers, train drivers etc., depicting them as mere defenders of 'their privileges'.

Social justice is still the dominating issue. Those who can offer a credible strategy for a break with the Agenda 2010 will be met with great approval. If the SPD had followed this line during the recent election campaign it would have gained a lot of votes having been able to supersede the CDU/CSU - at least as opinion leader. Although Die Linke is clearly against the antisocial labour market reforms (known as 'Hartz IV') with good proposals for the restoration of more social justice, it has a problem: There is no mood for a red-red-green coalition; the experience gained from the participation of the Die Linke in government coalitions of federal states like Thuringia or Berlin is not good. There Die Linke quickly forgot its great promises, instead pursuing realpolitik.

That the way out to the left is being blocked and at the same time the objective situation is crying out for change paves the way for a lasting rise of the far right. There were strong mobilizations against the AfD during the election campaign. But that did not prevent the party's electoral success. The AfD will not be got rid of if the left is limiting itself to challenge the far right in the public space or to question its political legitimacy, essential as this is. The left must undermine it by showing which other solutions can be imposed.

(29 September 2017)

How the earthquakes shook Mexican politics

3 October 2017, by Edgard Sanchez

We are not cursed, nor do we suffer from divine punishment or mere natural disasters, but from the consequences of a savage capitalism and the policies of the governments that defend it.

Just after September 7, when the first big earthquakes hit southern Mexico, the Senate announced it had opened a bank account to collect donations to support survivors in Chiapas and

Oaxaca. They didn't receive a single donation from Mexican citizens, and hardly any from the senators themselves. By contrast, Section 22 of the CNTE [the radical section of the Mexican teachers' union] transported tons of goods and first aid materials from Mexico City and beyond to the affected areas to share them directly with the people of Oaxaca.

When President Enrique Peña Nieto

[or EPN as he is known] went to Oaxaca to promise aid, Section 22 had already distributed the better part of what had been collected. And after the earthquake hit Mexico City and central Mexico on September 19, there were widespread calls for the public to give aid directly to social organizations and movements that are independent of the government and the institutional political parties.

Centers have opened all over Mexico City—in ordinary families' homes, union halls like the electrical workers union (SME), and artists' studios such as Oaxacan painter Francisco Toledo—to collect aid, bypassing the state and delivering it directly to neighborhoods, towns, and communities who are in desperate need of it. People have offered food, water, child care and even their electrical outlets so volunteers can charge their cell phones.

Obviously, this brings to mind the tremendous people's response after the earthquake in 1985 that killed up to 10,000 people in Mexico City. Tens of thousands of people have volunteered for brigades to rescue people, remove debris, carry food, clothes and water, reinforce damaged houses, provide tools for digging, etc. The spontaneous rebirth of this tradition is all the more remarkable because the great majority of these brigadistas were not even born in 1985!

It is as inspiring as it is hopeful to see a huge number of youth helping rescue people and offering aid to the survivors. Groups of young people—who previously belonged to no organization, but came together as classmates, friends or even strangers who just happened to find each other—are taking to the streets with backpacks slung over their shoulders, their personal information written on their arms in magic marker, and cell phones charged to 100 percent, looking for somewhere to help.

All of this stands in sharp contrast to the scandalous inefficiency, cynicism and corruption on display at all levels of the government.

Osorio Chong, the secretary of state, is shouted down and quickly scurries away from the ruined Bolívar and Chimalpopoca factories. A city councilor from Xochimilco flees one of the hardest-hit neighborhoods under a chorus of boos and a reign of water bottles launched by residents.

Graco Ramírez, the governor of the state of Morelos [hit badly just to the south of Mexico City] is told off by brigadistas and neighbors in Tetela del Volcán—after which he and his

wife, Elena Cepeda, are denounced in the press for hoarding relief materials sent by civil society. In Oaxaca, people discover a shop run by the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) filled with goods intended for distribution to victims being diverted for political patronage, so they seize the relief and deliver it to the intended recipients.

On top of all this, there is widespread condemnation of Peña Nieto's response. Before the earthquake, when EPN traveled for the first time while in office to the city of Oaxaca, Section 22 of the teachers' union organized a big protest against him. As is common in Oaxacan protests, they set off fireworks and skyrockets, one of which managed to reach a helicopter in the president's entourage (transporting reporters), forcing it to make an emergency landing.

Yet perhaps the most significant incident symbolizing the mass rejection of Peña Nieto occurred in the state of Mexico [the state surrounding Mexico City where the PRI recently stole the statewide election] when a man interrupted a public appearance by EPN to demand that the president "pick up a shovel," as a way to challenge his demagogic promises. The president's executive staff wanted to have the man arrested, thereby provoking a group of young students from the Autonomous University of the State of Mexico (UAEM) to protect the man and begin a protest against EPN.

In response, perhaps losing control of himself upon realizing that protests dog him even in the state of Mexico, Peña Nieto launched into a threatening speech in the style of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz—the PRI president of Mexico who oversaw the 1968 massacre of hundreds of students at Tlatelolco—denouncing "professional agitators" with "foreign ideas." EPN went on to say, "Sometimes there are strangers who come to stir up trouble and provoke [anger]...We have seen a lot of misinformation in social networks, sometimes false information, false news that really hinders aid work...Do not be deceived, do not be confused."

Of course, we shouldn't be surprised by the young students' reaction to Peña Nieto. We only have to remember how he ridiculed students in 2012 at the Ibero-American University who charged him with electoral fraud. His claim that there were "no more than 131" protesters launched the #yosoy132 ("#Iam132") mass student movement that shut down campuses and clogged highways for months.

Today, thousands of young brigadistas are responding that they are not troublemakers—on the contrary, it is the government and institutional parties that are to blame for blocking aid by diverting it for political purposes, or by preventing the free passage of solidarity vehicles and trucks trying to reach affected communities.

EPN's Díaz-like threats hang in the air: "strangers" are rioters. These insinuations seek to recreate the kind of fear whipped up by the state after 1968. Tragedy followed when five university workers were accused of being "outside agitators" and lynched in the small village of Canoa in Puebla. However, the distrust of the government and the collapse of its legitimacy are now intense, greater than they have ever been—and Peña Nieto's threats only increase the contempt with which he is held.

The government wants to impede, delay, and disrupt the process of self-organization taking place in society and among the survivors themselves to avoid a repetition of the political dynamics set in motion in 1985. They must prevent the rise of an autonomous movement, independent of the regime.

