

LEFT VOICE

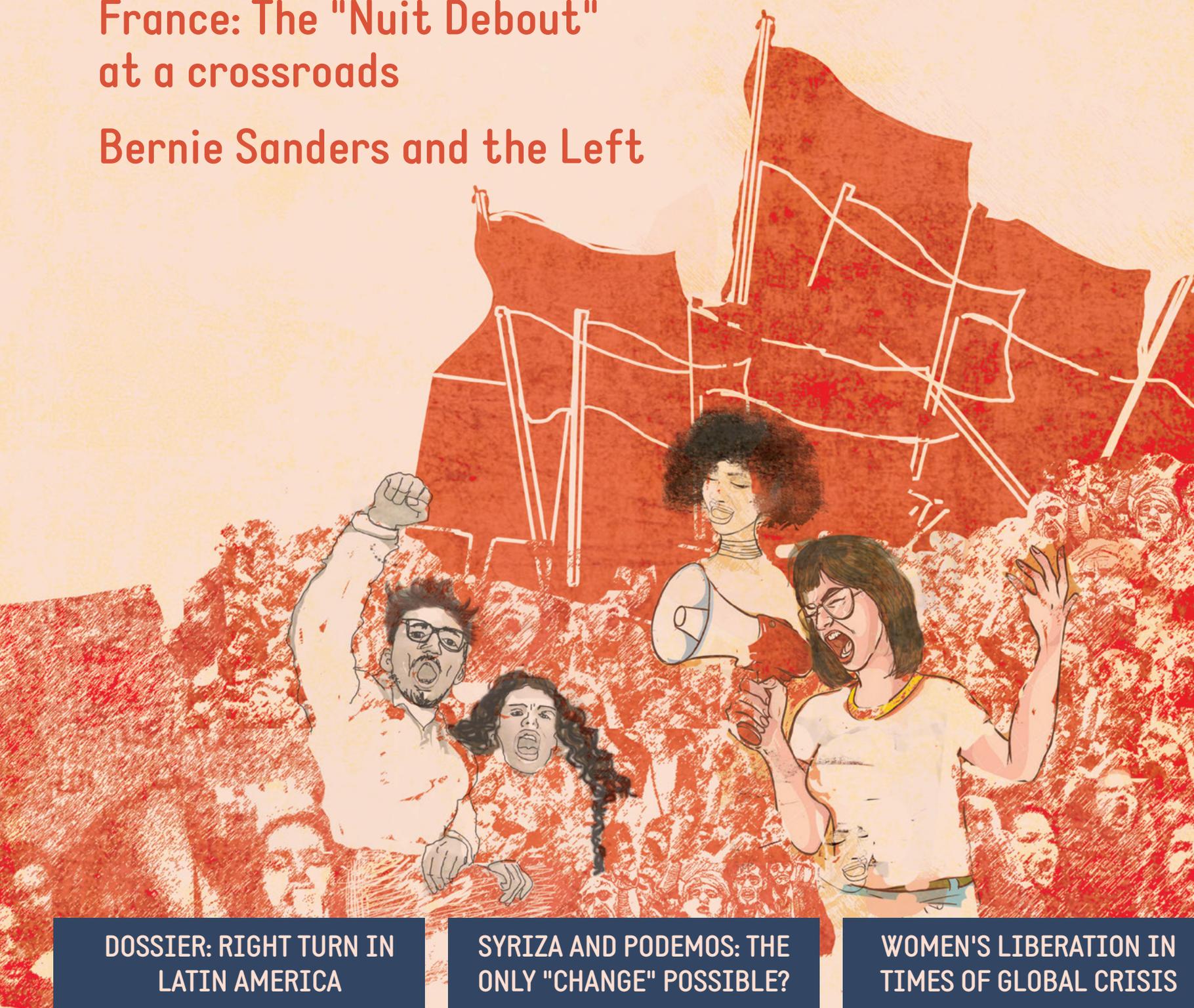
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SUMMER
2016

A NEW GENERATION RISES UP

France: The "Nuit Debout"
at a crossroads

Bernie Sanders and the Left



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LATIN AMERICA

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EDITORIAL

World capitalism is knee-deep in mud since 2008, with no prospects of exiting the swamp any time soon. Despite hefty economic stimulus and billionaire bailouts, global markets cannot escape their fragile instability. The ruling class is everywhere attempting to make us pay for their crisis, through austerity, cutbacks, layoffs, repression, deportations, and imperialist wars.

Neither neoliberal nor social democratic governments have been able to offer a way out of the crisis at hand. In both the U.S. and Europe, the establishment parties who governed for decades are being undermined by their roles in the expanding crisis, while new political phenomena on the left and right have quickly gained ground. The extreme right has made serious inroads in Austria, Germany, France, the U.S. and elsewhere by channeling class anger away from the ruling class and toward most precarious sectors of the working class—refugees and immigrants.

But despite all obstacles, a new generation is rising up and resisting their attacks. Massive mobilizations and occupations led by an increasingly radicalized youth have shaken Paris and other cities across France demanding an end to Hollande's labor reforms. In Brazil, over 100 high schools have been occupied by students who are fighting cutbacks and protesting dire conditions. In the U.S., a new generation of Black youth has taken to the streets to fight for their lives and their own vision of liberation and radical change.

Left Voice aims to amplify the struggles of these and other heroic youth and working class fighters and to tell the truth about the

capitalist system— it is rotten to the core.

In these pages, we present an account from the frontlines of the fight against labor precaritization in France and discuss the strategy needed to win. We consider the tasks of the left amidst a generalized right turn in South America and a new soft coup in Brazil. We attempt a balance sheet on the uprisings in Baltimore, a year after the killing of Freddie Gray. We look at the roots behind Bernie Sanders's meteoric rise and debate with the left organizations which today find hope in Sanders. We examine the new reformist phenomena of Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain and their prospects for achieving reform. These are just a few of the questions we take up in our first printed issue of Left Voice.

This magazine and our ongoing Left Voice website are part of the La Izquierda Diario international news network, launched first in 2014 in Argentina, and now with editions in Chile, Mexico, Spain, Germany, France, Brazil, Uruguay and Bolivia. Together, the network has over 200,000 weekly readers. Our outlets in Argentina, Brazil, and France are the most widely read left news sites in their respective countries. A project of the Trotskyist Fraction - Fourth International, we are supported by revolutionary socialists in 13 countries.

We invite you to join us in this project and we welcome discussion on the ideas presented in this magazine. Opportunities for a new anticapitalist left in the U.S. and around the world are emerging. It is our duty to seize these opportunities. History is ours.



Photo: María Paula Avila/EnfoqueRojo.

GENERAL STRIKE OR OCCUPY? A MOVEMENT AT A CROSSROADS

JUAN CHINGO & EMMANUEL BAROT
TRANSLATION: IVAN MATEWAN

On March 9, 2016 students and workers in France took to the streets to protest pro-business labor reforms proposed by Hollande's government. Since then, numerous universities and high schools have been on strike, uniting their forces in coordinated national strikes. Protests and street demonstrations in March and April brought together tens of thousands of youth across the country. On March 31, workers joined the youth in what was one of the largest demonstrations in recent years, with more than 1.2 million people in the streets. Those who refused to clear the streets afterwards have been occupying the *Place de la République* in Paris ever since and became known as *Nuit Debout* (Night, Standing Up). Hundreds, even thousands of people can be seen at the square daily, debating politics and the movement's way forward.

This day of massive strike action did not, however, mark a clear turning point in the



Illustration: Dienteleche.

growing movement. Throughout April, the movement has been stuck in strategic limbo. School vacation have emptied the country's high schools and universities. No major sector of the working class has yet entered the struggle yet. Nevertheless, at the time of writing, a national day of interprofessional (multi-industry) strike action is planned for April 28, which will define the next stage of the mobilization.

Two distinct yet inseparable questions have become important in the past few weeks. The

first is directly related to the need for youth and working-class movements to strengthen their self-organization to overcome the obstacles to a general strike. The second is whether or not the imagination and practices associated with the occupation of public squares as they currently exist in France will encourage this strike dynamic. If the goal of a victorious May '68 – and not of a poly-classist 1789 – has significance today, it can be found in the need to “block everything,” i.e., to paralyze production in both the private and public

sectors. If the occupation of public squares develops in this sense, the government will be rapidly confronted with its downfall.

Class Struggle in 20th Century France

Whether in 1848, 1871, 1936, or 1968, France has been the country in which, as Marx was fond of saying, class struggle gets to the bottom of things. France has a long history of mass movements capable of putting the capitalist system in jeopardy. However this history is peppered with the same system's counterrevolutionary abilities, especially when the proper tools, perspectives and confidence are lacking to turn mass revolt into revolution. Today we can draw important lessons from the experiences of 1936 and 1968 in France.

The year 1936 is associated with not only the major protests that took place and the spread of factory occupations throughout the country, but also the victorious electoral front – the Popular Front – led by the socialist Leon Blum. It is also associated with the historic social rights won by the signing of the Matignon Agreements. The real “popular front,” however, was the one that materialized in the streets and the factories. The confusion between these “two popular fronts,” as Daniel Guerin wrote in 1963 in *Popular Front in France – A Lost Revolution*, has been intentionally maintained by those who do not want the betrayal of the workers' movement by the electoral front to be known.

In *Whither France?*, Trotsky analyzed the events of 1936 according to the general schema of 1917. In this schema, he noted two qualitatively, yet indissociable *stages*: (1) *contagious spontaneous revolt*, illustrated in this case by the general strike of May-June 1936; and (2) the *passage from revolt to a revolutionary confrontation for the seizure of political and economic power*. What happened exactly? The revolutionary potential that expressed itself through action committees was completely subdued by trade union leadership and the Socialist and Communist parties. The Matignon Agreements were signed in exchange for the evacuation of occupied factories – in other words, in exchange for the end of the struggle against private property and the power of the bourgeoisie.

There are at least two major differences between the 1930s and the 1960s: (1) the profound economic crisis and the catastrophic development of fascism in the 1930s versus the full-employment of a “glorious” capitalism in the 1960s; and (2) the student struggle, which played a key role in the events of

May 1968.

After May 13, 1968 and the largest general strike ever known in Western European history put the working class back in the spotlight, the past reared its ugly head. Like the Matignon Agreements, the Grenelle Agreements signed by trade-union bureaucrats demonstrated once again the extent to which counterrevolutionary political and union leadership can undermine a revolutionary dynamic.

If Working-Class Rebellion and Student Radicalism Join Forces...

May 1968 in France inaugurated a decade-long period of upsurge in class struggle. This period was characterized by numerous strikes, factory occupations and workers taking bosses hostage, in what would later become known as “boss-nappings.” There was growing working-class rebellion which made the self-organization of factories and workplaces the reference point for political action.

With growing unemployment in the 1970s, followed by economic stagnation and the beginning of neoliberalism in the 1980s, the bourgeoisie put an end to this insubordination. Ideologically they waged a war against the philosophy of May 1968 and its “unobtainable revolution.” These ideas quickly became hegemonic and its main political representation was the conservative revolution within the French Socialist Party that began in 1981. This became the origin of social-liberal neo-conservatism, represented by the reactionary policies of current President François Hollande and Prime Minister Manuel Valls.

Ingredients and Contrasts of Spontaneous Revolt

Since 1968, the spectre of spontaneous and contagious revolt has periodically returned to haunt the ruling class. What makes them particularly fearful is the possibility of a convergence between the rebellious youth and the working class around an anti-capitalist platform. The calls in the general assemblies for a “general strike until there is the complete withdrawal of the labor reforms” offer the possibility that this threat will materialize. In France, an explosive combination of three important elements could very well be near.

The first element is the radicalization of the youth – high school and university students who have taken to the streets against the brutal and arbitrary repression that has become the norm. The second is the aspiration for a more just society by major segments of

François Hollande's former electorate. They believe that the existing order of things can be improved, but not through the state of emergency, pro-business labor reforms, truncheons or tear gas. Many teachers, middle managers, and middle-class professionals belong to this category and find themselves without political representation.

The third element is the generation of rebellious workers formed in the struggles of the first decade of the 21st Century. This tradition was revived recently by workers of Air France and Goodyear. Alongside them are the unemployed and ultra-precarious workers who refuse to yield to the demands of capital or their own trade unions.

There is also a fourth potentially explosive element: the youth of the *banlieues*. They struggle daily against the neo-colonial racism that is so inherent to the French Republic plays a key role. They know more than any other segment of the population in France the reality of social misery, unemployment and oppression.

An orientation and a program of action capable of unifying these four sectors would be a terrifying prospect for the ruling class.

Stop the Bosses from Winning

The first limit of the current movement is its self-organization, which is in an embryonic state. There is a need for proper structures through which anger, rebellion, the youth and workers can join together; structures through which these forces can propose a radically different orientation to that of the national inter-union. The slow pace at which these are developing is explained not only by the 2010 defeat, but also by the fact that the so-called “protest” unions (CGT, Solidaires) are currently leading the struggle.

The only tool that the working class can deploy independently is a *strike*, a tool that can attack the foundations of capitalist and state power. Such a strike should not only aim for street demonstrations or blocking production, but must also allow workers to organize themselves in order to challenge the power of their bosses in the workplace. It must be accompanied by calls for factory occupations and the democratic seizure of production by the workers themselves. This same dynamic can develop in the high schools and universities. The key is for the youth and workers to coordinate their struggles, supporting and mutually strengthening their movements.

For decades now, bosses and bourgeois governments have accepted small losses in order to win in the long term. Their social partners

– the unions and reformist organizations – continue to play the game of “social dialogue” and “negotiations.” The struggle for workers’ self-organization is the struggle to prevent the bosses from turning their apparent losses into a win; we must prevent the trade union bureaucracies from masking major defeats with tiny victories.

Night, Standing Up: Occupations and General Strike

Another limit could rapidly emerge from the Occupy-style *Nuit Debout* (“Night, Standing Up”) movement in Paris – a movement that has been replicated across France. The National Student Strike Coordinating Committee has called for student strikers to join this movement. More and more local trade unions are also including it in their plans of action. Will *Nuit Debout* be the locus for the current protest movement? Will it finally break the routine of traditional organizational divisions? Can it be the base for a general strike and encourage confrontation with the current government?

The worst-case scenario is if occupations become a substitute for a general strike. Nothing points to such substitutionism so far. Nonetheless, the problem would remain the same: blocking production is the strategic foundation of any potentially victorious confrontation with the bourgeoisie. In May 2011, similar questions emerged with the 15M *indignados* movement in Spain, raising the spectre of a Spanish 1968, but also demanding a better understanding of this type of mass movement.

In 2011, between the Arab Spring, the Spanish and Greek movements and Occupy Wall Street, the occupation of public squares was a socio-political phenomenon that swept aside the accumulated defeats of the labor and social movements. In a similar sense, *Nuit Debout* is the current incarnation of a growing political process that tends towards the reappropriation of both space and time, ordinarily controlled by the institutional powers. It is especially progressive in the face of the French state’s militarization of public space. The movement also expresses tremendous aspirations to change society, reinvent and rebuild a collective existence. It rejects the division and isolation created by capitalism.

However, these movements that are focused on spaces ultimately fail to shake the foundations of capitalist power and political institutions.

Should we occupy spaces? Of course, but workers must be given a central role and we

must fight against the dilution of class into the nebulous category of “citizens.” Through centering workers, the occupation of space can be closely linked to the *General Strike*. A “let’s block everything” spirit would be highly progressive in this situation. However, it must also go beyond this. The General Confederation of Labor (CGT) claims that it fights “against capital.” However, this has not prevented it from adopting reformist strategies and undermining the most combative sectors of the labor movement. Therefore, we must also fight against the “citizen”-based bureaucracy which would attempt to contain the movement within a reformist framework.

Yes, We Have Demands, But Not Only Demands

What is one of the main lessons we can take from May 1968 and 2010? The need to build structures of self-organization from which alternative political leadership can resist bureaucratic attempts to limit the movement. What lessons can we take from the capitulations of Syriza and Podemos? That we cannot let a new reformist political party claim leadership of the movement in France today.

Frédéric Lordon, who is set to play the role that Pierre Bourdieu played in 1995, has proposed a strategic hypothesis that demands our attention. He is an emerging important figure of the mobilizations, and, like the current movement as whole, is at a crossroads. Lordon has supported the mobilization of both the youth and workers. Through his participation in *Nuit Debout*, he has shown how these two processes are perfectly compatible and carry together an explosive conjuncture between the workers, the youth and the activists at *Nuit Debout*.

When Lordon says, “We have no demands” in this movement and instead, “We only have affirmations,” he is emphasizing the need to reject negotiations as well as the existing order. However beyond affirming a “sense of possibilities,” not all strategic options are equal. A collective text that he co-authored and released on March 21, “Writers and intellectuals support the street actions against labor reforms. Why we support the youth,” had already formulated certain hypotheses on how the movement should structure itself. The article provides some important points for discussion and debate.

Between Political Affirmation and Political Alternative

We obviously agree with the need, as asserted in the article, to “step outside the limits

set by various bureaucracies,” and we recognize the validity of the desire to “stay in the streets and occupy places.” The signatories are also aware of this process’ limits and do not make the occupations an end in themselves: “We have learned in recent years that only occupying places is not enough to block the functioning of institutions. The risk that this contains is to simply exist and wait for their eviction or exhaustion.” We agree with this diagnosis.

However, we disagree with the alternative perspective that is proposed: “In our view, they should rather serve as bases from which to occupy the places of power where the ‘representatives of the people’ claim to govern. Town halls, various city councils, so-called regional or national assemblies, all of these must be taken over, besieged or blocked. We must aim and organize a blockade of political power.”

In what sense, and against what power exactly should these spaces serve as “bases”? Can we simply re-appropriate local organs of bourgeois democracy without confronting the social system that structures their very existence?

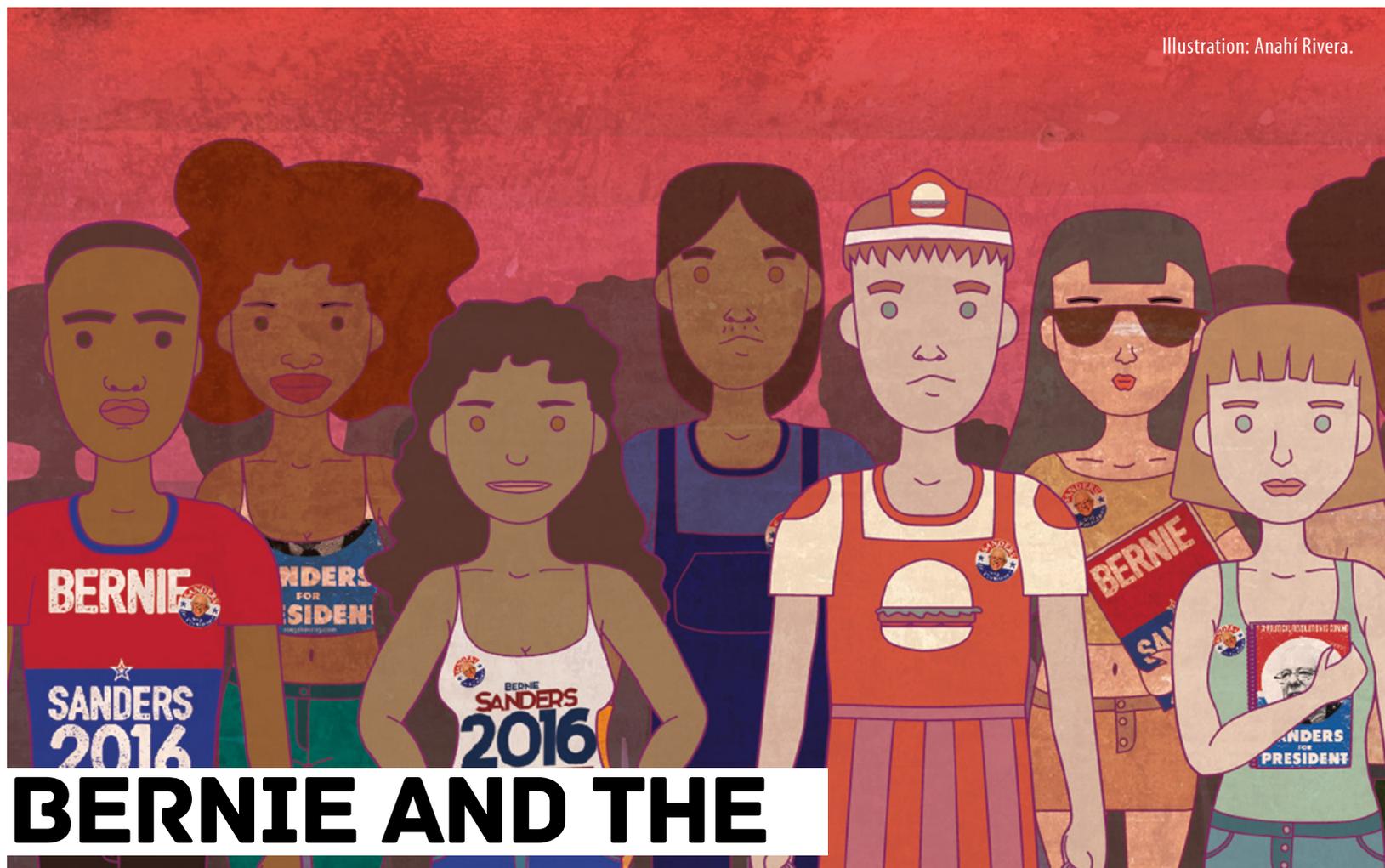
We must instead take over spaces of *material power*, for which political power is the support and the extension. Workplaces and schools are not only the places to formulate “demands” or even just to “block” capitalist production: their reappropriation is the only way to bring about an alternative political power.

It is in this sense that the construction of a general strike is much more than the generalization of a long list of “demands.” It must be based on claims that channel the anger of millions of people who are ready to enter the struggle.

The demand for “total withdrawal without negotiations” of the proposed labor reforms is a powerful rallying cry that can unite the existing struggles to defend social rights. The tactic of occupations can add to this dynamic by animating it, extending it, making it echo throughout ideological, media, and political space-time. The movement can consciously use the general strike as the strategic pivot of its own aspirations. In this way a social, economic, and political alternative to bourgeois power can be established. Without this, we will lose.

April 24, 2016.

Illustration: Anahí Rivera.



BERNIE AND THE INDIGNATION OF THE YOUTH

JUAN ANDRÉS GALLARDO
AND CELESTE MURILLO

How did a septuagenarian self-proclaimed socialist become the candidate of the youth? What will remain of the Sanders phenomenon after the primaries? What is meant by “socialism”?

The Sanders campaign has captured the attention of both the mainstream media and international left. Since Sanders began his run as a candidate in the Democratic primaries, he has drawn large crowds and organized thousands of volunteers around the country. His campaign broke the record for individual contributions—previously set by Obama in the 2008 Democratic primaries.

Although Clinton is still the front-runner and will likely get the nomination, the competition has become unexpectedly stiff, with Sanders expanding his influence and appeal among young people and steadily gaining ground among women, Blacks, and Latinos. However, after Sanders’ seven straight wins in April, Clinton once again gained the upper hand with her victory in the New York State primaries.