It's very common today to hear that the movement is outdoing the government in terms of providing relief. In 1985, the movement continued during the whole process of reconstruction, and it provides a precedent showing both social self-organization and governmental failure.

These dynamics spilled over into 1986 with a huge student strike [led by the University Student Council, or CUE]. Soon after, the PRI was split by a

historic current headed by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in 1987—who subsequently ran for president in 1988 against the PRI one-party state and went on to found the center-left Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD).

When officials confiscate aid collected by civil society, they do so not only because they are corrupt and seek personal enrichment. Rather, they are primarily interested in asserting control, so that all aid for survivors is delivered in the name of the government, especially the National System for Coordinated Family Development (SNDIF), represented in the media by Angélica Rivera, Peñón Nieto's wife.

On September 20, when the earthquakes' terrible effects became known in the San Gregorio neighborhood of the Xochimilco region in Mexico City, thousands of volunteers converged there with the intention of volunteering.

A huge traffic jam occurred because so many people went to help, but also because there were various roadblocks set up by the Marines, Army, and municipal and central government authorities, telling people to go no further and leave relief supplies with them. Supposedly this was a way to centralize all supplies; in reality, it was an attempt to portray the authorities as critical in the relief process and to try to prove that civilian volunteers were useless.

Certainly, the point is not about competing with state institutions to see which can secure more recognition in the eyes of the survivors. Rather, the only guarantee that the survivors have of winning their demands, especially the recovery and reconstruction of their homes, depends on them being organized, mobilized and fighting for these demands.

Fortunately, not only in Mexico City, but also in Chiapas, Oaxaca and Morelos, there are rich experiences and strong traditions of struggle.

For instance, in Mexico City, a coalition of the survivors' organizations from 1985 finally came together in the unified council of

survivors (CUD), becoming the officially recognized intermediary with the state in terms of reconstruction. And in Juchitán, Oaxaca, there is a long tradition of social struggle, even if it is no longer embodied in the historic Worker, Campesino, and Student Coalition of the Istmo (COCEI), because it has been divided by the dynamic of institutionalization of the left via the PRD. Of more recent origin, we can look to the experience of the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO) and the mass strike and struggle it led in 2006.

At the same time, we must not only safeguard the process of self-organization from maneuvers from the state and institutional political parties. Among sections of the left and social movements, there is also a sort of desperation when faced with the potential for the birth of a new, vigorous movement that enjoys tremendous legitimacy and national status, but remains disorganized.

Faced with the dangers of confronting the government and several cases of "low-intensity" repression [over the weekend of September 21-23, there were various clashes between police and rescuers or those transporting aid], certain left-wing currents are already striving to lead the movement, but are doing so by imposing themselves on the incipient forms of organization.

Clearly, the spontaneity of any movement is relative, and we always find, here and there, elements with political experience and even militancy. Yet any new social movement depends on a process of self-organization of those most affected, and not on those of us on the left speaking on their behalf.

For instance, when a powerful movement against a steep hike in gasoline prices erupted in January of this year, several pre-existing movements and organizations convened meetings and conferences and tried to raise their own slogans for the struggle to bring the new movement into their ranks. It didn't work.

Now there is a similar risk in believing that our respective social

organizations and movements can bring survivors and the earthquake solidarity movement directly into our ranks—and thereby ensure such a movement develops a political, even a radical, direction.

No doubt, even before the tremors in 1985, there were important urban movements that provided a precedent and were obviously able to merge their experienced cadre with the survivors' movement then. This previous experience was concentrated in the National Council of the Popular Urban Movement (CONAMUP) and the National Committee of the Plan de Ayala (CNPA).

But the movement of survivors in 1985 did not simply swell CONAMUP's component organizations. Instead, a new movement was created—new actors in the struggle with their own organization that finally converged in the Unified Council of Survivors (CUD). In fact, in some ways, the CUD's experience outgrew that of CONAMUP.

If a new, authentic movement of survivors grows up out of September 19, it will develop its own organizations—in fact, these may already be growing up in the first neighborhood assemblies. Social and political organizations must certainly offer their example, their experience and even their cadres, but they must do so by encouraging and respecting the survivors' own organizational forms and not trying to fit this movement into older organizations.

It is important that the people—the survivors and the volunteers—see these new groups taking action and building solidarity so that they can understand how different they are from the governmental agencies, but we must resist the urge to substitute for or co-opt the initial movement. It's hard because, at the same time, the movement must resist pressure from the government that aims to disorganize it and co-opt it, and to repress it if need be. However, if there is no autonomous movement, there is no possibility of success.

The survivors' movement of 1985, as we've already said, anticipated the 1986 student strike led by CEU in the

National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and the split in the PRI that was carried to a conclusion in the 1988 elections, when the PRI's Salinas took office on the back of massive voter fraud.

The popular mobilization and massive rejections of the PRI that followed these developments are incomprehensible without taking these events into account. These experiences and the level of consciousness reached were primarily channeled at that time into the PRD, even though this party did not represent a genuinely radical change.

Today's movement of survivors, with all the moral authority it enjoys, may provoke repercussions in the midst of the regime's social and political crisis.

In fact, this is the worst moment in terms of legitimacy in the history of the Mexican regime, and it comes at a time when the alternative represented by the PRD has imploded, as the party has been assimilated as a collaborator. This is especially true after the PRD signed the Pact for Mexico in support of EPN's neoliberal program that only exacerbated the disasters of rampant feminicide, ruthless violence against journalists, and the militarization of the war on drugs.

In reality, the crisis of the regime has found expression in nearly every year of EPN's administration, repeatedly raising the slogan "PeÃ±a out!": #yoso132 in 2012; mass protests against neoliberal reforms in 2013; the Ayotzinapa abductions in 2014; the boycott of 2015's midterm elections and the growth of the teachers' movement; a strike in teachers' colleges and high levels of abstention in the vote to reform Mexico City's constitution in 2016; and the "gasolinazo" protests against price hikes at the beginning of 2017.

If the regime hasn't yet collapsed, this isn't because of its strength, but because of the movements' weaknesses. We had expected that the next explosion in this ongoing crisis would appear in July 2018, when, no doubt, the PRI attempts to cling to power through a new round of fraud in the presidential elections. However, the earthquake has shifted Mexico's

social and political tectonic plates, and its energy may fracture the regime's rotten foundations.