Meanwhile, the numbers reveal that there is little chance for Sanders to win the nomination. A completely undemocratic system has transformed Clinton’s 10-percent lead

(in delegates awarded by popular vote) to a 22-percent lead with the addition of super-delegates. This is a total scam for Democratic primary voters, which Sanders rarely points out.

Nevertheless, the enthusiasm around Sanders has turned his campaign into a true political phenomenon (see table below).

Anti-establishment sentiment across the world

Discontent with the establishment is not a phenomenon exclusive to the United States. Many analysts have compared Sanders to Jeremy Corbyn in the UK and Podemos in Spain, which arose after the indignados movement.

And this year, massive protests erupted in France against the labor law reform proposed by the Hollande government.

The common thread among them is the central role of youth. This was demonstrated by the enormous wave of young people who signed up to join the British Labor Party to vote for Corbyn; the average age of party members took a dive from 53 to 42 years old. In the case of Sanders, people 30 and below are the life-blood of the campaign – a phenomenon that no other candidate, Republican or Democrat has experienced.

The indignation of the youth and their repudiation of the establishment does not automatically translate into a progressive or

Candidate	Delegates	% delegates	Including Superdelegates	% with Superdelegates
Hillary Clinton	1.446	55%	1.948	61%
Bernie Sanders	1.200	45%	1.238	39%
		10%		22%

*This chart includes delegates up to and including the New York State primary elections on April 19, 2016.

leftist phenomenon, as is demonstrated by the growth of right-wing groups like the Ciudadanos in Spain, the UK Independence Party, the National Front in France and the Golden Dawn in Greece. We have also seen the growth of neonazi and xenophobic groups like Pegida in Germany in reaction to the refugee crisis.

In the US, the anti-establishment sentiment has most benefited the Sanders campaign, although Trump has taken advantage of some aspects of this phenomenon.

Before Sanders

Many of the youth who today support Sanders made up the social movements that have emerged and developed over the past few years. Within these movements a type of synergy exists, in which the new movements draw from the progressive aspects of the older ones and incorporate their demands. For example, while Occupy Wall Street is not an active movement today, its idea of building a resistance against the 1% is present in all US social movements today, and is even a fundamental aspect of Sanders' rhetoric.

With the exception of the anti-war movement, the lack of major defeats to the social movements has allowed for this continuity of ideas. Black Lives Matter and the movement against police brutality connected the racist murder of Black youth with economic inequality, poverty, and at times, class.

Something similar has happened in the struggle for a \$15 minimum wage, where the demand has been linked to immigrant rights and the fight against racism. Sanders has taken up some of the demands of these social movements and has even altered his political platform to incorporate them after being challenged by BLM activists in the early stages of his campaign. These movements are heterogeneous and are often propelled by small core groups. Yet the impact of their actions have generated enormous sympathy from millions of millennials.

The Youth Behind Sanders

In 2015, millennials became the largest generation in the United States, surpassing the baby boomer generation. They are generally overqualified, underemployed and face loads of debt, namely student loans. This generation has become the main protagonist in the primary elections. Their participation has wrecked havoc on the Democratic primaries

by creating an obstacle to Hillary's coronation. Thanks to the vote of 18 to 30-something year-olds, Sanders has put up a strong battle for electoral blocs that until recently overwhelmingly favored Clinton, such as women and Blacks. In January 2016, the unemployment rate was 4.9 percent according to official statistics. Yet it was up to 16 percent for 16-19 year olds and 8 percent for 20-24 year olds. Twelve percent of millennials live under the poverty line and 14.9 percent of college graduates are underemployed (EPI, The Class of 2015). A third of all millennials return to their parents' homes after graduating college due to the economic impossibility of living independently. Those who graduated in 2015 are the most indebted of all time; on average, each student owes more than \$35,000 after graduation (an increase of \$2,000 since 2014). Debt as a result of student loans (\$1.2 billion) are only surpassed by home mortgages. Forty million people have student loan debt in the US today.

Millennials know they will likely have a worse standard of living than their parents and do not have access to home ownership. If they are able to attend college, they will be in debt for most of their lives and will enter the workforce with a lower wage and more precarious work than older workers. This gloomy future for American youth has not pushed them to individualism or ideological apathy, as it did with previous generations who were marked by the fall of the Soviet Union and triumphant rhetoric of capitalism. Millennials did not live through the era of neoliberal triumph. They have only seen the misery that followed.

What is it about Bernie Sanders' message that attracts these young people? Put simply, it's because Sanders talks about what is happening in their lives: economic inequality, mountains of debt, and unemployment. He transforms their demands into campaign slogans, like free college education, pardoning portions of student loan debt, and expanding access to health care. Furthermore, his idea of a political revolution gives the youth a beacon for the fight against those responsible for inequalities and against the political and financial elite: Wall Street and Washington.

No longer a dirty word

One of the unique characteristics of Sanders is that he calls himself a socialist (even though in recent months he has been calling

himself a "democratic socialist"). What is interesting is that a large sector of young people not only accept this descriptor, but are drawn to it.

American society is highly polarized. A series of surveys say as much. Among those under 30, 43 percent have a favorable view of socialism while only 32 percent have a favorable vision of capitalism (YouGov). A conservative consulting firm found a similar phenomenon and expressed worry about the degree of "radicalism" among youth. Not only did 58 percent respond that socialism is the political system that most takes into account people's problems (9 percent said communism), but 66 percent believe corporations "represent everything that is wrong with the United States." These are not classic nationalists who admire America's greatness. In fact, 35 percent of the people between 18 and 26 years old feel more like citizens of the world than of the United States. How do we explain that?

Journalist Owen Jones put it well when he said that this generation was nearer to the fall of Lehman Brothers than the fall of the Berlin Wall. He is not the only one who thinks so. John Cassidy of *The New Yorker* wrote, "The stigmatization of left-wing politicians and left-wing ideas dates back to the Cold War, which ended twenty-five years ago." In *The Guardian*, well-known economist Thomas Piketty stated, "We are faced with the end of the politico-ideological cycle opened by the victory of Ronald Reagan at the 1980 elections."

While many millennials may only have a vague understanding of socialism, linked to a general notion of equality, what is certain is that they have been given no reason to believe in capitalism. Since 1975, almost half of the growth in per capita income in the US went to the richest 1 percent (OECD). The youth are the big losers of the recession and the economic recovery. In them, we can catch a glimpse of what a future capitalist society offers.

The rhetoric of capitalist triumph after the fall of the Soviet Union is as foreign to this generation as the ideological arguments that are remnants of the Cold War era. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the US found new enemies, forced unpopular wars, and entered into a period of economic crisis with historic depths. This eroded the celebratory rhetoric and sharpened the crisis of American hegemony. The "positive effects" are evident: a

significant portion of the population thinks socialism is a better system than capitalism, an idea that was unthinkable 25 years ago in the heart of imperialism. Yet the devastating effects of the conservative and neoliberal restoration at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century erased the idea of revolution from the horizon. This means that today, socialism is often thought of as a mix of undefined, romantic ideals, or a social-democratic welfare state.

This combination has created a generation without previous prejudices against socialism, which when coupled with the downfall of American hegemony, is fertile ground to counter the disastrous ideological consequences of neoliberalism. This has not taken and will not take a harmonious and linear path, but rather a chaotic and confusing one. It is in this framework that we can find support and hope in the “political revolution” that Sanders promises.

Life after Sanders?

With Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign, there was a perceptible shift from a previously detached and apathetic generation that placed their hopes in change that the first Black President represented. However, to them, the Obama government has been a disappointment, with his unfulfilled promises of closing down Guantanamo and bringing about immigration reform, along with bank bailouts and employing public assistance for multinational corporations. This disappointment, along with the effects of the crisis, led to greater political participation, an ideological inquisitiveness, and the rise of new social movements. This explains why the Sanders campaign has become so attractive and why his platform targets these sectors.

Yet the expectations created by his campaign have major limitations. One of the central problems is that Sanders ran as a Democrat. The Democratic and Republican party are the complementary wings of a two-party system, which has always maintained and advocated for the interests of imperialists and the American establishment. The Democratic Party in particular has a long history of co-opting and de-mobilizing political and social movements such as the anti-war movement during the Vietnam War or the Civil Rights movement. This is demonstrated by the failed candidacies of anti-war candidates in the ‘60s (Kennedy and McCarthy) and Jesse Jackson’s

run in the ‘80s. Clearly, none of these candidates ended up being the Democratic nominee. These “anti-systemic” candidates were thwarted by party mechanisms and backroom deals. This pattern is repeating itself today as the Democrats attempt to channel the discontent aimed at the political elite and the economy back into the Democratic Party. Sanders’ candidacy has played a key role toward advancing that objective.

Another problem is that there are important contradictions between Sanders and his base. In the first place, he voted – with the Democrats – in favor of the war in Afghanistan, has firmly supported the state of Israel, and is in favor of the use of drones. Through these actions, he has expressed a commitment to imperialist foreign policies. Secondly, he has committed to supporting Clinton if/when she wins the nomination in August. Lastly, he rarely questions the anti-democratic mechanisms within the Democratic Party itself, such as the superdelegates, which go against the basic principle of “one person, one vote.” The elite superdelegates (governors, party officials, and legislators) have a vote that is approximately equivalent to 10 thousand ordinary voters. They are the mechanism by which the party and their donors impose candidates.

The blatantly undemocratic nature of the superdelegates system has been obvious since the beginning of the election. In the New Hampshire primary, Sanders decisively won the popular vote, but the candidates ended up with an even number of delegates due to superdelegates who had already committed to Clinton.

In the end, Sanders will call on his passionate, young base to vote for the establishment candidate of an irreformable party. It remains to be seen what percentage of Sanders voters will support Clinton in the general elections – some surveys have shown that as many as 50 percent of Sanders’ supporters may not vote for Clinton. Even if these figures are hypothetical, they are consistent with polls showing that in the general elections, Sanders is the best competitor against any of the potential candidates including Trump, whom Sanders would defeat by 8 points, while Hillary would do so by only a 3.4 point margin.¹ In the past few weeks, Clinton has begun to raise the spectre of Trump to push the logic of the “lesser evil,” insinuating that Sanders could be the new Ralph Nader.

In response to this campaign, Sanders himself began to put conditions upon his support for the candidacy of Hillary Clinton, likely due to pressure from his base, rather than his own political convictions.

The Left’s orientation toward Sanders

A large part of the global left has placed its faith in reformist phenomena, considering these to be the most that can be hoped for today. This includes relatively uncritical support for Syriza and Podemos and for figures like Jeremy Corbyn or Bernie Sanders. In the US, this translated into a discussion around the possibility that a Sanders candidacy might lead to a political movement – and that the left could capitalize on such a movement. At least on a small scale, the US left knows how to make ties with social movements as the election of Kshama Sawant demonstrated with her support from the Fight for \$15 campaign. The ties can amplify and expand when the left does not renounce an open criticism of Sanders’ program and other contradictions of his candidacy, beginning with his decision to run within the Democratic Party. Above all, the left must maintain the center of their strategy on the construction of a working-class organization that is independent of the establishment parties. The idea of the rise of a new movement has its detractors. James Petras reduces the Sanders question to its electoral expression and says that Sanders’ electoral base “has a strategic weakness: it is in the nature of electoral movements to coalesce for elections and to dissolve after the vote, leaving only one possible scenario: massive demoralization after Sanders’ defeat in the primaries.” However, the continuation and development of social movements and their entrance in the political terrain show that the current phenomenon goes beyond the candidate. Instead, it is found in its voters, and it is very likely that this phenomenon will continue to develop after the elections.

April 28, 2016.

¹ Survey about the presidential race, “2016 Presidential Race” on www.realclearpolitics.com.

SANDERS, A THIRD PARTY, OR A WORKING CLASS PARTY?



Without a doubt, the Bernie Sanders phenomenon offers new opportunities as well as potential pitfalls for the left in the U.S. We intend to discuss the positions of various socialist left parties vis-à-vis the presidential elections and the Sanders candidacy in the coming weeks and months. In our first article in this series, we will examine the position of Socialist Alternative, which made a major statement in 2013 by winning a seat on the Seattle city council, the biggest electoral victory by any socialist group in decades.

ROBERT BELANO

In January, Socialist Alternative launched its Movement4Bernie, a full-scale campaign for Sanders, with marches, fundraisers, and local chapters. The group maintains that Sanders should run as an independent outside of the Democratic Party. Still, the group would “welcome it if Bernie Sanders were to win the Democratic nomination” and urges its members to vote for Sanders wherever state primaries allow them to do so.

Given Socialist Alternative’s success in the Seattle city council race in 2013 and 2015, opposing the Democrats each time, it is surprising that the group has now decided to back a candidate of the very party they correctly denounce as one of the two “parties of big business.” While Sanders may be outside the Democratic Party’s traditional establishment and has rejected corporate contributions, his candidacy is squarely aimed at corralling youth and workers back into a party which is fundamentally opposed to their interests. Sanders has already declared he will vote for Clinton if she wins the party’s nomination

—all but assured at this stage— and that he will call on his supporters to do the same.

An historic opportunity

Kshama Sawant's election in 2013 to the Seattle city council was one of the biggest victories for socialists in the U.S. in decades. Before Bernie Sanders was a household name, Sawant ran representing an openly socialist party against the Democrats and won nearly 80,000 votes. Her platform was based on the demand for a \$15-an-hour minimum wage, dismissed by the corporate media as a pipe dream at the time but set to become a reality in Seattle in 2017. In 2015, she defeated the Democratic Party challenger again, proving her win two years earlier was no fluke. Despite our political differences with Socialist Alternative, Sawant's election was a major victory for workers and youth and a big blow to Seattle's Democratic Party machine and its big business backers.

Why then has Socialist Alternative turned away from the strategy of building a working class party and instead thrown its support behind the Bernie Sanders candidacy in the Democratic primaries?

There is no doubt that the Sanders candidacy has captured the attention of millions of young people, despite the opposition of the entire party establishment, a lack of support from nearly all the union bureaucracies, and the undemocratic rules of the primary system. The platforms of his campaign, from a national \$15-an-hour minimum wage, to free public higher education and free universal health care, echo the demands of important social movements like the fast food workers' struggle and the Occupy movement.

It is essential for the U.S. left to begin to engage with the tens of thousands of youth and workers who today place their hopes in Bernie Sanders and to patiently explain the

need to build a working class alternative to the Democratic Party. These youth and workers, many of whom are calling themselves socialists for the first time in their lives, will play an indispensable role in the building of such a party, as will the youth who have participated in the struggles for black and immigrant liberation and the Occupy movement.

However, Sanders is no socialist. What Sanders represents is social democracy; he might seek to grant a few concessions to workers and poor people, but above all he acts as a brake on the workers' and popular movements that have erupted in recent years (Black Lives Matter, Occupy, the fast food workers' struggle). Sanders has made clear that he has no intentions to nationalize any industries or expropriate any capitalists. He plans to break up the big banks, but keep the new smaller banks in the hands of millionaires and billionaires. He has not put forward any plan to close U.S. military bases abroad. In fact, he does not even support withdrawing troops from Afghanistan or ending U.S. funding for Israel's occupation of Palestine.

Socialist Alternative concedes that "Sanders limits himself to a program of reforming capitalism along the lines of Western Europe" but does not consider that reformist perspective to be an impediment to their support.

This logic was taken to its conclusions during the most recent elections in Seattle when Socialist Alternative publicly endorsed several Democrats in city council races with the slogan "Kick Out the Conservative Majority!" The slippery slope of critical support for Sanders has led to openly backing candidates from one of the two parties of Wall Street.

The dead end of reformism

Socialist Alternative is correct to liken Sanders' program to European reformism. Where they are mistaken is in thinking that

reformism offers any alternative to workers and oppressed people over the openly neoliberal candidates. One needs only to look at the recent record of the European social democratic parties to understand the failure of the reformist strategy. This is true not only of the traditional social democratic parties which now govern in France and Italy but also the new reformist phenomena such as Syriza in Greece, which employs anti-austerity rhetoric while administering the capitalist state and carrying out further austerity.

In France, the Socialist Party government of Francois Hollande has maintained an indefinite state of emergency for over five months in which hundreds of innocent Muslims have been placed under house arrest and surveillance has been massively expanded. At the same time Hollande is now attempting to gut worker protections through "reform" of the labor code. In Italy, the social-democratic president Renzi has frozen salaries, cut pensions, and implemented new labor flexibility laws.

And in Greece, the left-reformist Syriza government, which was elected on a platform opposed to the austerity of the traditional parties, has completely capitulated to German imperialism and the international financial institutions, selling off state assets—including 14 airports—to German capital, and is forcing new structural adjustment programs down the throats of the Greek people. These are measures which could never have been achieved by the neoliberal parties.

Do these European reformist projects represent the interests of the working class or the capitalist class? We don't need to think too long about the answer.

Another way forward for the left

Only a revolutionary and independent working class party can achieve the overthrow of

capitalism. Socialist Alternative cannot, of course, play that role alone today, nor can any existing socialist group in the U.S. But if the groups of the socialist left – Socialist Alternative, the ISO, Solidarity, Socialist Action, etc. – did run a campaign based on the principle of class independence, it could be an important first step in building the party we need. That candidate would obviously have no chance at winning the elections. But such a candidate could raise demands that no other candidate, including Bernie Sanders, has raised in these elections so far: an end to all U.S. military interventions abroad, immediate citizenship rights for all immigrants, for the nationalization of the banks and foreign trade under worker and popular control, and for the police out of Black and Latino communities.

That candidate would not limit him or herself to campaign speechifying, but would actively support and take part in strikes, protests, and other workers' struggles. This is the type of candidacy that would attract the most politically advanced workers and oppressed people and lay the foundations for the construction of a revolutionary class-struggle party.

In Argentina, we have witnessed a powerful example in the Left and Workers' Front (FIT), an electoral alliance of three revolutionary working-class organizations – the Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas (PTS), the Partido Obrero (PO) and Izquierda Socialista (IS). The organizations which form the FIT have put forward a common platform based on class independence, anti-imperialism, and a rejection of all collaboration with capitalist parties. Together they have raised the demands for a minimum wage equal to the cost of living, an end to layoffs and outsourcing, for the nonpayment of the external debt, and the re-nationalization of all privatized

utilities under worker and consumer control, among other demands.

In the last elections, hundreds of workers stood as candidates for the FIT – workers who led rank-and-file battles in Argentina's most important episodes of class struggle in recent years. Above all, the FIT emphasizes the primary role of the mobilization and organization of the working class united with the oppressed as the main force behind a revolutionary movement for socialism. While still far from a mass workers party, the FIT earned between 3% and 5% nationally in recent elections, obtained over 1 million votes and won five seats in congress.

However, the FIT was not simply created to stand in elections. Since the inauguration of the right wing president Mauricio Macri, the parties that make up the FIT, and in particular the PTS, have played a leading role in workers' struggles against Macri's austerity measures, and layoffs – and have become a force within the unions in opposition to the bureaucracy.

Independent of the Democrats vs. independent of the capitalist class

We must stress that an independent working class candidacy cannot simply be independent of the Democrats – such as the Green Party, figures like Ralph Nader, or even Sanders himself (pre-2015) – but must maintain class independence. That is to say, a party with no participation from the capitalists and which clearly fights for working class objectives.

Socialist Alternative says it was a mistake for Sanders to join the Democratic Party and that he should run as an independent – a position held more or less by the ISO and Solidarity. This demand not only ignores the fact that Sanders has been a *de facto* Democrat for years – voting with Democrats in the

Senate 98% of the time and receiving tens of thousands in campaign contributions from groups like the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee – but also fails to make any class distinctions. The point is not simply that we need a party independent of the two mainstream parties, but that we need a party independent of the entire capitalist class.

While it may be true that the Green Party does not count on the massive support of individual capitalists, its program remains a bourgeois program. It seeks “sustainable capitalism,” as if such a thing were possible. The capitalist class cannot be convinced to sacrifice its profits for the sake of the environment or workers' well being. The only sustainable path – if by “sustainable” we mean the prevention of environmental ruin and an end to interminable war and widespread poverty – is socialism.

Socialists should support every progressive initiative such as the creation of a Workers' Party or Labor Party. However, the starting point must be independence from the capitalists and their parties. Were such a class conscious party to arise, the socialist left should participate in these initiatives, without sectarianism, and fight for an anti-capitalist and revolutionary program and against all forms of racism, sexism, homophobia, and xenophobia. This, as part of a revolutionary strategy, as the great Russian revolutionaries Lenin and Trotsky laid out in the fight for a true revolutionary party. This strategy places its faith in the working class to provide a way out of the capitalist crisis and the environmental degradation, war, and misery to which capitalism inevitably leads.



A YEAR AFTER THE BALTIMORE UPRISING

TRACY KWON
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During the last five years, a barrage of police killings and racist hate crimes—many caught on tape—spurred protests that claimed the slogan Black Lives Matter and crescendoed over the course of two years. Until these events broke out, the liberal hegemonic discourse insisted on the idea that we had achieved a post-racial society, especially with Obama's election. Oppressed people and Blacks in particular—with their daily encounters with systemic racism—could not afford the luxury of these illusions.

Post-Racial Myth, Dispelled

The myth that US society had overcome racial divisions and inequality was shattered by people's response to the repeated murders of Black people by police.¹ Protests led by Black youth, women, and LGBT people successfully shut down highways, malls, and bridges. Die-ins took place on university campuses around the country.

Through disruptive tactics, BLM activists

challenged Bernie Sanders on his platform, which left much to be desired when it came to the concerns of people of color. All the major presidential candidates were asked about Black Lives Matter and police brutality.

The notion of a colorblind America is being replaced by a heightened awareness of police killings and attacks on Black people. However, the murder of Black people by police has not ceased. In 2015 alone, 1,134 people were murdered by police.¹ The outcry and organization against police violence exposes the lie of a post-racial society. The Black Lives Matter movement laid bare the systemic nature of racism.

A Disjointed City

Within a nationwide context of racial oppression, the city of Baltimore is a striking example of segregation and poverty. Since 1910, when local officials passed a bill restricting Blacks to certain blocks with the aim of “reducing civil disturbance and preventing the spread of

diseases,” numerous policies have maintained spatial segregation.² Over time, formal racial segregation became less permissible and was replaced by insidious redlining practices that denied Blacks access to insurance, loans, and mortgages.³

In addition to police brutality, a confluence of social and economic problems affect Baltimore's Black population. Public schools in poor areas are grossly under-resourced and constantly threatened with privatization and closures, as school systems are largely funded through local property taxes.⁴ Joblessness is highest among Blacks: 37 percent of young Black men are unemployed compared to 10 percent of young white men.⁵ Because of the targeted imprisonment of Black people, about a third of Black people have criminal records, which employers check before hiring, making it even more difficult for them to get jobs. This makes it extremely difficult to break out of the vicious cycle of joblessness, poverty, illegal activities, and prison.

In poor Black neighborhoods, police employ violence with impunity. Their actions are protected and perpetuated by the legal system. Only 11 of the 65 officers charged in fatal shootings over the past decade were convicted.⁶

Baltimore's Rebellion

After Freddie Gray was murdered on April 19, 2016, the first stirrings of resistance began in his neighborhood. Initially, protesters were almost entirely Black youth, children, and some elders from the surrounding neighborhood. After several days, the mobilizations spread throughout the city with massive participation by students, community activists, labor unions, faith-based groups, and left political organizations. People traveled from New York, Charlottesville, Philadelphia and Ferguson, where Black communities were waging similar struggles against police brutality.