Our aim must be to help find a way for the survivors' movement and the anti-neoliberal movements to develop a shared, anti-system perspective.

This is a complicated question. For example, just as the PRD has retreated as a political alternative, Andr s Manuel L pez Obrador [or AMLO, as the PRD's former presidential candidate and now an independent is known] and his new MORENA party [Movement for National Regeneration] have adopted the electoralist perspective once promoted by C rdenas and the PRD.

AMLO now argues that all movements fighting against the regime should hold their fire and dedicate their efforts to electing him in 2018. Fortunately, none of the movements that arose against EPN have accepted AMLO's proposal to subordinate themselves to the elections and the institutional path.

Today's movements must deal with this political contradiction, although—in contrast to 1988—the perspective of simply "alternating" ruling parties has run its course, no matter how much MORENA hopes to generate new illusions in AMLO winning the vote in 2018 as a solution to all problems.

However, it must be said that, in desperation and out of hatred for the PRI, some sections of the movement do accept these electoralist illusions. At the same time, the recent elections in the state of Mexico only demonstrate that even if MORENA can win the majority of votes, the PRI is willing to resort to fraud to maintain power and AMLO's only alternative is to complain in the courts. In reality, the state of Mexico's elections are "chronicles of a death foretold" with respect to what we can expect in 2018.

TAKING ALL this into account, the survivors movement's potential force and energy means that 2018 won't necessarily be like 1988. If 1985 led to

a crisis in 1988 that was resolved through the PRI eventually sharing power by alternating terms in office with other establishment parties [principally the pro-business National Action Party, or PAN] in defense of a fraudulent institutionalism, then 2017 does not automatically presage a repetition because the balance of forces is different and the regime's crisis is deeper.

Now there is a stronger expression of anti-capitalist forces that will not settle for political parties taking turns in office.

Although it is sometimes dispersed, an anti-capitalist consciousness has advanced within diverse union, social, and political movements. One example is the founding of the Political Organization of the People and the Workers (OPT) on the initiative of the electrical workers union (SME) in the midst of its desperate struggle against the neoliberal privatization of Mexico City's electrical system.

Yet this is only one option. The Zapata Army of National Liberation (EZLN or Zapatistas) proposed to the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) that it constitute a Governing Indigenous Council (CIG) and then presented its spokeswoman Marichuy, an Indigenous leader, as an independent candidate to stand in the 2018 presidential elections. The CNI adopted this plan of action in May and has begun working on putting it into practice.

Critically, the OPT's national meeting on September 9 agreed to support Marichuy and the CIG presidential campaign, signaling the potential for an important alliance—between Zapatismo and the CIG on the one hand, and the proletarian pole of the SME-OPT on the other hand. Taken together, they could put forward a social bloc as an alternative to the system.

Without doubt, the CIG and its spokeswoman's campaign will break out of the institutional electoral framework. As Marichuy has said, we are not going to chase votes. This will be a campaign based on struggle.

Thus, the regime's crisis will even find

expression in the elections. Marichuy's campaign is very similar to Rosario Ibarra's presidential race in 1988 initiated by the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT). However, today the balance of forces has changed. Back then, the major currents of the socialist left that emerged from the battles of 1968 capitulated to the Cardenista institutional perspective, even dissolving themselves in the

PRD. The PRT refused to do so, but found itself isolated in those circumstances.

Despite this month's devastating tragedies, there are reasons to hope that, as they say in the social networks, the system suffers from structural flaws and is close to collapse. September's seismic tremors

may awaken a social and political force that, like Marx's old mole of history, burrows up from underground with enough power to bring down the whole corrupt and decrepit edifice.

26 September 2017

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Catalonia's Decision

2 October 2017, by **Josep María Antentas**

On October 1, Catalonia held a referendum on its independence. This vote, convened by the Catalan government but [banned by the Spanish Constitutional Court](#), was the culmination of an unprecedented five-year confrontation between Catalan and Spanish institutions.

Since the independence process began with a mass demonstration on September 11, 2012, the Catalan national holiday, the movement has grown into a sustained political and social force capable of organizing mass protests every year since. These developments clearly worry the right-wing government in Madrid, which is now trying every [repressive tactic](#) possible to prevent the vote from taking place.

Tomorrow is a key moment for Catalonia, and a good occasion to recall the political trajectory of the Catalan independence movement, with all its potential and limitations.

The Mainstream Movement

The movement that erupted in 2012 was the result of three connected dynamics. First, many Catalan citizens disliked the aggressive centralism of the second Aznar government (2000-4), which made Spanish nationalism the core of its political-cultural project.

Second, the new Catalan Statute of Autonomy, which the Catalan

parliament passed in 2005, faced challenges when it went to Madrid for approval. The conservative People's Party (PP), then in the opposition, claimed the law was unconstitutional, and the constitutional court declared fourteen articles illegal. This failed process to increase their nation's sovereignty convinced many Catalans that they could not reform Spain from within.

Finally, the economic crisis and turn to harsh austerity policy further alienated Catalonia from the Spanish state, increasing the perception that Spain had politically and economically failed. Tensions between the central government and regional administrations increased as Madrid sought to take advantage of the crisis in order to impose a recentralization plan that would, among other things, cut regional governments' public spending.

In Catalonia, discomfort with austerity policies and the collusion between financial and political elites was expressed first in the 15M movement. But, although it was not directed against austerity, the independence movement was also able to benefit from this discontent with the economic situation and offered [a concrete proposal](#) "independence from Spain" as a way out of the current situation.

In 2012, the Catalan National Assembly (ANC) organized a

democratic movement exclusively around the call for independence. The ANC quickly grew into a mass organization with branches all over Catalonia, becoming the undisputed leading organization of the movement. As a result of its singular focus on independence, the ANC has neither critiqued austerity policies nor proposed economic change. Instead, the mainstream independence movement centers itself around shared identity "We Catalans must unite because we have common interests" and the desire to have a state of its own "Without a state nothing can be done."

Left-wing supporters rounded out this focus on nation and state with a stagist perspective that calls for independence first and reformed economic and social policies later. But this approach ignores the fact that whoever controls the transition process determines what comes later. Today's concessions and demobilizations cannot be recovered tomorrow.

This insight is especially important in the Spanish case because the discourse of "first independence and then the rest" closely resembles the rhetoric of "first democracy and then social rights" that the Left accepted in the post-Franco transition. This doctrine justified compromises that left-wing forces never recovered from. It's a reminder that any movement

based around a shared demand must take advantage of the opportune moment, but what it cannot win today, it cannot guarantee. The independence movement's elevation of the nation and the state as well as its stagist approach has produced serious strategic problems. That said, independence would directly confront the institutional framework established in 1978. For those fighting neoliberal capitalism, this assessment of the movement must become the starting point of any strategic analysis.

The Movement's Social Base

The independence movement cuts across class and generational lines, but the middle classes and young people dominate it. The high bourgeoisie has opposed the independence process from the beginning and consistently attempted from behind the scenes to derail it. The traditional working class – historically, immigrants who came to Catalonia from southern Spain in the sixties – has been less involved.

We can explain the traditional working class's absence by two different but related phenomena: the lack of this class's identification with the Catalan national question, and the decomposition of the labor movement. Workers in Catalonia remain divided on independence, and a significant part of them do not view an independent state as a future horizon.

A paradox of the independence movement is that the dominant political force since it began has been the Catalan nationalist right, *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* (CDC), historically the party that represents big capital despite the latter's opposition to independence, although it has by no means completely controlled the movement. The CDC came to power in 1980 under the leadership of Jordi Pujol, initiating a long phase of conservative nationalist hegemony and closing the previous period when Catalanism was mainly dominated by its progressive currents.

In the sixties and seventies, the struggles for Catalan national demands and labor rights worked

together, as they were fighting a common enemy, Franco's dictatorship. Indeed, the workers' movement – in particular its main illegal organization, the communist Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSUC) – based its strategy on this conjunction, fighting to unite the Catalan working class around a national identity and successfully convincing Spanish-origin workers to embrace national demands.

During the post-Franco transition, Pujol brought together the middle classes, combining a moderately nationalist and democratic project with his faultless anti-Franco credentials. As a result, he could present himself as the guarantor of quiet political change, overcoming the Left and winning a political hegemony that would last for more than two decades. His pragmatic relationship to the Spanish government, quest to increase Catalan influence in Spanish politics, and cultural nationalism united his middle-class social base. In the nineties and the first decade of the new millennium, this gradualism hardened as the CDC sought to enhance Catalan self-government in hopes of improving the nation's position within the global economy. When the independence movement broke out, President Artur Mas (Pujol's successor) had no choice but to lead it.

Since then, the financial and business powers have largely distanced politically from CDC, which nevertheless continues to represent their class interests. In the five years they have been in government, the right-wing nationalists have experienced a serious decline in favor of the pro-independence center left around *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (ERC). This forced them to relaunch CDC as a new party in 2016 under the name of *Partit Democràtic Europeu Català* (PDECAT).

From Referendum to Disconnection and Back

Since the beginning, the independence movement has fought for a referendum, but the Spanish government has systematically denied this request. Indeed, the central government rejects the legitimacy of

the debate altogether.

This reflects the nature of the centralized Spanish state and the political regime that emerged from the 1978 constitution. The national question – and, within it, the Catalan question – became one of the transition's hottest issues, especially for the dictatorship's inheritors and the army, who oversaw the creation of the new constitution.

In this period, the Catalanist parties' demanded the restoration of an autonomous government within the framework of Spain's democratic transformation. While the new constitution introduced the ambiguous term "nationalities" to describe the particular characteristics of Catalonia, Basque Country, Galicia, and Andalucía, it did not recognize the multinational nature of the state or its constituent nations' right to self-determination. Indeed, article two established the "indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation, the common and indivisible homeland of all Spaniards."

In practice, this meant considerable political and administrative decentralization constrained by a strict legal framework, which the constitutional court has increasingly interpreted in a restrictive manner. In 2012, the Catalan government announced that it would hold an independence referendum and on December 2013 its date was set for November 9, 2014. When the Spanish constitutional court banned the vote, the Catalan government rebranded the plebiscite as a semi-official popular consultation, legally defined as a "participatory process." This strategy avoided both surrender to and direct confrontation with the central state. The Spanish government couldn't prevent a massive democratic event in favor of independence, but the independence movement couldn't promote the vote as a binding act.

The 2014 referendum had an ambiguous result. First, its hybrid nature made it an important event without binding political consequences. The vote showed that the independence movement had gained hegemony but still lacked an overwhelming electoral majority. Independence won handily (1,861,753

out of a total 2,305,290 votes), but this victory looks less impressive when we consider that almost three times that many people – 6.2 million – had the right to vote (the Catalan electorate comprises 5.2 million but for this occasion people over the age of 16 and 900,000 foreign residents were allowed to vote). November 9 allowed Catalonia to have a referendum without doing so – and not to do it while still claiming it had. Thus, though it represented an unquestionable political and social success, it became a serious strategic error because it pushed the independence movement to follow a flawed road map.

Following the vote, the pro-independence forces decided to convert the 2015 regional elections into a plebiscite on independence. Then, after the new government formed, they initiated an eighteen-month disconnection process that would make Catalonia independent from the Spanish state. This plan had an insurmountable internal contradiction: the same movement that did not dare disobey the legal ban on the 2014 referendum was now trying to accomplish something that required greater mobilization and demanded a direct confrontation with the state from which it had just backed down.

Finally, after an unproductive two-year detour, the government and the independence movement returned to the starting point: the need for a referendum on independence as a catalyzing moment of a democratic confrontation – that is, October 1's moment of truth.

The Catalan Left

[Catalunya en Comú](#), the Catalan party led by Barcelona's Mayor Ada Colau, has maintained its distance from the October 1 vote, though it does call on the centralized state to accept to hold a legal referendum. Colau's party has unequivocally denounced state repression but remains stuck in a passive position.

The party decided to participate in the October 1 event but considers it more of a mobilization than a referendum. Consequently, [Catalunya en Comú](#)

calls for a new referendum with binding effects, agreed upon by both the Spanish and Catalan governments.

This position has serious problems: first, we should blame the lack of guarantees – not to mention the legal and procedural uncertainties – on the Spanish government's repressive efforts, which have forced the Catalan government to act unconventionally.