The protests captured national headlines and the target of people's rage became directed more and more toward city government leaders. The main demand was for officials to lock up and charge the officers who murdered Gray.

After an enormous rally at city hall, protesters broke away and swept through Inner Harbor, an upscale commercial district in downtown Baltimore. Seething with rage, hundreds ended up outside of Orioles' Stadium. Two police vehicles were trashed before protesters were intercepted by heavily armed riot police. A few days later, dozens of Black high school students engaged in open confrontation with Baltimore police—throwing stones and exchanging blows. At a press conference that evening, Mayor Rawlings-Blake, a Black woman who commanded the nearly 50 percent Black Baltimore police force, condemned the youth, labelled them thugs and pronounced the city under a state of emergency. In addition to deploying three thousand police officers from the Baltimore PD, Rawlings-Blake called in reinforcement from the State Troopers and National Guard. In the days that followed, the state cracked down ruthlessly on protesters, locking up more than 480 demonstrators. The show of force and baseless arrests were aimed at debilitating the movement. Undeterred, about four thousand students from high schools and universities throughout Maryland marched through the city a few days later.

On May 1, State Prosecutor Mosby announced the decision to file criminal charges against the six police officers involved in Freddie Gray's death. That same day marked the height of the mobilizations; an estimated

ten thousand people took to the streets and circled the city twice over, chanting, "If we don't get no justice, then you won't get no peace!"

A Necessary Balance Sheet

The indictment—a significant departure from the system's sanction of police murder—was a direct result of the mobilizations. The boldest actions were highly spontaneous, but without these confrontations, the news of Freddie Gray's murder would not have entered the world's purview. At the same time, these isolated, unorganized acts of rage alone would not have drawn the same awareness and ultimate results. If not for the widespread support of workers, students, labor unions and community organizations, the state could simply have extinguished the protests through repression and refused to offer any concessions.

After May 1, mobilizations quickly waned. Black religious leaders and reformist political parties cheered the results and hastened to bring the raw street resistance to an end. Ministers, the New Black Panther Party and other self-appointed Black community leaders held celebratory closing rallies in front of city hall, while one hundred people were still locked up in central booking a few miles away. A small minority continued to fight and demanded that the detainees be released and their charges dropped. However, the majority of organizations failed to mount a united response.

The Lack of Coordination in a United Front

Overall, the widespread mobilizations assembled loose groupings of activists, left political parties, labor organizations, community groups and students whose combined response brought ten thousand people to the streets, resulting in the indictment of Freddie Gray's killers.

However, the movement never achieved any real coordination between the various sectors involved in the protests. Actions were highly fragmented and undirected. Multiple groups refused to march together and instead called for separate, competing rallies, splitting the potential force of the mobilizations. Some community leaders dismissed out-of-towners and labeled them "outsiders" rather than embracing them in a common struggle against police brutality.

The lack of coordination and unwillingness to call for a workers' united front turned out to be detrimental to the uprising's political potential, which was all too quickly subdued by the state's nominal concessions. Such a front would have been a step towards uniting

workers of various sectors to fight against police brutality. These are not merely organizational or tactical issues. The rejection of the united front tactic against state repression and racism belies a strategic revolutionary perspective.

While few and far between, there have been key examples of organized labor taking a stand against police brutality. On May Day, 2015, ILWU Local 10 shutdown the Port of Oakland in protest of police terror. Unite Here Local 7 mobilized its members for several days of protest following Freddie Gray's death. Later that summer, University of California graduate students and faculty of United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 2865 passed a resolution calling on the AFL-CIO to end its affiliation with the International Union of Police Associations.⁷ Local 2865's resolution stated that police unionization "allows police to masquerade as members of the working-class and obfuscates their role in enforcing racism, capitalism, colonialism, [and] oppression." These are all methods for workers to take up the fight against police brutality at their workplaces.

All workers should push their unions to not only call for the expulsion of the police, but act in concert and in solidarity with oppressed communities: in this case, with Black youth in resistance against police brutality. Beyond any single tactic or gesture, it is fundamental for labor unions and working-class people to organize against racism and for an end to Black and Brown oppression.

A Fledgling Movement at an Impasse

BLM is the most dynamic political movement in the US today. Women, youth and LGBT people have taken on the police and capitalist politicians and called for an end to systematic racism. The BLM movement has forced the hand of a few bourgeois politicians. Presidential rally disruptions, freeway shutdowns, occupations, and bridge takeovers have influenced the policies of local police; prosecutors uncharacteristically indicted cops; commissioners and elected officials have stepped down; the Department of Justice has opened up (useless but highly publicized) investigations. BLM has brought international attention to the mass incarceration of people of color.

Highly spontaneous and politically heterogeneous, the movement has demonstrated the propensity to fall to the pressures of two overlapping ideologies: Black nationalism and reformism.

BLM is a decentralized network, with chapters that are autonomous in character and action. Around the country, some political

disagreements are being articulated. Some minority sectors have claimed the organization is being “co-opted” but no such grouping has successfully advanced a program delineating these political differences or proposing a strong alternative.

Predominant tendencies within Black nationalism are no longer tied to the idea of secession or territory, but are certainly tied to the socio-cultural “secession” of Black people. Black nationalism is expressed through the call for Black leadership, for an end to white supremacy, for greater equality and access to schools and against police brutality. Despite the militant history of Black people under the banner of Black Nationalism, most famously the Black Panthers, the development of these tendencies has led to a cross-class collaborationist response to anti-Black racism. This perspective fails to provide a critique of the “Black elite,” who have reached positions of (political or economic) power; in fact, some Black nationalists celebrate this elite.

Reformism, which often expresses itself in different forms of nationalism, has found ample expression in the Black Lives Matter movement. It is led by trust in capitalist institutions and the belief in a smooth transition to a “free society”; it feeds the illusion that gradual reforms will achieve a free and democratic society.

A cohort of Black activists is paving the way for institutionalization, heading straight for one of the major “trenches” of American capitalism—in Gramscian terms—the non-profit sector. A tendency towards incorporation, social entrepreneurship and professional activism pervades the BLM National leadership. Furthermore, many BLM leaders have pleaded for presidential candidates to address race issues. While presenting a subversive or radical appearance, in practice, these prominent activists seek to move bourgeois politicians to the left—or even become those politicians. Prominent BLM activist DeRay McKesson ran for Baltimore City mayor in April 2016. He won three percent of the vote and came in sixth place. It was the first time that a well-known figure of the BLM movement ran for elected office. McKesson’s campaign actually represented the right wing of the heterogeneous movement. A week before he announced his plans to run, he met with Obama.

Reform the Police or Destroy the System

Some activists promote the installation of Black (or “Black-friendly”) bourgeois politicians. They issue recommendations for body

cameras, cultural sensitivity trainings, and “community control” and organize copwatch against police violence. These are all damaging in the long run because they channel the anti-systemic rage of the people through institutional and reformist channels, fomenting trust in the master’s tools and the vile bourgeois legal system.

Since professionalized policing first emerged in the 1820s, its primary role has been to control the “dangerous classes”: to break up labor strikes and work stoppages, arrest social and political “deviants,” etc. Radicals, Blacks, immigrants, LGBT people, the poor, the homeless, and people with disabilities are constant targets. The capitalist state has an unmistakable monopoly on the “legitimate” use of force. The police and their murderous, debasing methods are designed to protect the private property of the owning class; they exist to protect the status quo. The same goes for detention and corrections officers, as well as border patrol.

How then can the community “control” cops without exterminating their masters, the capitalist class, and controlling society? How can the community control the police without destroying the current capitalist state?

Capitalist regimes utilize and foment racism to divide workers and enable the super-exploitation of certain sectors. How do we end racism, driven by capitalism, if we do not organize resistance against capitalism and the bourgeoisie, along with its political parties?

Reformism flies in the face of reality. The capitalist class will never hand over power and the material basis of production to the working and oppressed for the sake of progress, democracy, the betterment of our conditions.

Cops are enemies of the working class. Even as Black men and women are being shot dead in cold blood by cops, even after the US has undergone a radicalization and massive uprising of people against racist policing and brutality, some “progressives” and even socialist organizations cling to the incorrect notion that police collectively form a part of the working class.

Some argue that police may one day shed their roles as strikebreakers, repressors, and racist murderers, and instead join their working-class brothers and sisters to fight against their capitalist masters. In a revolutionary situation, when class struggle has taken the form of civil war, and mutual attacks are open and unfettered, it is possible that a few individual police officers may resign from their posts and take the side of the working class. However, the police, as a category, will be

on the side of the capitalists, as they have always been. When postulated outside of a revolutionary context, however, the idea of the police fighting on the side of the working class is an entirely fantastical notion.

The Stalinist Workers’ World Party’s central demand for community control of the police reveals the organization’s utterly reformist character. Similarly, Socialist Alternative’s push for unionization of the police force is totally mistaken. Police unions have only been shown to push for reactionary politics, officers’ impunity and discretionary use of force.

Challenges and the Role of the Left

Black workers—along with immigrant workers—make up some of the most exploited layers of the U.S. working class. Due to the fact that they’re subjected to the double burden of racism and capitalist exploitation, they have a potential energy to fight longer, harder, and with more resolve. Thus, Black and minority workers are an indispensable component of any left organization with serious revolutionary aspirations.

The left can win the confidence of youth, people of color, workers, and activists by fighting shoulder-to-shoulder on the streets and offering a revolutionary program to end police brutality. One progressive step in building a revolutionary party would be the formation of a workers’ united front that could effectively fight against police brutality.

1 This statistic reflects the number of known deaths caused by police from January 1 to April 29, 2016. Source: The Guardian. “The counted: people killed by police in the US.”

2 The Poverty and Segregation in Baltimore and Ferguson- It is All Connected to Racist U.S. Housing Policies. (2015).

3 The Poverty and Segregation in Baltimore and Ferguson- It is All Connected to Racist U.S. Housing Policies. (2015).

4 <http://www.epi.org/publication/african-americans-concentrated-neighborhoods/>

5 <http://money.cnn.com/2015/04/29/news/economy/baltimore-economy/>

6 Washington Post, A year of reckoning: police fatally nearly 1,000, December 26, 2015.

7 See No place for cops in our unions, Left Voice, August 7, 2015.

THE SOFT COUP AND SOUTH AMERICA'S RIGHT TURN



Illustration: Fer Lendoiro.

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TRANSLATION: JUAN CRUZ FERRE

Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff's government faces an imminent institutional coup that is part of a broader right turn and end of the "Pink Tide" (a cycle of center-left regimes) that has defined the region for over a decade. The hegemony of relatively "progressive" governments (including those led by nationalists like Chavez in Venezuela or center-left regimes like the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT) is disintegrating in a context of economic stagnation and efforts by the United States to regain its political dominance in the region.

From Brazil to Argentina to Venezuela, there is a common thread – the advance of the right wing and its attacks on the working class. The Parliamentary impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff is an effort to replace her with Vice President Temer. If successful, Temer's government will implement an austerity program even harsher than the one the PT had

put in place. In Argentina, President Macri's "government of managers" has begun to orchestrate a series of austerity measures. In Venezuela, the reactionary opposition made unprecedented gains in last November's elections and won the majority in the National Assembly, leaving Nicolas Maduro's government debilitated in the face of an acute economic and political crisis.

The rightward shift in South American politics

The events in Brazil will have important repercussions on a regional and international scale. Today, the conservative winds buffeting the region are being seriously reinforced, enticing the continent's Right to go for more. In Venezuela, the pro-imperialist opposition feels emboldened to hasten its plans to oust Maduro through maneuvers in the National Assembly. It will also invigorate Macri's

CEO-government, the plan of attacks on the working class, and subordination to global capital.

Because of the country's sheer economic and political weight, what happens in Brazil has enormous implications for the entire region. Should the "soft coup" consolidate, it may be the tipping point for South American politics. It could open the door to a reactionary period, with conservative governments like Macri's in Argentina or the one emerging from the runoff elections in Peru. Needless to say, the U.S. will attempt to make the most of this political conjuncture to obtain greater influence in the region and to leverage more pressure on countries like Venezuela, Cuba or Bolivia by imposing new economic and financial agreements.

We are facing the end of the "cycle of progressivism" in Latin America – the decline of governments that ruled for over a decade and

presented themselves as the “Latin American Left.” For these dependent, capitalist national economies, the period of economic prosperity fueled by the high price of raw materials has come to a close and class-conciliation projects have been stripped of their material foundation.

“Progressive” governments have played a role in this conservative turn and continue to do so through incessant structural adjustment measures, devaluation and inflation, wage erosion and exacerbation of the problems rife in education, health, transportation, and housing. In addition, they have hardened their response to the struggles of the working class and poor, while at the same time incorporating elements of the reactionary agenda (ie., the increasing emphasis on “security”). They have remained loyal to the continued payment of foreign debt and made major concessions to big business and multinational groups. Furthermore, the authoritarian, bonapartist nature of these regimes has alienated segments of the population and caused greater dissatisfaction with the economic situation.

Thus, these populist governments and their decline have paved the way for the advance of the Right. Conservative forces have taken on the appearance of “renewal and change” with a rhetoric of corruption-busting and even “democracy.” The ultimately defeated electoral campaign of Daniel Scioli, Kirchnerist presidential candidate, centered on security and “gradual” austerity.

In fact, the Kirchnerists are now supporting Macri’s new governance plan; despite their oppositional posturing, many Peronist congressmen voted in favor of the deal with the vulture funds, and Kirchnerist governors of Santa Cruz and Tierra del Fuego are laying off state employees and lowering wages. In Venezuela, Maduro did not take real measures against the capitalists despite his rhetoric of “economic war,” making it easier for a demagogic opposition to penetrate popular sectors.

In Brazil, the PT’s unpopular measures have provided traction to the right wing opposition’s agenda. The governing party’s outcry against the soft coup rings hollow against the backdrop of many years spent managing the capitalist state, brokering deals with conservative and religious sectors and partaking in the worst methods of corruption. They lay the groundwork for the current right-wing offensive.

The Exhaustion of Progressivism

The international crisis has brought an end to years of growth in the region, revealing the meager progress made by the Kirchnerists, despite their laying claim on what they call the “decade of conquests” (década ganada) or period of labor-friendly policies. The contradictions of a capitalist Latin America have come to light. In this context, progressive speech rings hollow.

The post-neoliberal governments came to power during the wave of political crises and uprisings that toppled neoliberal regimes run by the likes of De la Rúa (Argentina) and Sánchez de Losada (Bolivia). This shift served to demobilize and channel popular discontent through partial concessions. While preserving and cohabitating with the power of corporations and large landowners, these post-neoliberal governments continued privatization (with partial exceptions), precarious employment, the deepening of export-oriented, extraction models and overall dependence on foreign capital.

With the fall in revenues derived from exports (soy, mining, oil), the possibility of mediating and arbitrating between classes has greatly diminished. It is no longer possible to prolong inclusive social policies and at the same time maintain the smooth order of capitalist business. The “national and popular” regimes have managed the developing crisis at the expense of wages, employment and living conditions. Meanwhile, the expectations of the masses lingered, unsatisfied.

Despite their efforts, progressive rulers have not fulfilled the demands of the bourgeoisie. Instead, they have weakened their own social and political base, as seen in the electoral defeats of the Kirchnerist government in Argentina, Chavism in Venezuela, and Morales’ setback during the referendum in Bolivia.

In face of an economic crisis that extends throughout the region and an unfavorable international situation, the local ruling classes demand more functional governments. They demand greater loyalty and willingness to implement a full-fledged program of attacks on the working class and open the doors to global capital. This is how they expect to restore conditions for a new cycle of (dependent) capitalist accumulation.

Whether they are pushed against the ropes by the Right or thrown into the opposition, nationalists and progressives stay true to their nature – preferring defeat over mass mobilization. Such mobilizations would go up against the implementation of austerity measures and

threaten the social order in its entirety.

Once out of government, these “progressive” forces guarantee governability of the Right and share responsibility for austerity measures against workers and the people.

The Capitalist “War Plan” Must Be Confronted

The discourse of the new Right deploys demagoguery and prejudice to capture the popular vote and broaden its social base. Thanks to progressivism’s fall from popularity, the New Right (ie., in Brazil and Venezuela) is thriving, riding the coattails of the main bourgeois blocs and mainstream media. But it remains to be seen whether the Right will be able to transform its political and electoral successes into a new dynamic of social forces, and thus impose a reactionary agenda – increasing exploitation and reducing workers’ rights, “cutting costs,” encouraging “competition” at the expense of the national economy, favoring landowners, and increasing the commitment to foreign capital.

There are unresolved contradictions between the reactionary political turn and the structural situation. This is particularly clear in the Brazilian crisis. Even the imperialist press (New York Times, Financial Times and The Economist), which constantly champion the positions of the Right, pointed out political risks in the impeachment of Rousseff, and El País warned that “political division, social clashes and economic crisis” lead to a “dangerous transition” that could trigger social unrest.

In the midst of major social discontent, the political regimes and governing parties have allowed rotten corruption schemes to run the show, ensuring capitalist profitability. A new government led by Michel Temer may still prove incapable of implementing the bourgeoisie’s desired (harsher) austerity program. Any new “governability” will demand the joint efforts of the PT and the union bureaucracy.

This political division is an acute expression of a broader pattern of crisis faced by political regimes, party systems and “political castes.” It also affects opportunistic progressives, who while administering the bourgeois state have shared the same corrupt practices and have strengthened their ties with the bourgeoisie. The central role being taken up in Brazil, Argentina, and Peru by the “judiciary party” (court system), the most conservative of the State’s powers, is a symptom of the weakness of the political systems in these

countries and a sign of the Right's bonapartist tendencies. Macri's rule-by-decree is another example of this.

The fear of social unrest is a response to the increasing polarization exacerbated by the economic crisis and austerity measures. The dynamics of "upward social mobility" and "social inclusion" that propped up the social peace that prevailed during the years of growth are now disintegrating. As a result, we are seeing class realignments to the left and right.

The Right is winning over a social base in large sectors of the middle class, particularly in the wealthiest and most economically dynamic regions, like the Pampas in Argentina and the Southeastern states of Brazil. However, the petty-bourgeoisie can split and become polarized under the weight of the crisis, when frontal attacks – service fee hikes, tax increases, recession – affect their interests. What's more, the short-term electoral trust given to the New Right in Latin America by the popular segments that are dissatisfied with "progressive austerity" can quickly vanish into thin air.

Until now, the labor bureaucracy and the leadership of the "social movements" under the control of nationalist reformist forces have striven to keep the working class from intervening in the crisis. However, the workers are not willing to give away salary, employment, and living conditions, nor are they willing to renounce their democratic aspirations.

Over the years, the working class has made some gains, albeit with increasing precarization and internal fragmentation. In addition, the working class holds the experience and tradition of a long history of struggle.

There is an awakening of a new generation of youth who see their prospects closed down in the current situation, who do not identify with decaying progressivism or the New Right. There have been student and youth mobilizations in Santiago de Chile, Sao Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro. The convergence of workers and youth could reinforce and amplify resistance, and give way to the great class battles of the coming period. The outcomes of these struggles will determine the nature of the next political stage in the region.

Tasks of the Left

The crisis in Brazil presents the Left – not just in Brazil but in Latin America and beyond – with the task of drawing important political definitions. Here, we leave aside the analysis of the reformist and populist left that

embraces the "lesser evil" to support "progressive" governments, justifying their austerity programs. This left is the enemy of any independent workers' and people's mobilizations, which are also the only means of defeating the Right. In this text, we will only address the debates within the socialist left.

First off, it is paramount for any self-proclaimed workers' and socialist group to denounce the Brazilian coup and call for a resistance to defeat it using the methods of the working class. This is not a minor tactical problem. It is a strategic problem. The bourgeoisie today is resorting to a "constitutional" approach to oust undesired governments and prepare the terrain for imposing major defeats onto the working class, tipping the relation of forces in its favor. However, with the intensification of class struggle and crisis, the future possibility of more "classic" forms like a military coup and openly counter-revolutionary methods can not be excluded.

In fact, various combinations of the sort have taken place in the last few years. The 2002 civil-military coup attempt in Venezuela was defeated by a mass uprising. In 2009, former Honduran President Manuel Zelaya was ousted from government exiled from the country by the Supreme Court, with the help of the military and widespread repression. In Paraguay in 2012, Former President Fernando Lugo was ousted through a conspiracy that unfolded in Congress – also accompanied by repression. The left and the vanguard cannot disregard these experiences.

Some left groups – like the majority within the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL) – formally reject the Brazilian coup, but end up "critically" capitulating to the PT and Dilma's government. On the other hand, groups like PSTU and the MES (a current within the PSOL), while claiming to fight against Dilma's government's cuts, have declined to even denounce the impeachment as a coup and take the fight against it in their hands.

In this case, under pressure from the middle class opposition, formal leftism functions to conceal its own adaptation to the democratic-bourgeois regime's settings, with constitutional mechanisms that the "republican" right utilizes in its drive to depose Dilma. Both positions – the critical support of the progressives as well as the surrender to the opposition – are opposite but symmetrical expressions of adaptation to the bourgeois political camps in dispute.

The debate cuts across the Latin American and international revolutionary left, leading

to differing positions within the Left and Workers' Front (FIT - composed of the Izquierda Socialista, Partido Obrero, and Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas) in Argentina. The Izquierda Socialista has joined the anti-Dilma camp by claiming there is no coup, instead characterizing the impeachment as simply a dispute between two bourgeois blocs. At the same time, the IS denounces the governability pact between the PSDB and PMDB.

The Partido Obrero in Argentina, in turn, has drawn the definition of a soft coup and opposes Dilma's austerity policies, but considers it a minor problem that should not affect the internal functioning of the FIT in Argentina. This attitude, characteristic of so-called national-trotskyism, responds to opportunist tactical preferences at a national level, ignoring the internationalist responsibilities prompted by an event of such magnitude as the coup in Brazil. It is necessary to advance an international campaign against the coup.

It is crucial to defend a consistently independent position against both the reactionary offensive and the austerity and bonapartist measures of progressivism. Our international current defends these positions, as our MRT comrades are doing in Brazil (see article, "Brazil: a right-wing Coup, the failure of the PT and the Coming Storm," [LeftVoice.org](#)).

We must fight against the Right without lending any political support to the pseudo-left governments, through a program of mass mobilizations and a United Front against reactionary attacks. The duty of resistance is inseparable from the struggle for a politically independent workers' organization.

It is necessary to advance a revolutionary regroupment of the vanguard at a regional level. This can be done through campaigns like the resistance against the Brazilian coup and through conferences and other initiatives that offer a socialist working-class alternative to decaying progressivism.

Over the past few years, revolutionary socialists have accumulated militant forces; gained insertion into sectors of the working class and vanguard youth; and won parliamentary positions. These forces must be deployed to achieve the task of regroupment and forge a socialist, internationalist working-class Left.



A RIGHT-WING COUP, THE FAILURE OF THE PT AND THE COMING STORM

LEANDRO LANFREDI
TATIANA COZZARELLI

Setting the Stage for the Crisis

In mid-April, Brazil's House of Representatives voted in favor of President Dilma Rousseff's impeachment. What took place was a barbaric scene, with countless speeches by reactionary politicians who dedicated their vote to *God, family* and the *police*. Right-wing political leaders also spoke out against the president, accusing her not only of corruption, but also of creating a "communist dictatorship" in the country. It is clear that the push for impeachment has nothing to do with the formal charges of budget mismanagement brought against Dilma; in fact, this was hardly mentioned. Instead, it is an attempt to break with Brazil's constitution and disregard the outcome of an election. It is a coup orchestrated by a corrupt right wing to seize political power from the Workers' Party (PT).