Second, [Catalunya en Comú](#) seems to disconnect the results of the vote from the political conditions that will exist the next day: planning a binding referendum will only become possible if the Spanish government loses or pays a high political price. Finally, though the party decided to participate, it did not openly call for mass participation nor encourage people to vote, thereby maintaining its low profile. Podem, the Catalan branch of [Podemos](#) – which is not part of [Catalunya en Comú](#), although some kind of electoral agreement between both will probably be made – was created during the national party's expansion following the 2014 European elections, but its founders failed to consider how the party could insert itself in Catalonia, especially with regard to the independence process and the national question.

The central party's Spanish leadership worked since the party's inception to consolidate a Spanish national project, which clashes with the political situation in Catalonia and the Catalan national question, weakening the party's potential there. In a way, what propelled [Podemos](#) to the center of the political map throughout Spain pushed it partially to the margins in Catalonia.

However, Podem has finally agreed to defend participation in the October 1 referendum, a commitment that goes far beyond what Pablo Iglesias would have desired. In fact, [Podemos's](#) leader is closer to [Catalunya en Comú](#) than to his own party branch in Catalonia. Podem does not consider the October 1 referendum binding and takes an anti-independence position, but it has decisively sided with those trying to hold the referendum against the Spanish government's will.

Meanwhile, an anti-capitalist wing has

formed within the independence movement, centered on the [Candidatures d'Unitat Popular \(CUP\)](#).

Radical independentism grew among young people and the non-parliamentary left during the eighties before consolidating in the nineties. It played an important role in social activism, but remained politically marginal until the 2000s, when radical left pro-independence candidates began to win seats on local councils. The CUP entered the Catalan parliament for first time in 2012 with 3.4 percent of the vote and three MPs. Three years later, their share rose to 8.2 percent and 10 seats.

Over the past five years, CUP has combined its commitment to the independence process with an anti-capitalist program. However, it has largely operated from within the independence movement's framework, failing to connect its anti-capitalist position with a strategic claim that would have let it reach with new social layers and help redefine some of the mainstream movement's goals. In this period CUP made two important and interrelated mistakes.

First, it did not try to build an alliance with the left-wing groups – like Podem and [Catalunya en Comú](#) – that reject independence but support the right to self-determination. Doing so would have redrawn the map of the Catalan left. Second, it endorsed both the semi-official and non-binding November 9 vote and the subsequent decision to turn the 2015 elections into a plebiscite and initiate a subsequent independence process.

CUP navigated its internal difficulties – the product of its mistaken political line – as best it could, but it did so with a genuine display of rank-and-file democracy that contrasts sharply with [Podemos's authoritarian plebiscites](#). And in 2016, it played a decisive and positive role in redirecting the movement toward a new referendum.

Unity Not Bifurcation

The debate over independence has handicapped the Catalan left, and, for this reason, a deep schism has developed within it. Surprisingly,

almost no one tried to formulate a strategic agreement between these two sides, independence supporters and those in favor of the right to self-determination. Such an alliance could have agreed to the foundation of a Catalan Republic and a constituent process without necessarily agreeing on the new state's final destination (independence or a type of federal alliance with the rest of the Spanish State).

Meanwhile, the independence movement has largely failed to join forces with the offshoots of the 15M movement. The fact that neither Catalunya en Com   nor CUP have thought seriously about this issue amounts to shooting themselves in the foot, and the shortcomings produced by this bifurcation threaten to harden into permanent incapacities. As a result, the radical left in Catalonia is divided, giving more power to the center-left ERC and to the Catalan right wing.

This mistake repeats across the entirety of Spain as well. The Spanish left has never successfully understood the Catalan national question nor has it articulated the movement strategically within its own project to transform Spain. This failure has been obvious at several critical moments in Spanish history, including the establishment of the Spanish Second Republic on April 14, 1931.

The Catalan question was one of this process's main controversies, and the procedure to approve the Catalan Statute of Autonomy â   which the Spanish Parliament voted to approve on September 9, 1932 â   was turbulent. The Second Republic's constitution, which called for an "integral Republic" that remained "compatible with the autonomy of Villages and Regions," clashed with Catalan demands.

As Joaquim Maurin, the main theorist of the heterodox Worker's Party of Marxist Unification (POUM), wrote "the Republic was not federal but integral, a euphemism of unitary." He meant that the new state not only failed to satisfy the Catalanist demands, but it also weakened its own capacity to break with the old monarchic centralist state that could

have been smashed if the Republic had been federal.

The issue of Catalan self-governance arose again in the post-Franco transition. Then, the left-wing parties, including the PSOE, formally defended the right to self-determination. But this was merely rhetorical, and the Left, including the Communist Party of Spain (PCE), accepted a constitution that flatly denied it. Since then, the PCE and the electoral coalition it launched in 1986, Izquierda Unida (IU), have defended the right to self-determination abstractly, as a mechanism to convert Spain into a federal state. They do not seem to recognize that the right to self-determination implies the right to separation. In their 2015 platforms, both IU and Podemos called for a binding independence referendum in Catalonia as part of their struggle to consolidate a new left-wing political majority across Spain. However, they have been [reluctant](#) to endorse the Catalan government's attempts to hold a unilateral referendum until a pro-referendum political majority exists in the Spanish parliament.

IU is not in favor of the October 1 referendum, and Podemos holds the same position as its allies in Catalunya en Com  : it supports the vote but doesn't recognize it as a real referendum. However, the fight between the Catalan government and the Spanish state â   not to mention the escalating repression â   have forced both IU and Podemos to denounce the government's authoritarian behavior. The Spanish left should consider how the advance of the Catalan independence movement affects Spanish political life and society. Does it weaken the political regime born in 1978? Or does it help reinforce the Right's reactionary values and hegemony outside Catalonia?

We cannot definitively answer this crucial question, but we can say that the Left must fight for the first scenario, which means rejecting the Spanish nationalist project and its reactionary rhetoric. The more left-wing forces give in to this line of argument and the more they tiptoe around the thorny issues, the more they allow the PP and its minions to

use Catalan independence as a scapegoat for its own failing legitimacy.

Spanish (and Catalan) Federalist left currents and the independence movements in Catalonia, Basque Country, and Galicia must articulate a joint strategy that resists the 1978 regime and the economic powers-that-be. This requires a complex center-periphery dialectic that neither views matters from the Spanish political arena nor locks itself into a perspective of fighting only from by the periphery. This crucial strategic issue unfortunately does not appear to interest either Podemos (outside of its Anticapitalistas left-wing current) and IU, or the CUP and mainstream independent movement.

The Coming Challenge

It is impossible to remain neutral in the clash between the Spanish state and the Catalan government. On the one hand, the reactionary and antidemocratic central government denies the right to self-determination and the basic democratic claim to hold a referendum. On the other, a democratic demand is expressing a long-sustained discomfort regarding the structure of the Spanish state. The government's repressive attempts to paralyze the referendum are unprecedented in their magnitude and political significance. On September 6, the constitutional court outlawed the Referendum Act and initiated a battle between Spanish and Catalan rule of law â   a situation we could define as one of dual institutional legitimacy.

After the decision, all activities related to the referendum became illegal. The civil guard searched several printers for campaign material and ballot papers and raided media headquarters.

The Spanish general attorney served a subpoena to the 712 Catalan mayors â   out of 947 â   who had officially expressed their willingness to organize the vote. On September 20, the Spanish police raided the Catalan government's headquarters and arrested fourteen people (who were provisionally released after appearing before the judge few days later). The central government also blocked the

Catalan government's bank accounts. And, finally, on September 23 the Spanish government announced it was taking the control of the Catalan police.

Outside Catalonia, actions in support the referendum have faced repression. For example, [a judge prohibited](#) a gathering that was supposed to take place in a building owned by the Madrid City Council. (The rally was finally held successfully in a private theater.)

October 1 is no longer just about the Catalan people voicing their opinions. It will set the stage for a wider democratic battle over the future of

the institutional framework created in 1978, which could strengthen or weaken depending on who wins this battle. The Spanish left must show solidarity with the Catalan people and their right to hold the referendum, but the Catalan left has a specific and complex challenge. First, it must fight to overcome state repression and hold the referendum as planned. Second, it must mobilize the highest possible turnout.

The bulk of the opposition does not recognize the referendum's legitimacy and is calling for a boycott. Podem is the main exception: its general secretary defends the vote but is campaigning against independence. Catalunya en Comú's leaders have

declared that they will vote but have yet to reveal how. However, to defend a "yes" vote is the best strategic choice, even for those who want a voluntary federal coexistence between the Catalan and Spanish peoples. Those in favor of this federal horizon should acknowledge that it can only be built on the basis of Catalan sovereignty. The outcome is far from guaranteed, but this strategic "yes" could deal a major blow to the 1978 regime and unleash Catalonia's democratic potential to create a better political and social framework. That is precisely the strategic challenge for the future.

[Jacobin](#)

Quebec independence a key to building the left in Canada

1 October 2017, by **Richard Fidler**

It was chaired and introduced by Andrea Levy, a Montréal-based editor of Canadian Dimension, and included André Frappier, a former president of the Montréal postal workers and now a leader of Québec solidaire; Kevin Skerrett, a leading activist in Solidarity Ottawa; Corvin Russell, a Toronto solidarity activist and recently co-author with Andrea Levy of an excellent paper, "[Mapping the Canadian Left: Sovereignty and Solidarity in the 21st Century](#)," [43] and myself. I am a member of both Solidarity Ottawa and Québec solidaire.

The conference program introduced the topic as follows: "The Canadian State is a common obstacle faced by progressive forces in Québec and Canada that makes the creation of alliances as much a necessity as a virtue. However, both in Québec and Canada, the left is mired in narrow ideological perspectives and lacking real involvement in day-to-day struggles. The growing resistance of Indigenous peoples is a game changer

for both sides as it calls into question the very foundations of the Canadian State. This session proposes to look at how we might build toward a new convergence of forces. - How can the Canadian left support the struggle for national and social emancipation in Québec? - What are the weak points in the Canadian State and among the elites seeking to maintain power. What sorts of struggles can we engage in jointly? - How can progressive organizations in Canada and Québec develop a common strategy of international solidarity with Indigenous peoples in Canada? - What means can we use to fulfill these aims?"

Levy and Frappier spoke in French, the rest of us in English, with simultaneous interpretation. The panelists' contributions were followed by some stimulating exchanges with members of the audience. Unfortunately, the session was not recorded.

The following is a slightly expanded

and edited version of my presentation. Readers will note that, contrary to some assertions in the above note by the conference organizers, I make some important distinctions between the lefts in the two nations. - Richard Fidler

The program introduction speaks of "convergence" as the goal. And it speaks of an impasse between the lefts in Quebec and Canada, implying a *divergence*. So I'll begin by exploring this. In what follows I will focus on what can be termed the *political* left, seeking political solutions to the problems addressed more generally by the various social movements. And I will treat the NDP as a part of the broad "left" in English Canada, for reasons I explain later.

Generally speaking, the *socialist* project is to "change the world by taking power" — that is, building powerful anticapitalist social forces and parties capable of winning control

of the state and using government to help build a new anticapitalist popular sovereignty based on decentralized grass-roots participatory democracy.

However, how we think of “taking power” differs between the lefts in Quebec and the Rest of Canada (ROC). In Quebec, socialists have historically oriented to breaking from Canada and creating a sovereign state. In the rest of Canada the left seeks power in Ottawa, hoping at best to use the central government to reform, not dismantle, the central state. To understand this difference, which is crucial, we need to understand how the existing state is viewed in Quebec.

Both lefts can agree that the Canadian state is historically based on the theft and occupation of indigenous lands and the genocide of their peoples; the British Conquest of the French settlers, the defeat of the latter’s Rebellion, and their subsequent marginalization outside of Quebec. The state that resulted, the bulwark of the class rule of the Canadian capitalists, including their Québécois counterparts, is thoroughly integrated within global imperialism.

This central state has exclusive jurisdiction over finance, banking, regulation of trade and commerce, issuance of currency, foreign affairs, the military, criminal law, the appointment of judges of the superior courts, etc. The provinces are generally limited to powers of a “merely local or private nature.” And Ottawa holds residual power over all matters not specifically allocated by the Constitution to the provinces, including Quebec.

The possession by the surviving indigenous peoples and by the Québécois of the territories in which they predominate, that they partially control and that continue to be the mainstay of their languages and cultures, their respective nationhood, is the basis of their respective quests for political sovereignty.