It is more than likely that the Senate will ratify the impeachment and oust Dilma, who will likely be succeeded by Michel Temer,

her vice-president from the PMDB (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party). This will secure the success of a right-wing coup.

The coup was planned and executed by reactionary political parties, the Chamber of Commerce and oligarchical mass media. *Globo*, the largest TV and news channel in Brazil, has actively supported right-wing measures throughout the process. From 1964 to 1985, it served as a propaganda tool for the military dictatorship. Despite its subsequent apology for supporting the dictatorship, today it continues its reactionary role. *Globo* anchors promoted the pro-impeachment demonstrations and called for the population to participate. These protests got round-the-clock coverage, while the struggles of workers and left forces got little air time.

The coup was led by the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB), a right wing party which previously backed the PT and had the Vice Presidency under Dilma. It was

also supported by the PT's right wing neoliberal opposition, the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB). The impeachment was facilitated by Brazil's judicial system through orchestrated, selective attacks against the PT while ignoring charges against other parties involved in the Petrobras scandal, the largest corruption scandal in Brazil's history.

How did the coup come about and how did the once-popular PT lose the reigns of power? It is necessary to answer these questions before examining the deep political and economic crisis the country is facing. The coup will not resolve this underlying crisis. On the contrary, growing tensions and conflicts are likely to emerge. At this historic moment, the situation in Brazil poses a tremendous challenge for revolutionary socialists.

The failure of class conciliation

The PT emerged out of working-class struggle. In the early 1980's, metalworker

strikes in Sao Paulo marked the end of the dictatorship's complete control over workers and labor. Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva, then president of the steelworkers' union, became a major figure in the labor movement during these strikes. He went on to create the Workers' Party as well as the CUT (national labor confederation), creating a division between the PT's political party and their labor organization, in other words, between the political superstructure and labor's economic struggles.

Although the PT was built on workers' support, it has employed a politics of class-conciliation. The PT's 13 years in the presidency have been marked by minor social welfare measures that assisted people in extreme poverty. In the process, millions of precarious jobs were generated. PT measures broadened the consumer market and provided larger sections of the population with access to credit, giving the illusion of more prosperity than there actually was. It is not uncommon for Brazilians to say that President Lula eliminated starvation, or for poor people to say that thanks to the Workers' Party, they can buy meat to eat with their rice. The PT years greatly expanded access to a university education. At the same time, however, the education system was highly privatized; large government loans were handed over to corporate executives. Free public university education has limited spaces and students are selected based on a highly competitive standardized test. Therefore, most spots are taken by students from wealthy families who can afford test prep classes and quality private schools, making free public education inaccessible to the vast majority of Brazil's working class.

During the Lula years, everything seemed in order: he used to say, "All sides are winning," yet this concealed the underlying contradictions. The working class was scraping by, while the wealthy were profiting. The measures that alleviated the conditions of the working class were minimal compared to the massive profits raked in by the banks, commodity industries and industries in general. Of the 10 million jobs created during Lula's two terms, over 90 percent paid less than 1,500 reais per month (about \$450 USD). Furthermore, the PT implemented pension reforms that obligated public employees work more years before retirement. Even prior to taking executive office, the PT held local and statewide positions and operated like any other neoliberal party, privatizing industries and betraying strikes.

The PT's tenuous class-conciliation pact was also challenged by the left. Resisting austerity measures (ie., fare hikes) and fueled by a generalized discontent with political and economic conditions, the masses, the left, youth and workers took to

the streets and challenged the whole political class in the momentous protests of June 2013- late in President Dilma's first term.

As the economic crisis deepened, the PT could no longer maintain the social pact that it represented. There had emerged a crisis characterized by growing budget deficits, a gigantic corruption scandal involving one of the most prominent corporations, and a decrease in the price of commodities. From December 2015 to April, over one million workers joined the ranks of the unemployed; the unemployment rate jumped from 6 percent to over 10 percent in less than two years. The crisis has made it impossible for all sides to "win" or even maintain the *illusion* that they are winning. The PT has made clear that they will implement cuts and austerity measures, forcing workers to pay for the economic crisis.

Aggravating this harsh economic u-turn from prosperity to crisis, a political reversal has also taken place: from the PT's dominant political position to Dilma's ongoing impeachment. Dilma Rousseff was re-elected in October 2014 while campaigning on an anti-austerity platform. However, once in office she implemented harsh austerity. She even cut down many of the education reforms that the PT implemented - in one case, cutting the available seats in the technical college program by half.

Social discontent from these policies has caused Dilma's approval rating to plummet to the lowest levels in decades (roughly 10 percent). The well-off middle class, not as affected by the economic situation as the poor, began to mobilize a year ago. Protests were organized by the PSDB, the right wing opposition of the PT, which refused to accept the election results. Propelled by the mass media and widespread indignation over corruption practices, enormous crowds demanded Dilma's removal. They praised the *judiciary heroes* cooked up by the media and railed against the left. Some even praised the military dictatorship.

In the process, the PT's allies defected. Above all, they were pressured by powerful business lobbies and perceived a situation in which the media, the judiciary powers, and sectors of the middle class supported Dilma's impeachment. All the right wing and center parties that once supported the government joined the opposition and pushed for impeachment trials. Most importantly, Michel Temer's PMDB began to call for impeachment.

It is notable that the impeachment was orchestrated by the PT's *political allies*. In the past, these right wing figures were not opposed or criticized by the PT government, which used this alliance of convenience to gain the presidency. The PT dug its own grave by allying with these forces to maintain power. Its strategy of class conciliation has proven an utter and complete failure,

with its former right wing allies spearheading impeachment efforts and the working class nowhere to be seen.

The PT Refuses to Mobilize Workers to Fight Against the Coup

The division between the PT's political party and its labor organization, CUT, was maintained during the impeachment proceedings. In the past, the Brazilian working class has engaged in strikes and work stoppages against cutoffs and other measures taken by the bosses or the government. The CUT engaged in these struggles only when given great pressure by its base to organize an action. Likewise, the CUT did not put up a real fight against the current right wing coup, largely because the PT did not want them to. The CUT called for inoffensive rallies that were more spectacle than struggle. This is particularly egregious when one considers that the CUT has approximately 25 million workers in its ranks, within strategic sectors of the economy, including metal, oil and banking sector workers. Yet CUT did not call for a single strike, assembly or picket - working class methods of struggle to challenge the impeachment.

Why would the PT, a party that emerged from the great metal worker strikes of the 80's refrain from employing all of the weapons in its arsenal to fight the coup? Why wouldn't the party use the same methods that brought it into existence? The answer is because the PT is implementing budget cuts and privatization, attacking workers and making them pay for the economic crisis. If the PT were to unleash the power of the working class to fight against the impeachment, who is to say that they won't fight against the PT and their austerity measures next? CUT opened the way for the coup by its lack of resistance, showing more fear of working class radicalization than of the right wing coup. Instead of employing the CUT to fight against the impeachment, Lula attempted to form more coalitions by unsuccessfully trying to buy off right-wing representatives.

Despite the PT's dismal mobilizations, many Brazilians opposed the impeachment. A substantial portion of the coup's opposition did not support Dilma's government, but rather, demanded democracy and were against the right wing. Many correctly understood that the coup would bring to power a more aggressive, unelected austerity government.

The Challenges Facing Temer

The most likely scenario is that Vice President Temer will become president and enact a series of new cuts. Last November, Temer and the PMDB published a document called the "Bridge to the Future," which outlined strict austerity measures, such as reforming labor laws, dismantling workers' rights, raising the retirement age, and privatizing public health and education. The big media

corporations in the country demand that the upcoming government implement such a program right away and “shock” the nation in 10 days, much like Argentina’s neoliberal Mauricio Macri. Forecasting difficulties, they advise him to implement the measures by presidential decree - authoritarian measures for an unelected President Temer.

Yet Temer potentially faces various obstacles that will weaken his presidency. First, the working class could finally become a protagonist by fighting against austerity measures. Although the CUT did not mobilize to keep Dilma in power, the union may be forced to mobilize against the cuts due to growing workers’ discontent. Also, the international media has not expressed support for the impeachment, further weakening the strength of a possible Temer government. Furthermore, Temer has been implicated in the Petrobras corruption probe and investigations into election finance practices. Both issues could bring about a new impeachment process and the cancellation of his presidency by Brazil’s Electoral Court, which would give way to new presidential elections. However, at this moment, that situation doesn’t seem to be plausible. Brazil’s elite wants a strong government as quickly as possible in order to implement austerity measures.

With midterm elections coming up next year, Temer is in a difficult position. His support from the bourgeoisie is based on his ability to implement austerity measures, but these measures could prove detrimental to PMDB’s popularity in the midterm elections. Another challenge for the Temer government is a floundering economy which austerity measures cannot fix. What is more likely is that there will be further economic recession, possibly deepening into an economic depression. Based on economic forecasts, by the end of 2016 the country’s GDP will have fallen 9 percent since 2014.

One thing is certain: there is growing resistance against austerity measures. Students have occupied nearly one hundred schools in Rio de Janeiro in support of teachers who have been on a month-long strike demanding increased wages and denouncing constant delays in pension distributions. Throughout the country, university students are fighting against cuts to the education budget, and voting to strike and mobilize against the presidential impeachment. These actions point a way towards fighting the impeachment without supporting the PT government and its cuts.

The defeat of the PT is not synonymous with the defeat of Brazil’s working class. The worsening economic situation and Temer’s anticipated austerity measures will be a major test for Latin America’s largest working class.

Drawing Revolutionary Lessons From the Fall of the PT Government

It is clear to socialists that Lula and his successor Dilma are responsible for the

privatization of Brazil’s oil, increased unemployment, billions in cuts to education and healthcare, and for the growth of the reactionary figures who led the coup. The left must fight these cuts. Yet opposing the PT and its austerity program does not mean supporting a right wing coup. While this seems to be an obvious difference, many Brazilian socialists have fallen into this logic.

The most important group to the left of the PT, the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL), closed ranks with the PT and used their parliamentary leaders to denounce the coup. Yet like the PT, they demanded absolutely no action from the labor unions. However, within the PSOL, other sectors acted differently. The PSOL’s ex-presidential candidate Luciana Genro, who received nearly 1.5 million votes in 2014, demanded general elections in the crucial days leading up to the impeachment. Only on the eve of the vote in the House of Representatives did Genro finally release a statement against the impeachment. Her silence contributed to the absence of mobilizations and promoted the illusion that general elections could be an advance for the working class at this juncture. The call for general elections, now echoed by the *The Economist*, was supported by another ex-presidential contender, Marina Silva. Silva’s presidential bid was strongly financed by Brazil’s largest bank and Brazil’s most-read newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*. Sectors of the right are on the same boat, calling for new elections ever since Dilma was elected.

The Unified Socialist Workers’ Party (PSTU), another left party in Brazil that has a stronger working class presence than PSOL, took an even more disastrous position. The PSTU’s main slogan was “out with all of them,” and it called for “general elections” via hypothetical general strike. The PSTU’s hypothesis of general strike has no basis in reality: there is no movement towards a strike and workers are not the subjects bringing about President Dilma’s ouster, or anyone else for that matter. Those who are yelling, “Out with all,” are in fact yelling, “Out with *Dilma*.” The PSTU’s call helps conceal the right wing nature of the coup. Certainly “out with all of them” would be progressive if it came from a workers’ uprising against all of those in the government. But the reactionary nature of the coup was demonstrated through the vote in Congress - with speeches dedicated to God and military dictatorship - if it wasn’t already clear. However, the PSTU did not speak out against the right and instead echoed them by calling for the immediate ousting of Dilma.

The toppling of government by the working class is one thing; the toppling of government by corrupt reactionaries is another thing entirely.

The essential lesson in Brazil is that one cannot characterize a movement solely by *what happens*, but rather, by *who is the primary subject*. Certainly, if the working class

were to mobilize and oust the governing party due to its cuts and betrayals, it would signal a major advance in a revolutionary process. However, a victory by the right while the working class passively watches is far from revolutionary, or even progressive.

On overcrowded buses, in workplaces, at neighborhood bars, everyone is discussing the impeachment. *Esquerda Diario*, the most-read left digital news in Brazil, releases articles every day that reach thousands with the call to create a movement against the impeachment that is independent of the PT. The Revolutionary Workers’ Movement (MRT), the political party behind *Esquerda Diario*, has been pushing for a real plan to fight against the cuts and the impeachment. While the PT seeks to contain struggles, it is time for workers and students to knock down all the barriers created by the PT and the CUT to defend our democratic rights.

The only solution to the putrid regime we live in is a socialist revolution. However, we are not in a revolutionary period. There are many who wish to defend democracy against the coup, want to end corruption and get rid of a regime that opens the door to proto-fascist representatives in parliament. Therefore, mass worker mobilizations against the coup and against the PT cuts should culminate in a Constitutional Assembly to implement radical democratic measures. Such measures should include instituting the direct election and revocability of all government officials, from the currently state-appointed court justices to the representatives in Congress. Each politician and judge should receive no more than the salary of a school teacher. A Constitutional Assembly should address unemployment by prohibiting companies from firing workers. The assembly should also suspend the payment of the public debt that consumes 43 percent of the national budget, while public necessities like education and healthcare suffer aggressive cuts.

The submission of labor and student unions to the PT and its conciliatory strategy undermines the struggle of youth and workers against unemployment, budget cuts and the coup. This political surrender inhibits workers and students from building radical solutions to the grave situation Brazilians face.

But this chapter is not over. In the upcoming months in Brazil, these lessons are fundamental. They will be used to address the growing grievances and offer a clear strategic position: fight the right-wing, oppose austerity and overcome the PT, which serves as an obstacle to a militant and revolutionary working class - a class which must be organized not in a corrupt pro-business party, but in a revolutionary party to put an end to capitalism.

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ARGENTINA'S *CEOCRACY* AND NEW TESTS FOR THE LEFT

MATIAS MAIELLO

TRANSLATION: TRACY KWON

Mauricio Macri's ascent to power in Argentina takes place within the context of a widespread conservative shift in Latin America. In Venezuela, the opposition overwhelmingly defeated the Chavista candidates in the 2015 parliamentary elections. In Brazil, where the situation is most critical, an institutional coup against President Dilma Rousseff represents a qualitative leap in the right-wing advance. Despite Rousseff's willingness to escalate austerity measures, reactionary attacks have crescendoed. The events unfolding in Brazil signal a reactionary offensive that, once consolidated, will have lasting consequences throughout the region.

Meanwhile, we are quickly approaching the end of the Pink Tide era. For over a decade, the post-neoliberal governments ruled in Latin America on widespread illusions of gradual reformist progress. Today the weakening of national economies throughout the continent has taken the wind out of their sails.

In Argentina, the newly inaugurated President Mauricio Macri has launched a full-fledged attack on workers and the poor. Even outside of the capital of Buenos Aires, in the provinces where Kirchnerist politicians dominate, there has been no exception to the

austerity programs. Now more than ever, it is necessary to organize a fight back against these attacks. The Left and Workers' Front (FIT), whose candidate Nicolás del Caño of the Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas (Socialist Workers' Party, PTS) earned fourth place in the recent presidential elections, is at the forefront of a nascent resistance.

The Macri government: A clique of CEOs

The presidential elections of 2015 which ended in a victory for Mauricio Macri over the Kirchnerist candidate Daniel Scioli (Victory Front – FpV) represented a momentous shift in the political panorama. Rising to power was a man straight from the heart of the country's clan of corporate elites. His party, the Republican Proposal (PRO), emerged in the wake of the economic crisis of 2001 as a new right with a rhetoric of "management and efficacy."

The composition of the Argentinean government today – boasting the greatest saturation of CEO-officials in the country's history – starkly illustrates the definition of government made by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto: "The executive of the modern State is but a committee for mana-

ging the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie."

Macri's cabinet is almost exclusively made up of multinational business executives who moved seamlessly from corporate boardrooms to government posts, people who unvaryingly represent the top layers of Argentina's business elite: Gustavo Lopetegui, CEO of LAN Airlines, now Macri's chief of staff; Susana Malcorra, CEO of Telecom and current Minister of Foreign Affairs; Isela Costantini, CEO of General Motors Argentina, now president of the state airline Aerolíneas Argentinas; Juan José Aranguren, CEO of Shell Argentina until he was appointed Minister of Energy and Mining in December. In the farming sector, the long-time agro-business leader, Ricardo Buryaile, now steers the Ministry of Agriculture. The Ministry of Finance is bursting with former executives from the banking sector like Alfonso Prat Gay from JP Morgan and Luis Caputo from Deutsche Bank.

In less than four months, the new government and its war of capital against labor have brought to life a mammoth austerity program. The Macri administration passed a mega-devaluation that dropped the currency from 9

pesos to the dollar to 16 pesos to the dollar nearly overnight. Public transport, gas and electricity fees have increased by up to 300 percent. There have been thousands of layoffs among public sector and subcontracted workers (with estimates ranging from 25 thousand to 55 thousand dismissals), alongside a lesser but still significant number of layoffs in the private sector.

These policies, meanwhile, have produced a windfall for capitalists. The peso devaluation and the reduction of taxes on agro exports served to transfer wealth directly to the pockets of the agribusiness bosses, large landowners and exporters. Companies providing gas, electricity, transport, and highway services have also been bolstered by the fee hikes.

Today's new order has the Argentinean commander-in-chief looking a lot like Robin Hood in reverse: taking from the working class and poor to give to the rich. One of the primary beneficiaries is international finance capital. With the go-ahead from a significant wing of the Kirchnerists, in March, Macri successfully obtained parliamentary authorization to pay off the usurious international hedge funds ("vulture funds"), Argentina's imperialist debt holders that will now get returns worth vastly more than their original investments.

The doors to Argentina's national sovereignty and public coffers have been flung open to the usurious devices of the speculative financial capitalists. For over a decade, the vulture funds turned down all debt swap agreements and instead battled in the New York courts, betting on a bigger cut (thus the name, "holdouts"). Their dogged greed paid off. With the March 31 passage of the "Public Debt Normalization and Access to Public Credit" bill, the imperialist capitalists will pocket profits between 800% to 1,300%, costing the country almost \$10 billion.

During his first days in office, Macri attempted to paint a picture of dialogue and cooperation, inviting his former rivals, former presidential candidates of all stripes, to meet at the presidential palace. At the same time, he began implementing a dizzying series of austerity measures through the use of "Necessary and Urgent Decrees" (similar to executive actions), ministerial resolutions, and other bonapartist tools. Macri stated clearly that he would not call for special legislative sessions, instead carrying out these policies in the absence of discussion in Congress – whe-

re he and his party, the Republican Proposal (PRO), have less institutional sway.

Therefore it came as no surprise that Barack Obama prioritized a trip to Argentina, which can now be counted on as a close ally in advancing imperialist interests in the region. The public demonstration of new ties with Macri served as a consolation for the hardcore conservatives in the US who were up in arms about Obama's trip to Cuba immediately prior.

Gestures of rapprochement with both Latin American countries are part of the United States' overall strategy to advance its commercial, financial, and military position, as well as limit the presence of China and undermine the regional blocs.

End to "detour" governments and the relations of forces

What we see in Argentina with Macri is an end to "detour" regimes, embodied by Kirchnerism, that served to divert the path to socialism. After the revolutionary days of December 19-20, 2001, which led to the resignation of President Fernando de la Rúa, Kirchnerism was forced to adopt a progressive discourse. Enormous social movements shook the country during the years that followed, seen in the upsurge of unemployed workers' organizations, the radicalization of sectors of the middle class, and proliferation of occupied and worker-managed factories. The primary means of deactivating these movements was through the recovery of the capitalist economy.

The Kirchners – first Nestor and then Cristina Fernández – went on to establish close relationships with human rights groups such as the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo as the only means of maintaining dialogue with sectors of the middle and popular classes that played a decisive role in the rebellion that unseated de la Rúa in 2001.

The main strategic task of the Kirchner governments was the reconstruction of the legitimacy of the capitalist state, which had become badly undermined, in order to establish a bourgeois government that would guarantee order. The Kirchner administrations were successful in large measure, but failed to fully insulate the country from the continuing reverberations of the 2001 crisis. This led them, in a certain sense, to respect the relations of forces that were established then and are still playing out today.

During the course of her two terms, Cristina Fernández attempted to cut Kirchnerism from its roots and demonstrate that she was capable of establishing a government of capital and order. Regardless of these efforts, Cristina failed – whether as a result of the conflict around tax retentions to grain exports in 2008, or due to contradictions within her own coalition.

In the end, it was Daniel Scioli – named the Victory Front's sole presidential candidate by Cristina herself – who took on the task of bringing this winding "detour" to an end. He sought to hold onto the Kirchnerist base and at the same time win over a portion of the opposition on the right. These efforts ended in defeat in the 2015 presidential elections. Instead, Macri came to power to wrap up unfinished business, fifteen years after the 2001 crisis gave rise to a situation that remains open today. Despite the restoration of state authority, at the core, the relations of forces between the classes that laid the groundwork for Kirchnerism (and led to its transformations) have not changed.

Furthermore, the laboring classes that were on the outside the struggle of 2001 have won economic gains and have breathed new life into the labor movement. It remains to be seen whether the current government will be capable of shifting the relationship of forces in order to stabilize its government of CEOs. This will depend on the outcome of collisions between the classes. The class conscious left, which has taken great steps over the years, will be tested in these coming battles.

Peronism, transformed: surrender, austerity, and containment

The austerity program currently underway could not come to pass without the support of the Peronist forces in the government and trade unions. Five Peronist legislators in the Chamber of Deputies broke with the Kirchnerist Victory Front to openly collaborate with rightwing forces, moving forward legislation favoring the vulture funds. While the legislators in the lower house played an undoubtedly key role, the most craven act of surrender to financial capital took place in the Senate, where Majority Leader Miguel Ángel Picheto rounded up over twenty senators of the Kirchnerist party to pass the bill.

Macri has not been alone in leading a neoliberal advance. Since the beginning of the year, the Kirchnerists have also successfully

carried out a multitude of attacks. Tierra del Fuego Governor Rosana Bertone has virtually transformed the southern province into a laboratory of austerity and repression, rolling out brutal policies against workers like the hike in retirement age, increased taxes, and a wage freeze. In the face of workers' resistance, she did not hesitate to unleash hired thugs to physically assault public sector workers, causing severe injuries and hospitalizations.

Santa Cruz Governor Alicia Kirchner, Cristina Fernández's sister-in-law, is also persecuting and attacking the rights of government employees and teachers in the province.

This scenario and the actions taken by various sectors within the Victory Front have proven the position of the Left & Workers' Front (FIT) correct, when it called for a blank vote during the runoff between Mauricio Macri and his rival, Kirchnerist candidate Daniel Scioli. In the lead-up to the final vote, the FIT did not yield to the pressure to stand behind Scioli as the "lesser evil" candidate.

Kirchner's comeback

After four months of absence, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner has been returned to center stage in Argentinean politics. In mid-April, she was called to court to be questioned by Federal Judge Claudio Bonadio as part of an investigation into the sale of dollar futures. On the day of her court appearance, Cristina used the opportunity to call for a mobilization in her defence. Over 40,000 people gathered at the entrance of the court house.

There, Kirchner announced her proposal to create the Citizen's Front, a strategy for reorganizing the country's political landscape, which would situate Kirchnerism-Peronism as the "party of containment" after years of having been the "party of order." She painted the Citizens' Front as an open proposal for sectors that have abandoned the Victory Front in order to form closer ties with Macrismo, such as members of Congress who voted in favor of the vulture funds and the Peronist union bureaucracy. With the expected erosion of Macri's government, the Front would permit the return of Peronism to power in 2019 and serve as a strategic method of containment in the face of a possible uptick in class struggle generated in response to Macri's attacks.

The PTS and FIT fight back

From the outset, the Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas (PTS) and the Left and Workers' Front (Frente de Izquierda y de los Trabajadores - FIT) have formed part of the resistance against Macri's policies. Today, the left has a greater presence on the national level than it has for a long time.

The FIT, composed of the PTS, the Partido Obrero (PO), and Izquierda Socialista (IS), was established in 2011 and has emerged as a political force in the country. In the 2015 elections, the FIT earned third place, coming

away with 812,530 votes (3.23%) for the presidential ticket led by Nicolás del Caño and Myriam Bregman (PTS-FIT) – the best results for a left slate since 1983 and a considerable accomplishment, considering the general shift to the right and the fact that the public tends to vote more conservatively during presidential elections than in midterm elections. The FIT candidates for the national assembly obtained 1,062,000 votes, surpassing 1 million votes for the second time since the front was created (in the 2013 legislative elections, the FIT obtained 1.2 million votes). The FIT earned four additional congressional seats, two seats in legislature of the City of Buenos Aires, one in Buenos Aires Province (PBA), three in Córdoba, two in Neuquén, six in Mendoza, one in Santiago del Estero, and four representatives from the Partido Obrero (PO) in Salta.

In addition, the FIT contended for city council posts in various municipal governments, mainly Mendoza, where at the beginning of 2015, it gained 17 percent of the vote for Nicolás del Caño as mayoral candidate, putting him in second place behind the Victory Front candidate. At the same time, Noelia Barbeito of the FIT obtained 10 percent of the vote for the Governor.

These developments mark a significant turning point for the left, which has never before conquered such a space in the country's superstructure, providing a key base with which to build resistance to the new right-wing government. The Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas (PTS) in particular has continued the tradition of revolutionary parliamentarism, paying its representatives and legislators a school teacher's salary and donating the remainder of their salaries to workers' organizations and struggles. The parliamentary seat has been utilized to amplify the demands of the exploited who are in the streets in the frontlines of mobilizations and call upon an extra-parliamentary struggle to counterpose the capitalist plans with a working-class, socialist program.

In the 2015 presidential and legislative elections, the FIT ran a campaign that, at its core, denounced the austerity measures that the principal bourgeois candidates (Macri, Scioli and Massa) were preparing to usher in. The FIT's program demanded that the capitalists pay for the crisis, not only through immediate demands (a minimum wage to equal the cost of living; an end to the wage tax; a halt to labor precaritization; pensions set at 82 percent of a person's income), but also to nationalize the banks and foreign commerce under worker control, as well as strategic industries of the economy; for the expropriation of the 4,000 largest landowners who control half the agricultural industry in Argentina, and the struggle for a workers' government as the way out of the crisis.

After the Partido Obrero (PO) rejected the PTS's initial proposal to form a single unified

slate, in August 2016, for the first time since the Left and Workers' Front was established, two FIT slates faced off in the primaries. List 1A, "Renew and Strengthen the Front," led by Nicolás del Caño y Myriam Bregman of the PTS ran against the "Unity" List 2U, led by Jorge Altamira (PO) y Juan Carlos Giordano (Izquierda Socialista - IS).

List 1A won the primary elections, with 375,874 votes (against List 2U's 356,978 votes). This came as a surprise to many who expected the well-known Altamira and 2U candidates to come away with a substantial lead. The results reflect the PTS's real advances in relation to other left forces, most notably its recruitment within the working class, youth, and women's movement (through the Bread and Roses organization), and the 2014 launch of La Izquierda Diario, the first left digital news site in Argentina and branch of an international network.

Notably, the PTS has gained an important insertion within the industrial and service sectors of the working class, winning new trade union delegates and left shop-floor committees, and playing a leading role in key workers' struggles during the Kirchner period: The Jabon Federal soap factory, Mafissa fiber factory, Kraft Foods, the Lear auto parts plant, Donnelley Graphics, and subcontracted railway workers, to name a few examples.

Resistance against Macri and new tests for the left

The influence of the FIT did not appear out of nowhere. It is an expression of the persistent struggle of the working-class left, which has differentiated itself from both Kirchnerism and the right-wing opposition by actively intervening and taking up a key role in a period of evolution, which saw the advancement in political consciousness of certain sectors of the vanguard and youth.

The current bleak conditions of capitalist crisis have yet to generate major advances in working-class independent political consciousness; for ten to fifteen years, the anti-neoliberal discontent that once predominated in South America was channeled through governments that employed a "progressive, anti-neoliberal" discourse.

The FIT can be credited with the enormous feat of transforming into an electoral reference that expresses class independence and calls for a workers' government -- something that is not evident in other countries, where the majority of the left has taken the form of coalitions and parties that espouse reformist programs within capitalist production, like Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain, Die Linke in Germany, and the Left Bloc in Portugal; and in South America, governing parties that promote the subordination of workers and peasants to the national bourgeoisie, like the PSUV in Venezuela or the MAS in Bolivia; in Brazil, the reformist politics of currents that form the PSOL are



dominating, with sectors that have ceded extensively to the right-wing opposition that is currently implementing an institutional coup against Dilma.

After having developed into an independent alternative to the Kirchnerist government and the bourgeois opposition, the FIT now faces the challenge of leading the resistance to Macri's right-wing government through United Front tactics with working-class organizations. The challenge is especially heavy for the PTS, as a result of its position of leadership and influence within the FIT, with Nicolás del Caño as the main figure of the left.

Overall, the Macri administration aims to slow down inflation through more recession, which will exacerbate unemployment. According to the polls, inflation and unemployment are the main concerns of the Argentinean people, who increasingly consider Macri's Cambiemos coalition the "government for the rich." The recent incrimination of President Macri and several members of his cabinet in the Panama Papers scandal only reinforced this idea.

However, despite these numerous, unmistakably market-friendly measures, it is difficult to say which element will act as catalyst for economic growth in a regional context of escalating economic crisis, with the deepening political conflict in Brazil and a larger global context of generalized recession.

The right-wing government is currently rising to the seat of power—not as a result of defeats in the realm of class struggle, but rather, from the exhaustion of "diversionary" governments as well as the working class' relative weakness to act as an independent political subject. The landscape is marked by an international economic crisis that is extending into its eighth year with few signs of dissipating. The era of high prices for raw materials is a thing of the past. The workers' movement has undergone reconfiguration and now contains a left minority that has gained experiences of struggle in the past years.

For the bourgeoisie, having one of their own personnel at the head of the government poses an important inconvenience: there is no pretense of popular representation. When discontent breaks out, those who hold real power will be recognized as directly responsible for the people's grievances. Cristina Kirchner launched the Citizen's Front precisely to address that potential. The idea is to coalesce the forces of the Peronist Justicialist Party (PJ), the union bureaucracy, and lead a domesticated, contained, and preventative opposition against the Macri government.

As mentioned before, Macri's attacks have multiplied exponentially during his first months as president-elect. According to *Tendencias Economicas*, there were a total of 127 thousand dismissals in the public and priva-

te sector in just the first few months of 2016. Although no major struggles have taken place, there have been countless denunciations and dispersed conflicts. The central trade union confederations would be taking a real step forward in resisting the nationwide austerity measures if they were to initiate a real plan of action, beginning with an all-out general strike. However, the divided Peronist bureaucracy of the General Confederation of Labor (CGT) has so far guaranteed a truce with the Macri government. Although the potential power of public sector workers was revealed in the February 24 mobilization, the bureaucracy has limited itself to feeble, isolated actions.

The PTS and the FIT are elbow-to-elbow with the working class in all of these battles, driving the regroupment of the working-class vanguard to struggle within the trade unions and oppose the union bureaucracy's truce, to instead force the capitalists to pay for the crisis. This effort reaches beyond workers who are organized within the trade union confederations to align with the struggles of precarious and unemployed workers, the women's movement, and the combative sectors of the youth. The task today is to utilize the experience and galvanization of the masses who are fighting Macri's austerity policies to forge a revolutionary tool for workers to win.

SYRIZA AND PODEMOS: THE ONLY “CHANGE” POSSIBLE?



JOSEFINA MARTÍNEZ AND DIEGO LOTITO
TRANSLATION: JUAN CRUZ FERRE

Syriza and Podemos emerged in Southern Europe in the context of a deep capitalist crisis and a concomitant crisis of the political regimes. Both political formations occupied the vacant space left by the decline in popularity of European social democracies, who are responsible for rigorously implementing the neoliberal agenda against workers and youth over the last decades.

The full expression of these formations was preceded by the buildup of generalized rejection of the traditional parties of the “extreme center” (in Tariq Ali’s words), which had developed an incestuous relationship with power. This, along with the resistance in the streets, fostered electoral illusions in the neo-reformist parties. A large part of the international left pointed to Syriza and Podemos as

models for a new possible, renewed Left; one adapted to our times.

However, it has not taken long for both organizations to demonstrate their narrow limits and failure to become instruments of change. Confronted with the test of power, they turned into moderate social-democratic projects –a reformism without reforms. They have utterly abandoned any questioning of the status quo and the real powers of capitalism.

A Greek Tragedy

A meeting with Chinese businessmen to negotiate the terms of privatization of Piraeus, the largest port in Greece; drastic cuts to pensions and public spending in order to comply with the Troika; a joint press conference

with NATO officials to defend military operations in the Aegean Sea; an agreement with Turkey to expel refugees; police crackdowns on demonstrations. These are some of the actions taken by the government of Alexis Tsipras just in the last month.

Since the onset of the Syriza government, the workers and youth of Greece have already held three general strikes, along with strikes of government employees, seafarers, and press workers, youth mobilizations and protests by peasants and retirees. Greeks are returning to the struggle, taking to the streets and fighting a party that many of them voted into power barely over a year ago.

They voted for Syriza with the hope of putting an end to decades of neoliberalism and austerity and winning back better living

conditions. However, in the span of 6 months, Syriza capitulated to the Troika and adopted its neoliberal discourse of “there is no alternative.” Syriza adopted their politics, too.

On March 8, an important meeting between Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu took place in Esmirna. The two reached a deal that led to the EU-Turkey agreement for the mass expulsion of refugees from Greece back to Turkey.

Since then, thousands of European police officers and agents of Turkey’s security forces have arrived in Greece to jointly carry out these deportations. The Greek government aims to evict millions of refugees living in inhumane conditions on the border of Macedonia and across the Greek islands. Refugee centers have been turned into open air prisons where men, women and children are incarcerated.

Europe has closed its borders to hundreds of thousands of refugees desperately fleeing the war in Syria. The central role of the Syriza government in this racist and criminal joint operation represents its second great capitulation.

Some of Syriza’s defenders argue that the Greek government had no other option; that it does not have the resources to accept any more refugees, given the harsh budget cuts imposed by the Troika. But the fact is, Syriza did not need to accept those neoliberal policies. Moreover, the government has not just accepted this racist agreement, but has turned itself into its defender and enforcer. This is tragic.

At the March 8 meeting, Tsipras cheerfully handed out flowers and called on people to have confidence in the treaty with Turkey. Just days earlier, the Turkish government brutally repressed protesters at an International Women’s Day demonstration. Tsipras did not utter a word about the crackdown; nor did he mention the massacre that the Turkish military is carrying out against the Kurds or the repression and the persecution of the opposition press. It seems that these topics are best left unmentioned if one does not want to lose “good allies.”

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg visited Athens in April and held a joint press conference with Alexis Tsipras. The Syriza leader urged NATO to expand its naval missions in the Aegean Sea to prevent thousands of refugees from arriving on the Greek Islands and for the international institution “to show its credibility and its effectiveness” in the face of pressing challenges.

The Greek Left and the social movements have historically demanded that the country withdraw from NATO and shut down its military bases. The Syriza government has abandoned this program and now defends NATO operations along the Greek coast that seal off European borders from refugees.

Sweeping privatizations, pension cuts, repression and a reactionary foreign policy. The Syriza government’s abandonment of its stated goals brutally demonstrates the limits of a reformist strategy in the context of European imperialist capitalism.

Podemos, a degraded illusion

Just like Syriza, Podemos in Spain is the expression of the diversion and blockade of the rising class struggle that followed the capitalist crisis. The bureaucratic leadership of the workers’ movement and reformist political apparatus were key players in containing and diverting the resistance to “electoral illusions.” Podemos was the political crystallization of this illusion.

Since its origins, Pablo Iglesias’ party differed in many ways from classic reformism, where party structure and recruitment of working-class elements prevailed. Instead, Podemos emerged as a “broad” organization: reliant on “video politics” and well-known media figures like Pablo Iglesias. Thus from its inception, the leadership has always reserved enormous autonomy from its base. The circles of rank-and-file members have since disintegrated and lost all decision-making power. The leadership imposed a conservative revision of the party’s already moderate program, and then embraced a populist discourse and a plebiscite method of online voting. Along the way, Pablo Iglesias forced his former allies of Izquierda Anticapitalista (IA) to dissolve their organisation (which later became the Anticapitalistas movement) as a requirement for staying in Podemos. The IA’s leadership unconditionally surrendered without a fight.

The Podemos leadership was convinced that it could take power in one fell swoop, and massively overestimated the potential of its increasingly moderate discourse --one which denied the need for mobilization and class struggle as a part of the political struggle. However, despite its success at local elections and the remarkable results in the December 20 elections, the rise of Podemos was not enough to surpass the vote of the Socialist Party of Spain (PSOE). One could argue that Podemos has fallen into its own trap: the fragmentation of social mobilization has helped the PSOE to avoid “pasokification” (total collapse a la PASOK in Greece) and maintained a higher vote than Podemos was capable of.

Since its initial breakthrough onto the political scene in the European elections of 2014, Podemos undergone through numerous stages. Initially, it took the form of a pure expression of the illusion of politics: propagating the possibility to revive democracy and escape the crisis while staying within the framework of the capitalist system and liberal democracy.

On this basis, Podemos, Izquierda Unida

and other “citizen” or grassroots platforms originated in the 15M (indignados) movement served as vehicles for a gradualist illusion that peaked during the 2015 municipal elections. In major cities throughout Spain, Podemos’ and other left platforms’ citizen-candidates were elected to various local governments. Soon after, their first tests of power demonstrated the insurmountable limits of neo-reformism.

With their embedded logic of controlling the State, these candidates quickly began to confine themselves to the margins of what is possible within their processes of change. Their absolute respect for capitalist legality and the “sacred” property of the banks prevents them from carrying out the social measures they pledged to implement. We have seen this in Madrid and Barcelona, where these candidates renounced their previous demands of non-payment of debt and re-municipalization of privatized public services. Moreover, these governments have directly come into confrontation with workers in struggle. Barcelona Mayor Ada Colau urged local subway workers to call off their strike even before they sat down negotiate. In the last few weeks, the government has orchestrated ruthless police raids against undocumented migrants who work as street vendors --a repressive policy that mirrors right-wing governments.

After the December elections, Podemos made a qualitative leap in its “turn to moderation” when it adopted a completely conciliatory policy towards the social-liberal PSOE, calling them to jointly form a government. This failed attempt was the catalyst for an internal crisis that was only resolved with “purges” and battles within the apparatus-methods which resembled those of Stalinism and bourgeois political manoeuvring.

For two months following the elections, Podemos tried to form a government pact with the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE). Pablo Iglesias initially wanted the Vice Presidency for himself, along with several ministries. With this objective in mind, he abandoned all programmatic principles during the negotiations and put forward a minimal social democratic terms. Ultimately, the PSOE opted for a pact with the new center-right Ciudadanos in an attempt to form a government of the “political center.” However, since no party or coalition has been able to achieve a simple majority in Congress, new elections will most likely take place in June.

In the case of new elections, Podemos has reached a preliminary agreement with Izquierda Unida (United Left) to appear on the same ticket: a marriage of convenience where no discussion takes place around the political program. What is also true is that they do not differ in their embrace of a gradualist strategy, which leaves the door open for them to form a government of progress.

In other words, Podemos may end up

forming government with a party that has applied harsh cuts and neoliberal austerity measures against the working class, a party that has been one of the pillars of the political regime since 1978, and a representative of the corrupt “political caste” the leaders of Podemos once denounced.

Podemos’ proposal to join forces with the PSOE and form a “government of change” nurtures the illusion that some kind of change is possible with this social-liberal party. Furthermore, it would catalyze a bourgeois regeneration of the political regime, which is now submerged in a deep crisis. This strategy, which leads inevitably back to the old experience of social democracy, is presented as the only possible alternative, the “lesser evil” – a testament to the degradation of illusions that arose at the time of the 15M movement.

A new anti-capitalist revolutionary hypothesis

Despite their political and organizational differences and particular developments over the past few years, both Syriza and Podemos have defended a program and strategy of reforming capitalism within the boundaries of parliamentary democracy. They have appealed to an eclectic mix of ideas taken from the arsenal of Eurocommunism, old Social Democracy and Post-Marxism. But at least Eurocommunism and the reformist left of the 1970s redefined socialism as the broadening and development of bourgeois democracy, the only way to avoid falling into a

totalitarian conception of society and secure a “democratic road to socialism.” The new version of reformism renounced this ultimate goal as well.

In the absence of organic relations with broad sections of the workers’ movement on top of decades of neoliberal advances and retreat of the working class worldwide, the leaders of Syriza and Podemos do not even advance the idea of socialism as political goal. They instead undertake the more narrow and senile objective of a return to the welfare state and a revival of social democracy. Although these new renditions of reformism are far removed from the bureaucratized party apparatuses of the historical social democrats and Stalinist community parties, their program and strategy contain much of “the bad” in them (starting with their reformist strategy) and none of the “good” (their implantation in the mass organizations of the working class).

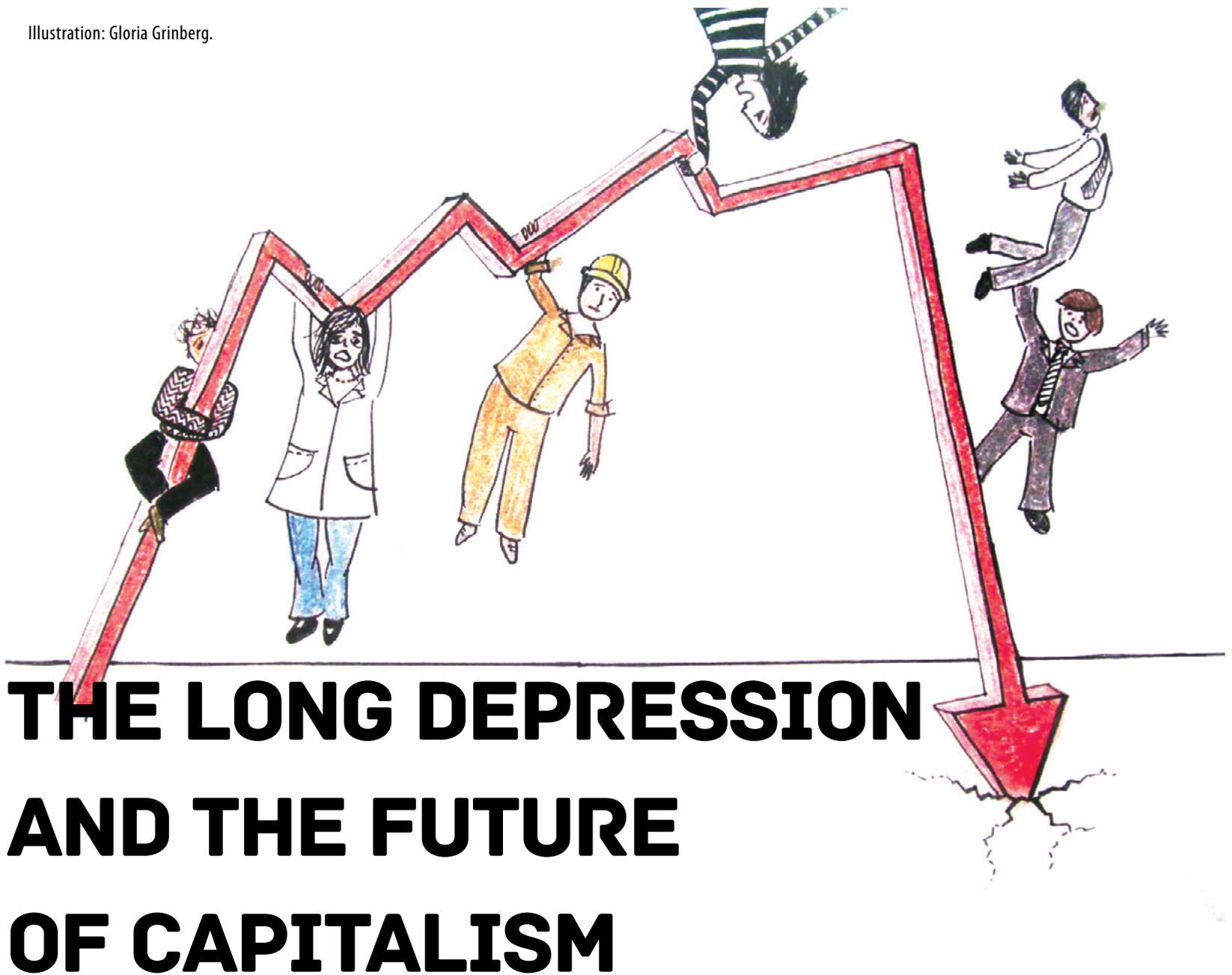
The strategic poverty of the leadership of Syriza and Podemos also applies to the politics of the “critical” sectors within them. While Syriza’s dissident elements were stronger and better organized as a tendency, they still defended a return to Nicos Poulantzas’ strategy of combining positions internal and external to the State in order to advance a process of radicalizing democracy. This ultimately means being incorporated into reformist organizations and adapting to their strategy and program. This perspective erases the idea of revolution as a moment of rupture.

It is the logical outcome of abandoning the insurrectional hypothesis as well as the path of revolutionary mass mobilization, the centrality of the working class, and the necessity of building revolutionary parties with an internationalist and socialist program.

Experience has shown that in a very short period, far from combatting the reformist and “statist” deviations of Podemos and Syriza, these policies have contributed to the strategic disarmament of the working-class and popular sectors when the task is to break with the machinery of the capitalist state and fight the attacks of the bourgeoisie.

With the failure of neo-reformism, it has become a vital task to develop an anti-capitalist, revolutionary project in Europe. In Spain, there are new promising initiatives like the No Time to Lose campaign (“No Hay Tiempo Que Perder”), which Clase contra Clase, independent activists, and other radical left organizations have launched together. This initiative is an attempt to regroup all those who agree with the need to take up a working-class, anti-capitalist program. No Time to Lose is a nascent and modest initiative, but with great potential to take strong steps toward the construction of a political front across Spain; one that rejects the strategy of both old and new reformism, the regime that was restored back in 1978; one which takes up the challenge of laying the groundwork for a genuine alternative for workers, women, and youth.