The Canadian state structures and constitution fail to recognize this plurinational composition of Canada, still less the democratic right of First Nations and Québécois to self-determination. The *Constitution Act*,

1982 leaves it to the federal courts to define and interpret the “existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples,” while the amending formula (art. 38) effectively rules out the secession of Quebec from Canada in the absence of overwhelming or even unanimous acceptance by federal and provincial lawmakers in the ROC.

Defending their lands and resources against incursions by capital, the indigenous peoples challenge the federal regime. However, it is the Québécois, above all, who pose a threat to the territorial integrity of the Canadian state *per se*. The forces mobilized for sovereignty are especially powerful when they are exerted by a nation with Quebec’s demographic weight and its geographical location in Canada’s heartland. [44]

Quebec’s subordination to the central state structures underpins its oppression — it lacks the powers needed to fully defend its existence as a nation, let alone implement a progressive social agenda. That is why rising social struggles (as in the 2012 Maple Spring upsurge), to the extent that they advance an emancipatory politics, point to the need for national independence. Québécois resistance to their oppression is the major fault line within Canada as a social formation and it is a key source of political and social instability.

The ROC left historically has struggled with Quebec’s national consciousness. For this left, it complicates, even blocks the fight for governmental power in Canada. For example the NDP, with a long record of opposition to Quebec nationalism, has most recently tipped its hat to Quebec self-determination in its Sherbrooke Declaration. But even this document aims, as it says, to attract Quebec support for the NDP’s own project of reforming the central state and giving it further powers. (More on this later.)

Apart from some very small political currents that claim adherence to the Marxist legacy, the Anglo-Canadian left for the most part seems baffled by Quebec’s national question. Some may formally claim to respect Quebec’s democratic right to national self-

determination, but in practice they are inclined at most to accept or support minor constitutional reforms devised to win Quebec’s acceptance of the Constitution, as we saw in the case of ROC left support to the unsuccessful Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords — the latter rejected by a majority of Québécois in a referendum. The ROC left’s unresponsiveness to Quebec’s national demands deepens its rupture with Quebec progressive opinion.

I think the Canadian left should stop seeing Quebec as a problem or simply hoping to neutralize the effect of sovereigntist sentiment by formally supporting Quebec’s right to self-determination. Instead, it should adopt a pro-active approach, viewing the Quebec independence movement as a strategic ally, an opportunity to break this current impasse on the left and, by recognizing Quebec secession as a potential key to dismantling the oppressive Canadian state structures, to open the way toward rethinking “power” as a reconceptualization of state and government in terms of establishing popular sovereignty.

Shifts in leadership of national struggle

There are important changes taking place within the Quebec national struggle. An historical overview indicates the shifts in class relations it is producing.

Following the defeat of the Rebellion of 1837-38 and [the British grant of home rule](#) to its four British North American colonies in 1867, thereby cementing Francophone minority status within the new state, the Québécois — led by traditional conservative and clerical élites — fought with uneven success for almost a century in defense of their language and schools and against the denial of their rights in the new provinces created with the expansion westward of the Canadian state.

However, in the 1960s, as a result of Quebec’s industrialization and proletarianization by Canadian and

foreign capital, a more assertive strategy emerged. The Quiet Revolution, led by Francophone professionals within the traditional capitalist parties and later the Parti Québécois (PQ) but with great popular support, modernized and secularized the Quebec state, and it became the vehicle for expanded education facilities and social programs.

Initially, the federal state attempted to accommodate the rising nationalist upsurge, for example through creating the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism or by allowing Quebec to use the massive revenues accumulated by the universal pension plan (the QPP) to help create a new Francophone bourgeoisie, later known as "Quebec Inc." But as Quebec sought expanded powers through constitutional change, the federalist response became more hostile, culminating in Trudeau Sr.'s 1982 "patriation" of the Constitution with its amending formula and Charter of Rights that imposed limits on Quebec's *Charter of Language Rights* and its right of self-determination — later extended through Supreme Court rulings and the *Clarity Act*.

However, federal resistance, while having a chilling effect on the national movement, has not persuaded the Québécois to embrace the federal regime. On the contrary, it has tended over time to deepen Quebec's alienation from the Canadian state while exposing the PQ's incapacity to lead the struggle for independence.

While seeking an expanded role for itself within the Canadian and global capitalist economy, the Quebec bourgeoisie has never favoured independence. And the Parti québécois, which has hegemonized the pro-sovereignty movement until recently, has always hinged its project — the creation of a state that advances the interests of a Francophone bourgeoisie while retaining popular support through occasional social reforms, workers' rights and defense of the French language — on maintaining an "association" with the Canadian state through such means as a common currency and even a central bank. The PQ has never been prepared to counter the federalist offensive; it was

tamed by the repression in the October 1970 crisis, Ottawa's signal that it was prepared to use armed force to resist moves toward secession.

In this sense, we can speak of the PQ as a "bourgeois" party, a party upholding capitalist rule in all its forms. And since 1980, when its first referendum on sovereignty was defeated, the PQ has proved to be another party of neoliberal austerity, now relying increasingly on an appeal to reactionary "identitarian" nationalism that scapegoats ethnic minorities. This is the main cause of declining popular support for the pro-sovereignty movement in recent years.

But the Quebec national struggle intersects with the class struggle, giving both a distinctive dynamic and progressive content, and thereby furthering the challenge to the Canadian capitalist state.

There is now a recomposition taking place within the national movement with the emergence of Québec solidaire as a progressive (and implicitly anticapitalist) alternative leadership, winning increasing popular support through its role in championing the interests of working people and social movements. This in turn opens new opportunities for advancing the struggle through linking the independence movement with a progressive social program, and vice versa, while pointing to the need for joint action, if not convergence, with left forces in the ROC.

The progressive dynamic of the national and class struggles in Quebec, when combined, is illustrated by the program that Québec solidaire is now finalizing. It includes free lifelong education, progressive taxation, the extension of social benefits to precarious workers, expanded rights for temporary foreign workers, environmental protection and meaningful targets for greenhouse gas emissions, as well as a fundamental reorientation of international policy toward achieving global justice and disengaging from the imperialist military alliances NATO and NORAD.

QS plans to publish its program

(including the recently adopted sections on global solidarity, justice, territory and agriculture) this fall. Containing many progressive proposals, it deserves to be translated into English and promoted in the ROC.

So what about convergence?

What, then, of convergence? My English dictionary defines it as "terminating at the same point." Are the lefts in Quebec and the ROC likely to do that? And what is that *point*?