Illustration: Gloria Grinberg.



In this interview with Marxist economist Michael Roberts he discusses the concepts from his new book and argues that the world economy today remains in the grips of a “long depression,” one which started with the crisis of 2008.

Michael Roberts is one of the most prolific marxist writers on the economic crisis that began in 2007.

The title of your upcoming new book is *The Long Depression*. The book begins by stating that “the global economy remains in the throes of a depression.” Considering that most analysts of global economy speak of the “great recession” beginning in 2008 and ending in 2009 – followed by a period of extremely weak growth – what elements lead you to believe that the world economy is undergoing a “long depression”?

In my book, I try to make a distinction between a so-called ‘normal recession’ and a depression. Capitalist production does not expand in a harmonious way, with steady growth of investment, output, incomes and employment. It is subject to booms and slumps in a recurring and cyclical process. The cycle of boom and slump (when investment collapses and output and employment contracts) usually occurs every 8-10 years in modern economies. The degree of contraction varies.

However, in the history of modern industrial capitalism over the last 150 years, there are just a few times when the slump is very deep and long-lasting and the ‘recovery’ afterwards is so weak that the previous rates of growth in output and investment are never fully restored. These periods are what I define as ‘depressions’ in the book. Capitalism (and the rest of us) have suffered three depressions in the last 150 years. The depression of the late 19th century (1873-1890s); the Great Depression of the 1930s (1929-1942) and now what I call the Long Depression (2008-20??).

Recessions come along regularly because of what I call the cycle of profitability. What decides whether capitalist companies invest is whether the investment will make a profit. Companies do not invest or produce things or services in order to provide what people need. That is secondary. Capitalism is a money-making, profit-making mode of production. No profit, no investment, no production. This creates a fundamental contradiction in the capitalist process of investment and output.

Capitalists can only get profit by employing the blood, sweat and effort of workers who

own nothing but their ability to work. Capitalists are competing against each other on the market to sell the products or services for the maximum profit. This forces them to try and squeeze wages to their lowest and make workers work as long and as hard as possible. Capitalists also try to introduce labor-saving machines that cut the size of the labor force while increasing the productivity of the remaining workers. Costs per hour are reduced and capitalists with the latest labor-saving technology can get a better profit than others on the market.

But if everybody introduces the same technology, that means the labor force shrinks relative to the value of machinery being employed. On the one hand the productivity of the labor force is rising, but on the other hand, the value exploited from the labor force tends to shrink (relatively). Thus, there is a tendency for the overall rate of profit from investing in technology and the labor force to fall. This is the fundamental contradiction of capitalist production because it is production for profit, not needs. Capitalists invest more to boost profit; that boosts productivity and production, but after a while the profitability of invested capital starts to fall. At a certain point, more investment means less profit and capitalists stop investing and there is a slump. As I said, this seems to happen every 8-10 years or so.

But more than this, the tendency of the rate of profit to fall as capitalism develops across the world eventually leads to a long-term fall. The profitability of capital in all the major economies was much higher in the 19th century or at the end of WWII than it is now. That is a sign that capitalism has a limited shelf life in the history of human social organization. But profitability does not fall in a straight line. There are periods when the profitability of capital rises (for up to two decades) and then a period when it falls (for up to two decades). A depression happens (every 50-70 years or so) because of a set of contradictions: a down phase in profitability, falling product prices, the collapse of a credit bubble in finance and property; i.e. a number of things come together to turn a recession into a depression, as we have seen since 2008.

Following up on your response to the first question, what is your appraisal of the period of crisis ending the post-WWII economic boom and the recovery that took place beginning in the '80s, often described by mainstream economist as the "Great Moderation"?

World War II allowed for a massive destruction of capital values (not just physical as in

Europe and Japan), but also in value (as in the US) as well as a sharp rise in the rate of exploitation. Thus after the war, the rate of profit in the US and eventually elsewhere was very high, new technology developed during the war and massive supplies of surplus labor plus credit from US finance laid the basis for a long boom (1946-65). However eventually, Marx's law of profitability began to exert its influence and profitability fell sharply from 1965 culminating in two major recessions, 1974-5 and 1980-2.

These slumps weakened the working class and gave an opportunity for the ruling class to impose neo-liberal policies of anti-labor laws, spending cuts, tax cuts for corporations, relaxation of regulations on finance and business etc. Profitability rose from 1980s to the late 1990s; globalization of capital spread and we had the Great Moderation. This could not last, however, and Marx's law began to dominate again from the late 1990s, leading eventually to the Great Recession.

On your blog, you point out that the U.S. economy is likely to enter a recession next year. What are the structural contradictions you observe in US economy, and how are they related to the possibility of a recession in 2017?

To be more careful in forecasting (a difficult and some say impossible task), I said that another recession or slump is likely within one to three years. Say there is a 20% chance in 2016, but a 75% chance by 2018. I think this will happen because capitalist investment globally remains too weak to restore output growth and employment globally. Indeed, every month, the international economic agencies like the IMF or the OECD or the World Bank lower their estimates for global GDP growth for the next year or so. Even the US economy, which has made a better relative recovery since the Great Recession of 2008-9, is growing in real terms by little more than 2% a year, compared to its long-term average of 3.3% a year. Europe is hardly growing above 1% as is Japan. China, the great growth miracle of the last 30 years with double-digit annual growth, is struggling to grow at more than 5-6% a year, while the other major 'emerging economies' of Brazil, Russia, South Africa are in recessions.

The failure to recover is due mainly to two structural contradictions. The first is that the profitability of capital has not been restored to its previous levels before the Great Recession. Even then, profitability in the major economies was in a downwave from a peak in the late 1990s and is now well below the level of profitability achieved in the so-called

Golden Age of post-war capitalism (1948-1965). That keeps investment low and thus productivity growth is very weak and there is no full employment. Capitalism can break out of this low profitability in only one way – by cutting the cost of capital. But that means closing down old plants and equipment, letting weaker capitalist companies go bust, mopping up their assets cheaply and laying off workers (in other words, another slump).

Second, one of the major triggers or causes of the Great Recession was the huge expansion of credit and speculation in property and financial instruments before the global financial crash in 2007-8. This was a response of capitalists to the falling profitability of productive capital outlined above. Investors looked to better returns in financial speculation or in what Marx called 'fictitious capital', the ownership in stocks and bonds of a portion in what productive capital might make in profit. When the banks collapsed because this fictitious capital turned out to be just that - fictitious -, governments had to step in and bail them out. The alternative would have been an even deeper slump. But that meant governments had to issue more debt and raise more revenue in taxes and cuts in government spending and services.

Capitalism was saved (although it is still crawling along) by huge injections of money and credit by governments and central banks. As a result, overall debt (private and public sector) has not fallen globally; on the contrary, it has risen even more.

So capitalism is in a state of low profitability, low investment and high debt. That's the combination for a weak recovery. All the attempts of the central banks and governments to get economies going have failed. The depression can only be broken by another slump that gets rid of 'unproductive' capital and reduces the debt burden through debt defaults. There is worse to come!

When it comes to the recovery of the US economy since 2008/09, there appears to be a sharp contrast between the recovery in service sectors (including finance) and the production of industrial goods, the latter being somewhat weaker. What is your assessment of the situation?

Yes, in each of the major economies, the so-called domestic service sectors are doing a bit better than the industrial and manufacturing sectors. That's because households and consumers can still borrow at very low rates of interest and so can spend more even though wage growth is feeble. That helps retail, services, construction, property etc.

But the key manufacturing sector growth is

very weak and even falling: there is limited investment here and world trade has ground to halt. Will the services sectors get the industrial sectors going or vice versa? The latter are smaller as a share of GDP but the latter are the most important for driving investment in productive assets and productivity. Investment there is what matters, not the consumers going to the shops.

What is your opinion of the debate on secular stagnation?

Secular stagnation is an explanation of the current Long Depression from the Keynesian wing of mainstream economics. I have covered this in detail in various posts on my blog. It is a return to the idea that what is wrong with capitalism right now is that it is suffering from a lack of demand for goods and is caught in a 'liquidity trap' where even low or zero interest rates cannot get the economy going because investment is being held back.

The proponents of this theory claim that under secular (long term) stagnation, continual injections of money or lower interest rates will just cause more credit bubbles in the stock market and not achieve any real recovery. What is needed is fiscal stimulus and investment. That is correct, but secular stagnation theorists do not explain why there is stagnation (it just has happened). The reason is as I explained in the previous answers: low profitability and high debt. Also, stagnation implies some slow and unending pace due to low productivity and slowing population growth. There is no understanding of the role of profit and how it affects investment in the theory.

You point out that we are going through a severe long depression. However, you don't seem to discard the possibility that a recovery could happen after a very deep sinking. Isn't a very extended destruction of capital value necessary to clear the path for a recovery? How do you consider this destruction could take place?

Nothing is permanent. There is no permanent crisis in capitalism or in any system. I argue that for global capitalism to get out of this long depression, there will have to be another slump that raises the profitability of capital and reduces the burden of debt. But then capitalists can start to increase investment, particularly in all the exciting new technologies like artificial intelligence, robots, genetic medicine, nano technology, 3D printers, driverless cars etc.

Capitalism could enter a period of upwave in profitability and growth that could last for 20 years. But yes, this is only possible after a

further destruction of capital value of major proportions not seen since WWII (but not through war this time). It will only be possible if the working class in the major economies do nothing to replace the capitalist system through a class struggle.

Regarding the level of destruction of capital value that would require a recovery of world economy, how do you consider it feasible in the absence of a cataclysm like WWII? Considering that the question of war (especially among Great Powers) is an aspect of debate in Marxism today, why would you consider that an event of such magnitude is out of the picture?

Yes, I do think it is feasible for capitalism to recover to another 'golden age' without another world war (there are of course wars everywhere every day under imperialism). The depression of the late 19th century came to an end without a world war, although the recovery in the 1890s onwards was based on a battle between imperialist powers for colonies that eventually led to WW1. But as I said previously, the current Long Depression will not end without another slump at least. If there is no action by the working class in the major economies, the ruling classes will be able to revive their economies again on the backs of the workers. However, the imperialist rivalry will intensify, with the conflict with China and India becoming key from the 2020s onwards. But the ruling class in the US and its allies would want to avoid a world war (it's bad for business) and it could only happen if fascist or military regimes were to gain power in the US, Japan etc.

An important debate in recent times concerns the future of China, and whether it is on the way to transforming into a great power in every sense, or if it remains a dependent economy dominated by imperialism, no matter how big and central to the dynamic of the world economy it has turned out to be. How would you define the position of China in the world capitalist system? Related to that, what role do you consider China has played in sustaining economic growth from 2009 onwards?

I have been discussing this issue of the role of China and imperialism in general recently on my blog with many comments from various readers. China has been an economic miracle, growing faster for longer than any other economy in human history, taking hundreds of millions out of dire poverty since 1949. It is now the world's largest manufacturer and the second largest economy in GDP (but not in income per head). This was made possible

by the expropriation of the landlords and capitalist lackeys of imperialism in the revolution and civil war of 1946-9. A predominantly state-owned economy with a national plan for investment proved way more successful than capitalism could be in China. The opening-up of sections of the economy to foreign capitalist investment, while the state remained dominant, also took the economy forward from the 1980s.

But further growth is hampered by an authoritarian regime that allows no democratic freedoms and toys with the idea of moving to outright capitalist domination of the economy with its leaders as billionaires.

The post-war development of China has been the result of the failure (so far) of imperialism to gain control of the Chinese economy. The state and the party bureaucrats still dominate investment, employment and trade, much to the chagrin of the economists and governments of the West. During this Long Depression, China's predominantly state-owned and controlled economy has contributed the bulk of economic growth globally while the West has faltered. But the weakness of global growth and the increased influence of pro-capitalist policy makers in China has brought a major slowdown that threatens the future progress of the economy.

Do you believe there is any possibility for world capital to find some equivalent of the role China has played since the 80s as a provider of cheap labor?

Capitalism is always seeking new avenues for sucking value out of working people. The globalization of the labor force into the capitalist mode of production after the 1980s was a powerful factor in counteracting the fall in profitability of capital that the major imperialist economies suffered in the 1970s. Exploiting new sources of labor in Asia, Latin America, Africa and in the post-Soviet economies was significant.

Also the world's reserve army of labor in peasants, rural laborers and under-employed urbanites is not yet exhausted. There is nothing like China's labor force, but that could not be utilized fully for capitalist profit anyway. However there is still more value to be extracted from India, Burma, Vietnam, Indonesia, Brazil, Africa etc.

Capitalism is not dead yet.

INTERVIEWED BY PAULA BACH AND ESTEBAN MERCATANTE



CUBA AFTER OBAMA: CLOSER TO CAPITALISM?

CLAUDIA CINATTI
TRANSLATION: SEAN ROBERTSON

In Cuba, two unprecedented events took place in the span of one week: Barack Obama became the first US President to visit the island in over 80 years, and the Rolling Stones played a free open air concert just 10 minutes away from Revolution Plaza. These events, while different in nature and political meaning, have both added to the sense of imminent change that seems to be taking over Havana. For better or worse, this change signals that the future of the Cuban revolution is at stake. Despite the fatalism of many, the final outcome is still an open question and yet to be decided. This will depend not only on what happens in Cuba, but also on international dynamics.

A historic visit

From the stage at the Ciudad Deportiva, Mick Jagger broke into impromptu Spanish: “We know that years ago it was difficult to

listen to our music here in Cuba, but here we are, playing for you in your beautiful land. I think that finally things have changed, haven’t they?” About 500,000 Cubans cheered euphorically, still incredulous at what they were seeing live.

Days earlier, President Obama also forced some Spanish, declaring, “The future of Cuba must be in the hands of the Cuban people!” during his speech at the Gran Teatro in Havana. Those who waited for the equivalent of Ronald Reagan’s “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” were sorely disappointed. Yet more important than this is the sympathy being generated for the Commander in Chief of Empire.

For the Cuban regime, allowing the Rolling Stones to play a free concert was a simple choice. But it is still too soon to assess the exact consequences of Obama’s visit. The resumption of diplomatic and trade relations

with the United States is now part of the Cuban government’s official policy. The hope is that the economic blockade, which has caused over \$120 billion dollars in losses, will be lifted. This much is very likely. However, with his deliberate and well-planned gestures, Obama has painted a friendly face on imperialism. He quickly gained popularity and even appeared on Cuba’s most-watched TV program.

That is precisely the charm of “soft power” – disguising an offensive strategy with a friendly tactic. In Cuba’s case, the objective is to empower the pro-capitalist sectors that are slowly being bred within society and the State. By these means, United States will achieve the “regime change” it has sought out and failed to achieve in over half a century of imperialist hostility. This policy seems even more attractive when you take into account the fact that by 2018, neither the Castro brothers nor

the old guard of the revolution will hold executive governmental positions.

Perhaps in an attempt to counter the effect of this propaganda coup, Granma published a series of articles that came out against US policy soon after Obama's departure. The most important account was Fidel Castro's balance sheet of the visit.¹ Castro sought to mitigate the heightened enthusiasm and reminded his readers that, despite Obama's gracious manners and endearing words, US imperialism is still Cuba's main enemy and that its strategy is the colonial subjugation of the island – just like Spain before it.

The tactical agreement between Obama and Castro

For the United States, the “normalization” of diplomatic relations is part of a general orientation of foreign policy – the so-called Obama doctrine. According to this model, within the current balance of forces, the most appropriate means of lessening the intensity of potentially explosive conflicts is through diplomacy. This is the approach that we have seen in relation to the Iran nuclear deal as well as in support for the peace agreement that Cuba hosted between the Colombian Government and the FARC. It is another way of securing imperial interests and rebuilding the weakened international leadership of the United States. In this same bloc is Pope Francis, who preceded Obama's visit to Cuba, along with the island's Catholic Church. The Pope was a main architect of the rapprochement between the two countries.

All Latin American governments, even the ardently pro-imperialist, have rejected the economic embargo and incorporated Cuba into their regional institutions and commercial trading blocs. The United States is the only country grasping onto a policy of isolating Cuba. With Obama's shift, the US will take advantage of the new situation in the region -- namely, the end of the cycle of populist governments and economic decline – to regain ground lost over the past decade in its historic backyard.

The main opposition to this Cuba-friendly policy and the lifting of the economic embargo is the hard right of the Republican Party along with the most recalcitrant sectors of the Miami gusanos and their Cuban dissident allies (some of whom have made very lucrative businesses out of the embargo). However the younger generations of exiles no longer subscribe to this hard line. Support for the blockade has fallen dramatically (from 87

percent in 1991 to 48 percent in 2014) and it continues to fall. Even prominent gusanos like Carlos Gutiérrez, the former Secretary of Commerce under George W. Bush, are now campaigning for an end to the embargo.

This will undoubtedly have repercussions in the upcoming presidential election. Traditionally, the Cuban exiles have been the Republican's electoral base, and Republican candidate Ted Cruz's presidential campaign included the continuation of the economic embargo. However, Obama was able to gain the support of important individuals and Cuban-American businesspeople, winning the state of Florida in 2008 and 2012. The Democratic Party hopes to repeat this result with Hillary Clinton.

Obama's ultimate goal is to use the seductive power of goods and capital to develop a material force with the potential to tear down what is left of the property relations established by the revolution and the political monopoly of the Communist Party. The newest development in US policy towards Cuba, seen as a betrayal by the rabidly anti-Communist Cuban “dissidents” is that its minimum objective is to settle for a model of restoration the likes of Vietnam or China, pushing for political liberalization without making this a condition for doing business. For now, that means accepting the leadership of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC).

The fact is, Obama's minimum objective coincides neatly with the Cuban state apparatus' plan – including Raul Castro and the majority in the PCC – which, in short, can be summed up as a “gradual economic opening plus PCC control.” Thus, the supposed thaw is a mutually beneficial deal – for the time being.

Is Cuba inexorably heading towards capitalist restoration?

For those who uncritically support the policies of the Cuban regime, merely asking if Cuba is heading towards capitalist restoration amounts to playing the game of the right and imperialism. There is no remedy for those who do not want to think. At the other extreme, some left currents argue that capitalism has already been restored in Cuba and the task at hand is to overthrow the dictatorial regime similar to the ones that have plagued Latin America in the past.² This position places them in the same political front as the Miami gusanos and imperialism (before Obama adopted his current stance).

The reality is much more complex. Since the end of the Soviet Union, the Cuban regime

has alternated between opening and centralizing the economy in response to the backlash from changing internal and external conditions.

In the 90s, during the “special period of peace,” there was an economic opening alongside an iron grip over social life by the State. Mixed businesses and small property ownership were legalized, and with the exception of the areas of health, education and defense, the mechanisms of state economic planning were suspended.³ This move practically dismantled the state monopoly on foreign trade. The 1995 foreign investment law was enacted, which allowed for Free Trade Zones with exceptional conditions for capital. The government also implemented “business development,” a type of management with capitalist criteria of profitability and efficiency. This was alongside the payment of wages based on productivity and incentives.

At the beginning of 2003, in the context of changing international economic conditions and the rise of populism in Latin America, the pendulum swung back towards centralization. Cuba received strong economic support from Chavez in Venezuela through subsidized oil and the purchase of Cuban medical services at preferential prices. During Fidel's final period in government (the “Battle of Ideas”), the volume of the self-employed sector, joint enterprises, and foreign direct investment shrank. Although the structural measures adopted during the special period were not reversed the State regained control of areas of the economy by reintroducing state bureaucratic planning and the centralization of foreign exchange. This directly affected foreign trade although it did not restore the previous 100% state monopoly (that mostly exists in practice).

Raul Castro's rise to power and the international economic crisis of 2008 occurred alongside a process of economic reforms called “Updating the Model.”⁴ These policies were based on a gradual, sustained reintroduction of capitalist relations in certain areas of the economy. This course was accelerated by the oil crisis and the enormous difficulties facing Venezuela, one of Cuba's the main economic supporters. Measures that allow for greater social and cultural freedoms were passed and the government no longer required direct authorization for foreign travel (though this is still limited by the difficulty of obtaining overseas visas and the high costs that preclude travel for most of the population).

However, similar measures did not take place in the political arena. The document adopted by the Sixth Congress of the PCC in 2011, Economic Policy Guidelines for the Party and the Revolution, aimed primarily at shoring up the emerging non-State sector. Since then, important changes have occurred in the economic and social structure of the island: the self-employed sector has expanded, around 500,000 state employees have been laid off (part of a plan to dismiss more than one million workers), along with cuts to ration cards and the expansion of private “usufruct.”⁵ This allows farmers or co-operatives to work unused government land and keep or sell the produce without affecting the property structure. The private sale of housing has also been authorized, sparking a process of capitalist accumulation in real estate, mainly for the purchase of properties to rent to tourists. In 2014 a new foreign investment law was passed which provides more ways to attract elusive foreign capital.⁶ This law maintains the ban on the direct hiring of Cuban workers by firms, but allows them to be hired through a special state agency that keeps the bulk of the earned wages. It is expected that the Seventh Party Congress (which will occur as this article goes to print) will reaffirm this course, although this is more speculation than certainty as the Congress documents have not been made public. The economic situation is complicated. The regime has yet to deal with the dual currency system of the national peso (CUP) and convertible peso (CUC) and the dual exchange rate, which sets U.S. dollar-CUP parity for business and 24 CUPs to the dollar for the public. The result of these oscillations is not neutral. On the one hand, the fact that the process has been gradual, and up to now at a snail’s pace, has prevented the generalization of the capitalist relations which have started to develop in certain areas of the economy. Even today, state ownership of the means of production is predominant: between 75 and 80 percent of the economy remains within the orbit of the State, which also continues to govern the mechanisms for control of foreign trade. At the same time, this gradual introduction of capitalist relations is utilizing pragmatic measures to implement a scheme of capitalist restoration à la Vietnam (praised by the ruling party leadership) that preserves the political monopoly of the Communist Party.⁷

The principle restorationist forces are within the State – in particular at the top of the hierarchy of the Revolutionary Armed Forces

(FAR), the Cuban military. There is also a substantial base in a minority sector of the self-employed that are benefitting from primitive accumulation.⁸ Of the two proto-capitalist forces, those embedded within the FAR are undoubtedly decisive. These military leaders play a central role in both the economy and government. Their cadre are filling management positions at capitalist companies. The FAR’s main business is the holding company called Grupo de Administración Empresarial, SA (GAESA - Enterprise Management Group), which is in charge of tourism businesses, hotels, transportation (Cubanacán, Gaviota, Cubataxi, etc.), foreign currency recuperation stores (TDR-Caribe y Panamericana) chains of foreign currency exchange (CUC) stores as well as Almacenes Universales (Universal Storage, which operates in the Special Development Zone at the port of Mariel).

Another holding company is the Cuban Export-Import Corporation (CIMEX). Its operations include the provision of immigration documents, control of remittances, management of travel agencies (ie., Havanatur), car rentals (Havanautos), and the Cuban oil company (CUPET),⁹ as well as retail stores, “paladares” (restaurants owned by the self-employed), bars, and other businesses. This is not to mention the specific companies that deal with areas of defense and communication. Heading up all these businesses is General Luis Alberto Rodríguez López-Callejas, the son-in-law (or former son-in-law) of Raúl Castro.¹⁰

Along with high-ranking state officials, the FAR hierarchy enjoys access to privileges forbidden for the rest of the population. They live in military neighborhoods complete with resorts and marinas, and have access to goods such as household appliances, computers and automobiles at subsidized prices.

This economic power of the top FAR leaders contains a clear contradiction: as individuals, they are company managers who have contact with foreign capital (and even bank accounts abroad), therefore in the best position to make the leap from bureaucratic caste to possessing class whenever the pace of restoration speeds up. However, at the same time, as a corporation, their interests lie in maintaining a gradual approach so as to avoid an indiscriminate opening up to foreign capital, or a generalized process of privatization (as in Vietnam). These top leaders have no desire to submit to further competition or give up their monopoly control of these strategic

economic sectors

Just like any other country in the world, an increase in social inequality means an increase in injustice. The competition of the “NEPmen” has awoken the egalitarian conscience that has historically characterized the Cuban people, a conscience that has waned in recent years. While an enriched sector pushes for deeper measures for capitalist restoration, in other sectors there is increasing resentment against those who are getting rich without working and against the privileges of government employees and the military. This is entirely understandable when we consider the enormous difficulties that the majority of the population has in ensuring its daily survival on an average salary of around \$24 USD per month.¹¹

Pro-capitalist reforms did not resolve the economy’s structural problems: low productivity and technological backwardness. Cuba continues to import around 80 percent of all the food it consumes. In the absence of any real prospects and the fear that the United States may end its preferential policies towards Cuban migration, many young people are choosing to migrate.¹² Others simply abandon their university studies to work in shops or other private sector services, where they are sometimes forced to work for over 15 hours a day, but earn five times more than the average wage in the public sector.

Perhaps that is why US journalist Jon Lee Anderson – an expert on Cuban reality – said in a recent interview that “Cuba will not let McDonald’s open like they did in Prague and Warsaw,” predicting that the bureaucracy will opt for maintaining the balance between openness and control. This remains to be seen. The upcoming Congress is the final one in which the “old guard” will be present. It appears that Raúl’s successor, Miguel Díaz-Canel, born one year after the revolution, will be the current First Vice President of the Council of State. He has yet to demonstrate that he can maintain the unity of the State and the Armed Forces if social tensions rise once Castro steps down.

According to the ruling bureaucracy’s discourse, in order to achieve “a prosperous and sustainable socialism,” it is necessary to update the model with necessary pro-capitalist reforms, which will produce a more unequal, but more just society. This is not dialectical sophistication but rather merely a contradiction in terms.

The situation is far from simple. The

pressures to move towards capitalism are very powerful and arise from within the State, Cuban society, and the world. The ruling bureaucracy with its privileges and business deals creates within this same State a cynical moralism that spreads throughout society and undermines revolutionary ideals. On the other hand, there are the conquests that the revolution still conserves (free health, education and housing – even if the buildings are in poor condition, especially in Havana) – conquests that the population values highly.

Despite the advance towards restoration, the bourgeoisie has not begun to reassemble itself. It exists only in exile. An intense debate has developed around these points and despite being monitored by the regime a new Cuban left has developed on blogs and websites.¹³

Some argue that the solution is a mixed model favoring cooperative self-management. Others look for alternatives to the one-party regime in anarchism. However the processes of restoration in Eastern Europe have shown that these variants are no alternative in the face of the advance of capital. In order to avoid capitalist restoration in all of its variations, it is necessary to raise a transitional program that includes an end to the economic embargo and the full re-establishment of the monopoly of foreign trade. Concessions made to imperialist capital must be reversed and genuine democratic planning of the economy must be established. This program must be based on the heartfelt and urgent demands of the masses: general wage increases and price controls by the population (the rise in prices are one of the main complaints of the workers), an end to the ruling bureaucracy's privileges, end of the one-party regime through the legalization of parties that defend the conquests of the revolution, and freedom to form trade unions and political organization for workers. This must all be done with

the perspective of transforming the working class into the true ruling class of the State and society.

1 "El hermano Obama" (Brother Obama), Granma, March 28, 2016 [<http://en.granma.cu/cuba/2016-03-28/brother-obama>].

2 This is the position of the Brazilian Partido Socialista dos Trabalhadores Unificado (PS-TU – United Socialist Workers' Party) and its international organization the Liga Internacional de los Trabajadores (LIT - International Workers League), which argues that Cuba is a direct colony of Spanish and Canadian capital (sic) and that the key is to bring down the regime that they compare to the "dictatorship of [Argentine military dictator] Videla."

3 Y. Martínez Pérez, "El proceso de planificación empresarial en Cuba" (The Process of Business Planning in Cuba), University of Cienfuegos, 2008 [<http://www.gestiopolis.com/el-proceso-de-planificacion-empresarial-en-cuba/>]

4 For an in-depth analysis of these measures, see "Transforming the Cuban Economic Model," Mauricio A. Font Mario González-Corzo (comp), Bildner Center for Western Hemisphere Studies, The Graduate Center, The City University of New York, 2014. This interesting compilation brings together articles from important Cuban academics, including Pavel Vidal Alejandro, Omar Everleny Pérez Villanueva, Camilia Piñeiro Harnecker y Juan Triana Cordoví. See also J. Habel, "¿Será posible una reforma política?" (Will There be Political Reform?), *Le Monde Diplomatique Explorador* 1, Cuba. *Los dilemas del Cambio* (Cuba: The Dilemmas of Change), March 2016.

5 According to the latest available official statistics, there are 4,949,800 state employees, 1,147,000 in the private sector and 483,400 self-employed, which must add an undetermined number of informal workers. The unemployment rate is 2.7% and the average wage is 584 CUP (US\$24). *Anuario Estadístico de Cuba 2014* (Yearbook of Cuba 2014), "Empleo y salarios" (Employment and Wages), 2015 Edition, Oficina Nacional de Estadística e Información (National Office of Statistics and

Information).

6 In his presentation to the National Assembly of People's Power at the end of 2015, Marino Murillo, Minister of Economy and Planning, reported that only 37 businesses have been established under the new regulations, of which around six are in the Special Development Zone (SDZ) of Mariel (Granma, 28 December 2015).

7 This is pending a reform of the electoral law. Some speculate that the regime could establish a system that allows for satellite parties, as occurred in some countries in East Europe, but there is still no clear signal indicating that this will happen.

8 Richard E. Feinberg, *Soft Landing in Cuba? Emerging Entrepreneurs and Middle Classes*, November 2013. In this interesting study, the author discusses the heterogeneous character of self-employment (which runs from the "carretillero" - person who sell vegetables from the back of a cart - to small entrepreneurs that exploit manual labour). His analysis suggests that the majority the self-employed consider that they are only doing extra work to add to their meager family income, with only a small minority being able to overcome the initial stage of "primitive family accumulation" and become entrepreneurs. The wealthiest sector of the self-employed are those who emigrated to the U.S. and then return to invest in Cuba.

9 "Grupos empresariales del MINFAR" (Business Groups of the MINFAR [Ministry of the Revolutionary Armed Forces]), *Foresight Cuba*, January 7, 2016 [<http://foresightcuba.com/grupos-empresariales-del-minfar/>].

10 According to Cuban Economist Omar Everleny Pérez, the FAR controls 50% of the income produced in Cuba. Other economists put this figure at closer to 80%.

11 To put this into perspective, a liter of milk in a TDR costs more than 2 CUC, while one hour of internet costs 3 CUC.

12 The latest major migration crisis is still ongoing. It involves over 1100 Cubans who at the end of 2015 were stranded in Costa Rica after attempting to reach the U.S. by land.

13 One of the most dynamic is the Cuban Critical Observatory (www.observatoriocriticocuba.org) that unlike other alternative sites such as 14ymedio, more clearly confront capitalist restoration.

PALESTINE: ETHNIC CLEANSING



INTERVIEW WITH ILAN PAPPÉ

Ilan Pappé is a historian, socialist activist, professor at the University of Exeter, and supporter of the Campaign for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS). Of Israeli origin, he is a world-renowned scholar on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and has written numerous books on the subject, including *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* and *The Idea of Israel: A History of Power and Knowledge*.

You've talked and written about the concept of homeland as justification for destroying the native population. What is the meaning of this concept and what are some examples of its use in other places? In what sense is applied differently in Palestine than in other countries?

The context is the phenomenon of settler colonialism: the movement of Europeans, because they felt unsafe or endangered, into non-European areas in the Americas, Africa, Australia and Palestine. These people were not only seeking a new home, but also a new homeland. Namely, they had no wish or plan to come back to Europe.

The only problem was that the lands they coveted were already inhabited by other

people. In most cases, their solution was the genocide of indigenous people. In two cases, the solution was different: apartheid in South Africa and ethnic cleansing in Palestine.

In your book, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, you suggest that the objectives of Israel have remained the same since 1948. Can you elaborate?

As any settler colonial movement, the Zionist movement is motivated by the logic of elimination of the native. In the period after the second World War, elimination is more complex and maybe less inhuman, but still drastic. The desire of the Zionist movement to create both a Jewish state and a democratic one means that there is always a wish to take over as much of Palestine as possible and leave in as few Palestinians as possible.

This is the background for the Israeli ethnic cleansing operation in 1948; an operation that ended with expulsion of nearly a million Palestinians and a Jewish takeover of 80 percent of the land.

However, the ethnic cleansing of 1948 was not a complete project. There was still 20 percent of the land that Israel did not have and there was a Palestinian minority within

Israel. The vision of a purely de-Arabized Palestine was still there, though the means differed.

The means included the imposition of military rule over the Palestinians in Israel and refusing to allow the refugees to return. The space was not enough and the opportunity to enlarge it came in 1967, but then the demographic problem emerged again. This time, the means were apartheid, military occupation and cutting the land into enclaves and Bantustans.

You have described Israeli actions in Gaza as "incremental genocide." What is the meaning of this term?

"Incremental" means that there is no dramatic, massive killing of people of a certain race or nation. However, a strategy like the one Israel has been conducting since 2006 has led to what the UN called "the transformation of the Gaza Strip into an uninhabitable place" – so this not just the constant killing of civilians that makes it genocidal, but also the destruction of the infrastructure.

Do you think that Israel is carrying out



ethnic cleansing in the West Bank and East Jerusalem on a similar scale as what took place in 1948?

Well, the fact is, just in the Greater Jerusalem areas since 1967, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were transferred in various means – from massive expulsion or by moving their neighbourhood to the West Bank or by not allowing them to return if they left the country. After 1967, ethnic cleansing is more about moving Palestinian into enclaves rather than out of the country.

You argue against a two-state solution on the grounds that it is not viable and instead are in favour of a bi-national state. What are your reasons for coming to this conclusion? How do you think a bi-national state could be achieved and how would it operate?

The two-state solution is not viable for three major reasons. First, it only applies to 20 percent of Palestine and to less than half of the Palestinian people. You cannot reduce the problem of Palestine in such a way either geographically or demographically.

Second, Israel created such a reality on the ground, in terms of settlement and colonization, that it would be impossible to create a

normal Palestinian state, even if one were to accept this solution. The best you can hope for are two Bantustans: one in the West Bank and one in the Gaza Strip. This is not a solution.

Finally, there will be no solution to the conflict without respecting the right of the Palestinian refugees to return and the two-state solution does not respect this right.

What has been the effect of the growing international criticism of Israeli actions against the Palestinian people? How has this affected the peace movement in Israel?

In the last ten years, civil societies around the world had enough of their government's passivity on Palestine. Therefore, they took independent action by supporting the Palestinian civil-right call for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel.

The world governments are still not pressuring Israel to change its policy and therefore it is difficult to expect any change from within. There is no peace camp in Israel. There is now a small group of activists who are encouraged by the BDS movement and are trying to educate Israelis about the human and civil rights violations in the past and present. These groups from within will not survive; it

is necessary to put more international pressure on Israel.

What role do academics or intellectuals have in the struggle for the liberation of Palestine?

A very important role. They can tell the story about Palestine that Israel wants to hide from the world. There is enough evidence, and today there are enough scholars using it, to tell the history as it really happened. We will need to deal bravely with this history if we would want to have a genuine process of reconciliation in Israel and Palestine.

How important is the BDS campaign? What do you think it can achieve?

Very important. It has two major roles: first, to send a painful but necessary message to Israel that there is a price tag attached to its continued policy of dispossession and colonization. And secondly, to galvanize world public opinion and activism around a campaign that would not let the Palestine issue be forgotten.

INTERVIEWED BY ALEJANDRA RÍOS FOR IDEAS DE IZQUIERDA.



WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION IN TIMES OF GLOBAL CRISIS

The crisis of global capitalism reminds us that the rights oppressed people have obtained are not set in stone, but are subject to cuts imposed by bourgeois governments and international financial institutions. Our rights are subject to the ups and downs of power relations in global capitalism. The economic crisis deepens social polarization, reviving the most reactionary sectors of society to express their virulent xenophobia, homophobia, and misogyny. Knowing this, how can we fight for women's liberation?

ANDREA D'ATRI AND LAURA LIF

Over the last century, women's lives have changed in ways that are incomparable to the relatively minor changes in men's lives over the same period. From the right to vote to greater insertion in the workplace to female presidents around the world, the lives of women today are almost unrecognizable compared to those of women a century ago. But there are other facts that sharply contrast

with the image of smooth progress towards greater gender equality, often used to characterize the rights of women in imperialist countries and wealthy semi-colonies.

Given the progress towards gender equity, how do we explain that each year, between 1.5 and 3 million women and girls are victims of male chauvinist violence? How do we explain that prostitution has become a major

and highly lucrative industry, which has allowed the expansion of trafficking networks? Despite enormous scientific and technological advances, 500 thousand women around the world die annually from complications during pregnancy and childbirth, while 500 women die every day because of complications from illegal abortions (World Health Organization).

In the same period, the “feminization” of the workforce has increased exponentially, especially in Latin America, but women find themselves in the most precarious jobs. They are subject to market fluctuations, sexual violence at work, and other oppressions. The current crisis is bearing down on a working class that is characterized by a female labor force that accounts for more than 40 percent of global employment (International Labor Organization). Fifty percent of those female workers are precariously employed in low wage and unprotected jobs. They are being incorporated into the ranks of the global proletariat for the first time in history.

There is a sharp contrast between the rights that have been won—including the legitimacy that the concept of “gender equity” has gained in recent decades—and the sobering picture these statistics depict. Does feminism only offer women restricted emancipation? Is feminist liberation limited to a privileged few that enjoy some democratic rights in certain countries, while brutal aggressions continue against the vast majority of women in the rest of the world?

International power relations and the place of women

This paradoxical situation, created by decades of conservative politics, cannot be explained without examining the international power relations that emerged with the radicalization that began in the 1960s. A revolutionary rise of the masses took place from the end of the 60s to the mid-80s. People questioned not only the capitalist order, but also the iron-fisted control of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the worker-states of Eastern Europe. However the imperialist counter-offensive – under the banner of neo-liberalism – led to a political and cultural defeat.

Unlike the strategy of the two world wars, the partial recovery achieved by the capitalist system in the late 80’s and 90’s was not based on the destruction of productive forces through military action. Although “physical defeats” took place in countries such as Argentina – where 30 million people were disappeared – this was not the foundation of the emerging world order. In Europe the deflection of the revolutionary process was not based on physical defeats but rather on co-opting and dividing the working class. Faced with this imperialist attack on the masses and its conquests, organizations created by the working class (from social-democratic or communist parties to unions and bureaucratized workers’ organizations) went on to help implement these capitalist measures. The free-market model was the guiding principle of this period of restoration. It diverted and halted the rise of the masses by extending capitalist democratic regimes – leading the way to economic, social, and political measures that reversed many of the victories won in prior years.

This process extended through time and space in an unprecedented way. While the upper sectors of the middle and working classes were brought to the table of the consumerist feast, the vast majority of people were thrown into chronic unemployment and faced overcrowding in poor suburban neighborhoods. They were subject to social, political and cultural marginalization. Individualism permeated mass culture. In order to establish a new “integrationist” social contract, it was necessary to incorporate many democratic demands, including feminism. Thus social movements were contained within public policy.

Feminism in democracy: from insubordination to institutionalization

Whether self-marginalized or assimilated into battles for “recognition” fought within the parameters of the “democratic state,” feminism gave up the fight against the capital’s social and moral order. At the time of capital’s largest attack, the absence of a revolutionary objective and the role of the bureaucracy plunged the working class into economic corporatism.

A two-sided reformism emerged. On the one hand, feminist politics became limited to exerting lobbying pressure on state institutions for an “expansion of citizenship” – quickly proving to be a waste of time as the crisis develops. This strategy, which we will call equality feminism, has clear limits for working women. At best, working-class women have only been given the right to struggle for wages while leaving the management of public affairs to the bourgeois political elite.

During these decades of deep conservative restoration, women who longed for their emancipation did not have a model to follow in countries run by so-called “really existing socialism,” as was the case in the early twentieth century. Instead, they found that any attempt to oppose the existing regime could generate new and monstrous forms of oppression and exclusion. Stalinism stained the Bolsheviks’ liberatory flags which had stood for women’s emancipation. It transformed these aims into their opposite, destroying and reversing the small, bold steps taken by the Russian Revolution in 1917.

As the feminist agenda was co-opted and integrated into the capitalist system, progress was made in the attainment of basic democratic rights. The feminist agenda – previously supported only by some sectors of the vanguard – became the common sense of the masses. However the radical nature of feminism at the dawn of the second wave was swallowed up by the system. Its subversive challenge was re-directed from the streets to government buildings, from radical social transformation to institutionalization. Difference feminism, the political current that criticized this, sought to create a different symbolic order starting with the idea of

sexual difference.

But difference feminism ended up reducing gender to an essentialist category, postulating that being a woman bestowed certain values that were supposedly universal and had been degraded by male hegemonic discourse. To some extent, this new feminism rejected political dispute, emerging as a reaction to the dominant political system’s assimilation of equality feminism. Instead, it aimed to create a counterculture based on new values arising from sexual difference. Along with the rejection of equality feminism, it ultimately challenged the movement for an egalitarian society which was free from exploitation and oppression.

During the advance of the conservative restoration, neither the egalitarian politics of integration within capitalist democracy, nor the difference feminist politics of resistant counterculture prevented the unprecedented expansion of oppression and violence against millions of women worldwide.

Lesbians, black women, and women from “Third World” countries would eventually question this celebration of feminine virtues. A celebration which concealed differences and oppressive hierarchies among women. Sexual difference then burst into multiple intersecting differences among women, making way for numerous fluid identities and a fragmented political subject.

Post-feminism then went further. Given the existence of so many distinct and singular identities, it argued the impossibility of establishing any identity at all. Reframing normative discourse through parody became a political strategy that would undermine hegemony and open up new spaces of meaning. It established the idea of individual emancipation, deceptively infused with the possibilities of consumption and subjective appropriation-transformation of one’s own body.

While individualism proliferated around the world through economic policies that pushed millions into unemployment and enforced the fragmentation and relocation of the working class, feminism moved further away from a project of collective emancipation. It fell back on increasingly solipsistic speech, limited to inciting an elite that demanded the right to be recognized in its diversity while being tolerated by and integrated into consumer culture.

Post-feminism as “accomplice/opposition”

Equality feminism can be credited with conceptualizing gender as a social and relational category linked to the concept of power, highlighting that the oppression of women has a history and is not the “natural” consequence of anatomical differences. Meanwhile, feminism of difference resisted assimilation into a system of subordination, discrimination and oppression that differs from the “universal” model forged under patriarchy. While difference feminism ultimately succumbed to a biologicistic essentialism, post-feminist theories

questioned the notion of sexuality as invariable, leading to the conception of desire as situated. Rejecting the idea that difference should be transformed into fixed, static identity opens up a powerful way forward in the culture and construction of subjectivity, even though it is not a strong political strategy for the creation of a movement for the emancipation of those who are oppressed by mandatory heteronormativity.

However, the greater degree of political equality in capitalist democracies does not dissolve social inequality; nor does the shared nature of afflictions common to the exploited members of a social class dissolve the inequalities generated by oppression based on difference. How can we imagine equality that is not based on identity and uniformity? And difference that is not constituted as identity and hierarchy?

Far from taking an unequivocal stand for equality, Marxism proposes a materialist and dialectical analysis of difference; it questions the metaphysical abstraction of formal equality, which traps concrete differences into an empty universalism. Under capitalism, equality can only exist formally through the abstraction of particular elements of social existence. The capitalist State achieves this fetishistic divorce of politics and economy, offering a resultant split human being: the people are equally citizens, while being essentially different: either dispossessed workers or owners of the means of production.

Postmodern theories, which propose that differences be recognized in their specificity to such a degree that they dissolve as categories of identity (or that we could do without them), draw the attention to “the excluded”. By not taking into account capitalist relations of production in which these exclusions are supported, postfeminism concludes by calling for a struggle for “inclusion” and symbolic representation which ends up conforming itself to the new market tolerance for diversity rather than subverting it. Without considering the inextricable relationship between the capitalist mode of production and the multiple fragmentations that contribute to oppression, a radical challenge to the stability of sexual identities and heteronormativity loses its subversive potential. Hence, Terry Eagleton defines postmodernism as “politically in opposition, but economically an accomplice.”

Claiming difference as such or merely proclaiming the elimination of binary identities in a world where such differences are cause for brutal insults and injustices, post-feminism ends up looking more like a self-congratulatory speech to an enlightened minority than a critique by a powerful and radically transformative movement. For Marxism, in contrast, the focus is on equal attention to the diverse needs of the people: this is the only way that difference does not become hierarchy and equality, or uniformity, something that no “expansion of citizenship” granted by capitalist democracies may offer – even less

so in times of economic, social and political crisis such as the one we are experiencing. Only a society of free producers can be a society where equality is not based on tyrannical standards that seek to hide differences, but is instead based on an equal respect for differences that constitute the particular elements of social existence.

Through women's eyes

The current global crisis is the result of capitalism's inability to survive without imposing greater hardship on the masses and further degrading and politically weakening its democratic regimes. The period of conservative restoration, which led to this new capitalist crisis, created a contradictory scenario: co-optation and integration of large sections of the middle class and certain sections of the working class, alongside the exclusion of the majority of the masses – leaving behind an uncharacteristic fragmentation of the working class. At the same time, entire countries were becoming incorporated into the world market and millions of people pushed into massive cities were forced into salaried employment.

For the first time in the history of humanity, this new period of capitalist crisis has a labor force that is highly feminized and more urban than rural. However, while the global situation pushes women and the most oppressed social sectors to develop their subversive potential – shown in historical moments of great crisis or in social, economic and political cataclysms – feminism has become divorced from the masses, generally distanced from the perspective of a collective, emancipatory project.

Reclaiming such a perspective requires the recognition that, if the working class has the potential power to destroy the resources of capitalist economy, this strategic position does not suffice to revolutionize the dominant order if the working class fails to conquer and command an alliance with sectors oppressed by capital—including uniting with the ranks of the highly feminized proletariat. Raising a program for the liberation of women is vital to the working masses, because of the group's composition and the need to establish an alliance with other sectors and social strata pushed into misery, ruined by big capital and condemned to discrimination and marginalization within a dominant culture that denies their recognition.