Interestingly, the English translation of this panel's topic asks "How can we *bring about* a convergence of forces on the left." But the original French text asks us only to "*think about* the convergence of the lefts." I will speak to the latter, because I do not believe a true convergence is feasible in the foreseeable future. I prefer to address the possibilities for joint action around common goals, a united front around the class issues that can unite socialists and social movement activists in both nations and in which the Quebec left, the leading edge, retains its autonomy and its clear national trajectory.

Strategically, Quebec independence will only be realizable through massive mobilization and solidarity from working people not only in Quebec but in the rest of the oppressor Canadian state.

But first, a few thoughts about the NDP, the hegemonic party in the broad left in Canada outside Quebec, and the prism through which electoral "politics" are largely viewed. It is an established party, with a long history in ROC politics, experience in provincial government, formal links to trade unions and informally with many community, provincial and "national" social movements. Although not anticapitalist, it is seen as the logical alternative to the traditional parties of Capital. Its social-liberalism is seen as a "kinder, gentler" antidote to aggressive neoliberalism.

As a reformist party, the NDP is unable to contemplate a break-up of the central state. Its politics are

entirely oriented to operating within or at best reforming that state, not destroying it. This is part of its DNA. It promotes a homogenizing politics, unable to accommodate the different dynamic of Quebec's national struggle.

The NDP voted for unilateral patriation of Canada's constitution in 1982 in the face of Quebec opposition. In the early 1970s it expelled the left-wing Waffle, which supported Quebec self-determination. [45]

Did the 2011 federal election, when the NDP managed to elect a majority of Quebec MPs, disprove this historical record? On the contrary. That result reflected a confluence of several factors, all of them conjunctural. Traditionally, the Quebec Francophone electorate votes defensively and pragmatically in federal elections, either to help elect a government with the most MPs from Quebec or to prevent parties perceived as relatively hostile to Quebec from winning government. Following the defeat of the Meech Lake Accord, however, the Bloc Québécois (BQ) provided an alternative opportunity to promote "Quebec interests" in Parliament, helping to fend off unwanted federalist incursions on Quebec jurisdiction.

But the BQ is confined to Quebec. In 2011, when it was suffering from the decline of the PQ and the Harper Tories were threatening to form a majority government, Quebec voters sought a federal option that could more effectively defend them from that danger. The NDP under Jack Layton was able to position itself as the alternative, helped by the apparent tolerance of Quebec self-determination expressed in the party's [Sherbrooke Declaration](#).

The NDP proved unable to sustain that support, especially with [Thomas Mulcair](#) as its new leader. Even before his ascendancy, the party's resistance to Quebec nationalism was revealed when it forced leading MPs like Nycole Turmel (the interim leader) and Alexandre Boulerice to [drop their QS \(and Bloc\) memberships](#). This was a bottom-line issue for the NDP. And since then the party has been unable to sink roots in Quebec. It is barely

hanging on to its reduced caucus of 16 MPs, its membership is down to fewer than 5,000 (Le Devoir, Aug. 30), and efforts to build a "provincial" Quebec NDP have gone nowhere.

So the Quebec electorate has reverted to its old pattern of voting for what it perceives to be the "lesser evil" — in 2015, the Trudeau Liberals — to the detriment of the NDP.

In Quebec the revival of a powerful movement for political independence, combined with relatively strong social movements, can be an incentive for activists to think of achieving their objectives through creation of a sovereign Quebec with a government based on social justice movements. And that in turn can awaken a positive response to Quebec national demands among progressives outside of Quebec.

But in the ROC, lacking an adequate political vehicle, social movement activists are less likely to think in terms of socialist-oriented power, the creation of a new kind of state as I have defined it, and more likely to think only of trying to convince governments to adopt progressive reforms.

That said, what can be some *common* campaigns with *shared* objectives of the broad left in both nations? I'll mention only two obvious ones — fighting capitalist austerity and fighting for climate justice, especially in opposition to the extractivist economic model — both issues offering important opportunities for forging class alliances with indigenous activists. The key role of the indigenous in leading the fight against climate change, in particular, is signalled in the *Leap Manifesto* (even though the Manifesto ignores the progressive potential of Quebec independence in posing a real governmental alternative).

Like the Québécois, indigenous militants have little reason to limit their demands to what is possible within the context of the existing state. And in Quebec, they have what can be an important ally. The Québec solidaire program acknowledges the sovereignty of "the ten Amerindian peoples and the Inuit people who also

inhabit Quebec territory." [46] And QS pledges its support to their "fundamental right" to national self-determination, however they may choose to exercise that right — whether through self-government within a sovereign Quebec or through the political independence of their own communities, which cover almost half of Quebec's present territory.

It remains to be seen what the NDP will commit to next year when it determines its position on the *Leap Manifesto*, but whatever that decision the party cannot be relied on to incorporate or implement the thinking behind the Manifesto. A key test for the federal NDP will be how it approaches the pending confrontation between the party's governments in Alberta and now British Columbia over the future of tar sands oil pipelines.

The Québec solidaire programmatic proposals, both in some particular demands and as a whole, cannot be implemented short of breaking from the federal state and establishing a fully sovereign Quebec.

By way of conclusion, I think the ROC left need not support Quebec independence in order to facilitate such alliances, but it does have to understand how the Quebec national question impacts the perspectives for joint campaigns and endeavours with Québécois social movement activists. And I would go further.

I think the Canadian left, and indeed consistent democrats, have good reason to go beyond the defense of the right of self-determination and to express solidarity with the demand of most progressives in Quebec for political independence, even if only to help provoke a public rethinking of the undemocratic nature of Canada's state structures and how they might be reconceived and reconfigured, with or without Quebec, to facilitate the pursuit of a progressive social agenda of equality and solidarity among the constituent peoples within the existing state. This, in my opinion, is a class question, not just national.

There might be some surprising responses, too. In a recent book chronicling a tour of his electoral constituency in Northern Quebec, [47]

Romeo Saganash, a Cree leader and as it happens an NDP member of the federal parliament, expresses an idea that must surely have occurred to other indigenous activists. "There has

never been a country constituted with the participation of the First Nations. The sovereignty of Quebec could be the opportunity for that!," Saganash tells the book's author, a French woman. She says he spoke seriously:

"an independent Quebec could be the framework within which the First Nations would win emancipation."

Food for thought.