Faced with this situation, many on the Left have conformed to the status quo of recent decades of conservative restoration. From the skeptical perspective, which assumes that defeat by the imperialist counter-offensive is irreversible, the expansion of rights in bourgeois democracy was implemented as an ultimate strategy. Indeed, the ruling classes were forced to heed these demands in order to defuse radicalization, to co-opt and integrate large sectors into the regime. Some forces on the left established these conquests as

ultimate objectives rather than strategic milestones; an anti-capitalist program was traded for an anti-neoliberal program with the minimal goal of limiting the scope of the most harmful aspects of conservative restoration.

At the opposite pole, others on the left dismissed the need for a program and a policy for women's emancipation that stems from conquered democratic rights within bourgeois democracy. This is another form of adaptation: by default, “issues” of oppression are left in the hands of multi-class social movements, while corporatism and narrow trade unionism in the labor movement deepen. Ultimately, the strategy of proletarian hegemony is abandoned by way of sectarian abstention.

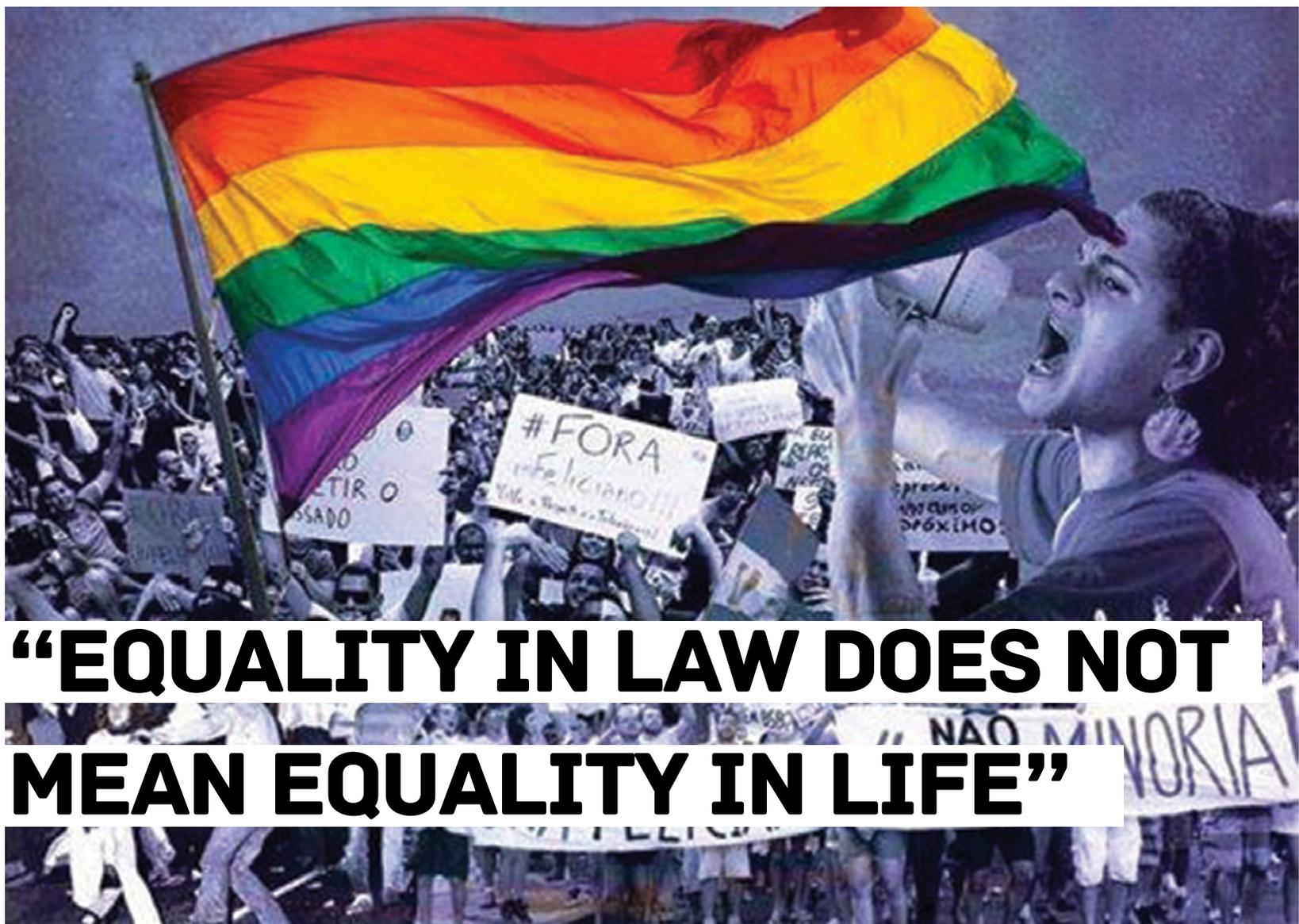
The authors of this article believe that a ruthless critique of the misery bred by capitalism in all aspects of life, including subjective and interpersonal relationships, must be an integral part of our Marxist world view, our program and our strategy in the struggle to radically change class society. While we support all struggles that seek to wrest the best living conditions for the millions of people who are immersed in the most unimaginable indignities, we aim to achieve a stateless society without social classes: a society liberated from the chains of exploitation and all forms of oppression that pit human beings against each other.

Those of us who seek the liberation of humanity from destitution and humiliation can only come together from the point of view of the most violated among the exploited. For fundamental transformation we must look through the eyes of women, and it is from this point of view that we try to re-appropriate the Bolshevik way of thinking, while at the same time, understanding the profound social changes of the last century that led to new problems which must be taken into account.

We know that merely longing for communism will not bring it about, even when it is longed for by thousands or millions of exploited people. We must seek not only to establish a different order, but to overthrow the existing one. Any partial conquest that is obtained in the narrow margins of degraded democracies must be situated within this broader strategy.

This is the only real antidote to the post-feminist utopia of radical democracies and the dystopia of bureaucratic totalitarianism that betrayed the Bolshevik revolution and transformed it into its antithesis. In this way, women's struggle for emancipation and a Marxist critique that is enriched by feminist contributions may emerge as a renewed socialist feminism waiting to see the light of day.

(*) This is a reduced version, revised by the authors for this edition. You can read the original article in Spanish, “La Emancipación de las mujeres en tiempos de crisis mundial”, Part I and Part II, in *Ideas de Izquierda Magazine* No. 1 and No. 2.



“EQUALITY IN LAW DOES NOT MEAN EQUALITY IN LIFE”

An interview with Virginia Guitzel, a trans public health worker who lives in Santo Andre, Sao Paulo. She is a militant of the Movimento Revolucionário de Trabalhadores (Revolutionary Workers’ Movement) and weekly contributor for Esquerda Diario. She is also part of the women’s group Pão e Rosas (Bread and Roses).

What are the primary issues for LGBT people in Brazil and how does the current movement respond to these struggles? How does the government respond to these issues?

The United Nations recognizes Brazil as the country with the most crimes and murders perpetrated against trans people. In Brazil, there are no laws defending LGBT rights. We still don’t have basic rights including quality public health care and access to education about non heterosexual sexualities and trans and non-binary gender identities. The trans movement, which emerged during the neo-liberal offensive of the past thirty years, has not sought to make a difference in our national reality. Instead, the trans movement has become increasingly institutionalized and integrated into the bourgeois regime.

This institutionalization has occurred despite June 2013’s organized LGBT

confrontation of police repression, the government, and religious fundamentalists seeking legislation for a “gay cure.”

The Workers’ Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores) sold itself to voters as progressive, but during over twelve years in power, it has not taken a single decisive step in defense of our rights. They were so cowardly, they didn’t even take a clear position against the “gay cure.” The Workers’ Party makes political deals with leaders of the religious right like Pastor Marco Feliciano, a leading advocate of the gay cure. In fact, the PT helped appoint him to the head of the Human Rights. During the protests of June 2013, which forever changed Brazil, many people protested against Feliciano and the “gay cure.”

How do you see the connection between capitalism and homo-and transphobia?

The capitalist system seeks to appropriate all forms of oppression to perpetuate a

regime of bourgeois domination. In a semi-colonial country like Brazil, capitalism does this in clear and obvious ways. The lessons we are learning about the limits of the degraded bourgeois democracy show us that equality in law does not mean equality in life. This is because under capitalism, there are no material conditions to eradicate oppression. Instead, the system divides workers using stereotypes and oppression. It weakens them with bourgeois ideology that propagates differences that hide the fact that we, the workers, all belong to one class.

The international movement against transphobia is getting stronger. It is the fruit of a new generation that refuses to restrict itself to imposed identities and gender binaries that serve to oppress women and deny working-class men real choices for their own emancipation. That’s why the marginalization of trans identities is fundamental to capitalism. On one hand, it maintains the traditional

family (which is being increasingly dismantled as single mothers are very much a reality). On the other hand, it maintains sexual desire for non-binary and trans people as a commodity to be consumed by relegating it to the streets via prostitution. At the same time, trans men and women serve as a reserve workforce that allow wages to be lower for everyone. Working as lower paid subcontracted workers, the most precarious of jobs, is seen as a great opportunity by many trans and non-binary people. For them, working a precarious, low wage job is welcomed due to the dangers of commodified sexuality.

I have heard you talk about organizing in the spirit of Stonewall. What do you mean by that? What lessons can the international LGBT movement take from the Stonewall Rebellion in 1969?

In Brazil and throughout the world, the LGBT and Queer movements lack complete independence from institutions like the police and the state. Stonewall broke the silence around us being who we are and it made us see our own strength. The LGBT struggle in these times of neo-liberalism has turned into a fight for civil rights without questioning capitalism or the limits of emancipation via consumption (“pink money”). Revolutionaries in times of neo-liberalism must revive the spirit of Stonewall and remember our combative history.

This means refusing to compromise with the police and the bourgeois government and it means not seeking the “lesser evil”. We cannot trust our rights to the goodwill of the bourgeois political parties. We LGBT workers are incompatible with this system of misery and human exploitation. Reviving the spirit of the Stonewall rebellion today is not only important, but also a necessary condition for LGBT people to take their destiny into their own hands and stop all forms of oppression.

Many people say that workers are homophobic. All of us have suffered homophobia from workers at one time or another. Why organize a class-based LGBT movement rooted in solidarity with workers? Can you give us examples of times that LGBT people united with workers?

In Marx’s text, *The German Ideology*, he says that the dominant ideology is the ideology of the dominant class. That means that the working class is bombarded with divisive stereotypes propagated by the bourgeoisie. The union bureaucracy, the current model of education, and all of the bourgeois media are transmission belts of these ideas. That is why we, the international Trotskyist Fraction, created an international network (*Esquerda Diário* in Brazil, *Left Voice* in the United States, *Révolution Permanente* in France, *Klasse Gegen Klasse* in Germany, and *La Izquierda Diario* in Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Spain, Venezuela, Bolivia and Uruguay). We hope

to build a counter-offensive to the bourgeois media with an online newspaper based on the point of view of workers, young people and oppressed people.

Is it difficult to build a class-based LGBT movement and solidarity between LGBT people and straight workers? Absolutely. But the difficulty pales to the strategic necessity of an LGBT movement united with the working class. And we have many examples to build upon. We have historic examples, going back to 1895. In that year, the biggest chapter of the Second International was in Germany, where the communist party spoke out against the imprisonment of Oscar Wilde. It was the first time a political party spoke out against sexual repression. But defending LGBT rights isn’t just a long past history. Wherever we of the Trotskyist Fraction do political work, we revive that history.

For example, last year in Argentina, there were many important struggles in the Northern Zone of Buenos Aires where one of the factories, *MadyGraft* (formerly known as *Donnelley*) is now occupied by its workers. Prior to the workers taking over the factory, they defended a trans worker who was being harassed by her boss, who refused to call her by her name and to allow her access to her own bathroom. The workers had a lively discussion about class unity against their employers and confronted their boss in defense of their trans co-worker. This action demonstrates that, in reality, workers are the only ones capable of guaranteeing the rights of oppressed people. If a law had been passed, their employers would find a million ways to get around it. Only the workers united in defense of their co-worker could guarantee her rights.

In Brazil, I was able to experience firsthand the possibilities of workers in solidarity with LGBT people. The first was at a strike of sub-sub contracted workers (they worked at a company that was subcontracted by another company, which was subcontracted by the Sao Paulo metro). The work was very precarious and the workers had very little education. By the logic of many people in the LGBT movement, it was almost suicide to be a trans woman in that space. Yet, I went and introduced myself, saying that I came to show solidarity with the workers. Many workers stared at me and looked at me very strangely. However, the days at the strike went on without incident. On the last day of the strike, the union bureaucracy wanted to isolate the workers, so they needed to prevent outside support from people such as myself and the Revolutionary Workers Movement (the political party I am part of). They started a smear campaign against me, questioning whether I was a man or woman. The workers responded, “She came here to defend us, long before the union. She stays.” This demonstrates how the class consciousness of workers advances during a struggle, such as a strike.

The second example was during the biggest strike of the state universities of Sao Paulo in history, which lasted 118 days. During this strike, for the first time in history, a union organized a debate entitled “Sexism, Homophobia and Transphobia” in the midst of the strike. This demonstrates how the union can contribute to undermining the influence of bourgeois ideas on our class, the working class. These workers later went on to protest the actions of the Sao Paulo police who brutally tortured a trans woman, *Veronica Bolina*.

Recently, the United States Supreme Court ruled in favor of marriage equality. What steps should the LGBT movement take in light of this victory?

The passage of marriage equality in the US and its territories rocked Brazil and the world. Here, we celebrated this as a victory against the conservatives who try to take away our rights. To all those who fought for this victory, I send you my sincerest congratulations.

I think the first task that the United States LGBT movement faces is to not let this victory be capitalized on by Obama and the White House who attack immigrants, the poorest LGBT people and black people who have bravely faced off against the police and the government in defense of their right to live. Today’s task is to build an international LGBT movement based on the most profound experiences of class solidarity and revolutionary organizing we have seen, like the *Homosexual Action Front* in France, *Somos* in Brazil and *Our World* in Argentina. We need a movement for sexual liberation that is anti-capitalist and intervenes in the class struggle. We need a movement that questions queer theory that does not have a plan to destroy capitalism. We need a movement that also questions institutionalized LGBT movements that ask us to compromise our rights or put them off for tomorrow in order to support the existing regime. This will only reproduce the misery of what is possible under capitalism. Our task is to internationally build an instrument for the working class and oppressed people to end what Marx calls “humanity’s pre-history” – the system of one person dominating another. For us of the Trotskyist Fraction, this means building a movement to rebuild the IV International. This means building communist parties throughout the world, which, with the strength of workers and of oppressed people, can destroy capitalism and create a society in which we are all truly free.

**INTERVIEWED AND TRANSLATED
BY TATIANA COZZARELLI**



AN INDEPENDENT, ANTI-CAPITALIST CAMPAIGN IN MEXICO CITY

OSCAR FERNÁNDEZ

After a militant campaign in the streets, subway stations, schools, and labor centers, the “Anti-Capitalist Workers in the Constituent Assembly” Slate has won legal recognition to run in the Constituent Assembly elections in Mexico City. This was achieved despite the harsh and undemocratic requirements of the National Electoral Institute (INE). Throughout the campaign, the candidates of the Anti-capitalist Slate have defied the three main parties in Mexico, all of which are notorious for governing the city in favor of big business while lowering the living standards of the majority of the city’s population.

As a result of recent political reforms, the Federal District (DF) will become a legal entity called Mexico City, elevating its status to that of other Mexican states. Until now, it has effectively functioned as the seat of power, where the executive, legislative, and judiciary branches reside, and was considered the presidential jurisdiction. Almost 100 years

after Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata’s forces took the capital during the Mexican Revolution, the DF will become the last entity to adapt its own constitution.

Mexico City’s new constitution will be written by a Constituent Assembly made up of 100 deputy-representatives, of which only 60 will be selected by popular vote. The remaining 40 will be hand-picked by the city’s Head of Government Miguel Ángel Mancera, along with Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto and members of Congress. Since the start of the campaign, the Anti-capitalist Platform has denounced Mancera and Peña Nieto for this undemocratic setup.

Furthermore, reducing the number of deputies elected by popular vote lowers the chances for new parties like the National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) to have a place in the Assembly from which to criticize – though only moderately – the lack of democracy in Mexico.

The future of Mexico City is at stake. It is being contested by numerous forces, including President Peña Nieto of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) –with the the support of a sector of Mancera’s degenerated Democratic Revolution Party (PRD). Also in the contest is the MORENA, a new party launched by Andrés Manuel López Obrador after breaking with the PRD. MORENA grew exponentially during the June 2015 midterm elections as a result of the crisis faced by the traditional parties following the disappearance of the 43 Ayotzinapa students. In the Legislative Assembly elections (Mexico City’s local Congress), MORENA gained almost 30 percent of the seats. However, since 40 deputies for the Constituent Assembly were directly appointed by the president and head of Government, MORENA would likely get only 20 percent of the seats.

For the Constituent Assembly race, there is a clear bias that favors the right-wing parties



(PRI, PRD, and PAN). The PRI has already ensured a safe majority through this scheme. They will also have their own candidates elected to the Constituent Assembly along with the less-represented PAN and the PRD.

Independent Candidates Fight an Uphill Battle

The Constituent Assembly is yet another undemocratic measure meant to prevent the expression of popular discontent, which has been building since 2012. On April 17, the INE passed a resolution approving only eight of the 38 independent candidacies that entered the race. In the lead-up to this decision, independent campaigns faced significant disadvantages compared to the traditional registered parties. It was necessary to meet the INE's criteria (complete a range of bureaucratic procedures, form an NGO, establish a bank account, etc.) and gather almost 75 thousand signatures within the span of one month. Furthermore, independents had to rely exclusively on their own resources.

After the process was closed, the INE checked the signatures to confirm they were all Mexico City residents. Although it is a fundamental right to call for the revision of decisions made by electoral authorities, independent platforms were not permitted to double check the rejected signatures or take any part in the validation process.

As a result, the signatures of 2,144,000 Mexico City citizens who backed independent candidates will not be considered. Such is the case for the supporters of the "Your Constituent" Platform (#TuConstituyente), with Mónica Tapia, Luis González Plascencia, Agustín Martínez, Gabriela Alarcón and Alfredo Lecona – all of whom have links to urban social movements and human rights activism.

The INE's April 17 resolution was released

just one day before the election campaign period began, leaving little time for the independents to prepare their campaigns against the registered establishment parties and MORENA –all of which have much greater resources.

A Militant Campaign

In March 2016, the Anti-Capitalist Slate, backed by the Socialist Workers' Movement (Movimiento de Trabajadores Socialistas – MTS), launched a militant campaign in Mexico City. To become eligible for the elections, the Anti-Capitalist Platform had to fulfill all of the INE's rigid requirements. In less than one week, the Anti-capitalists established an NGO, obtained over 102,000 signatures (surpassing the required 73,492), and carried out numerous other bureaucratic requirements. During the grueling process, many MTS militants were harassed and detained by Mancera's police while they were gathering signatures at public transportation centers and plazas. But with the support of workers, students and women, the Anti-Capitalist Platform and the MTS managed to force an opening in an utterly undemocratic regime.

An anti-capitalist independent candidacy won without any support from capitalists or politicians is an unprecedented victory. It shows that working-class people and youth can be political actors, set apart from the various parties that only rule in the interest of capital and U.S. imperialism. It is imperative for left organizations, workers, women and human rights organizations to support this initiative.

Candidates for the Women, Workers, and Youth

Sergio Moissen and Sulem Estrada, both teachers, are leading the Anti-capitalist Slate. Moissen is a professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Estrada,

the alternate delegate, is a high school teacher. Their proposals advance the needs of the oppressed of Mexico City –demanding laws against femicides and human trafficking, for the legalization of marijuana and unrestricted access to public higher education. They also demand that elected officials earn no more than the average teacher and that officials be subject to recall at any time. Estrada and Moissen entered the race to challenge the political order.

Interviewed by Left Voice Sergio Moissen stated, "We will struggle on every front so that the voices of workers, women and the youth are heard in the Constituent Assembly of Mexico City. We have a lifelong commitment to struggle for their rights. We want the demands of the working class and popular sectors to be debated through the process of writing the new Constitution that will rule Mexico City."

"We ask that all worker and human rights organizations and social movements throw their support behind our platform in the upcoming elections," said Sulem Estrada. "It's enraging that the people in power always get away with their corrupt deals. History is ours! Let's write it together in the streets, schools and labor centers. Let us storm their bunker, break through with the voice of the working class and popular sectors. We must expose their secrets and denounce how they legislate and manage resources against us!"

Moissen added, "we want to win a platform for workers, women and youth from which we can denounce the abuses we suffer every day: the lack of job security, violence against women, educational exclusion faced by the youth, repression and the criminalization of protest. We ask the vote in order to say what no one else will in the Constituent. We think that the minimum criteria for this process to be democratic is to ensure that all 100 constituent deputies be elected through the popular vote. We're tired of politicians being at the service of the rich."

"The Anti-Capitalist Platform signals something new. We do not represent the interests of those in power. We're part of the Mexican youth who opposes militarization, this undemocratic system and the collusion between politicians and organized crime. We demand that the 43 students of the Ayo-tzinapa School are returned alive. We want the people's vote to win a platform through which we can bring out our proposals to expand democratic rights for the majority of this city."

Both candidates stressed that participating in the Constituent Assembly elections was a step forward in the struggle for the rights of the working class, women and youth.

Their pre-campaign ended with a rally at the Benito Juárez Monument in the Historic Center of Mexico City, with hundreds present to hear their speeches and the musical performances afterwards.



INHERITANCE AND SITUATION: INTERVIEW WITH A NEW GENERATION OF REVOLUTIONARY MARXISTS IN CHINA

Left Voice spoke with Stone Song and Ji Hengge, Trotskyists in China who translated and published the first Chinese edition of *The History of American Trotskyism* by James P. Cannon.

You recently published *The History of American Trotskyism* by James P. Cannon. This is the first time the book was published in Chinese. What was your motivation to translate and publish it in China? What lessons can the Chinese people learn from it and what kind of readership are you aiming at?

Stone Song: Among American Trotskyists and important figures of the Trotskyist movement worldwide, James P. Cannon is distinguished as an organizer and politician. His life's biggest contribution was to establish a socialist revolutionary party in America, the heart of world capitalism. What *The History of American Trotskyism* discusses is the history of the early beginnings of American

Trotskyism. He collates many useful lessons, including organizing principles, programmatic questions, etc. Today in China, a new generation of revolutionary socialists is confronting the question of constructing something of their own, something we are lacking and need to learn anew, including by learning from history.

The book is aimed towards progressive young people in China so they can understand the conditions of socialist organizations and how to construct them. For example, a normal organization should have the right to factionalize internally, to allow for the internal democracy that allows discussion of different opinions; this is the first principle for

establishing a healthy organization.

What you can also understand from this book is that for a socialist organization, programmatic questions are of chief importance. After having the correct program, you have to decide how to realize it according to the development of circumstances.

Is this part of a larger project? What other publications do you plan to translate and/or publish and when?

Stone Song: Translating The History of American Trotskyism is only the beginning. We plan to translate other canonical texts of the revolutionary Marxist tradition, for example, Trotsky's The Spanish Revolution, In Defense of Marxism, The Transitional Program and Discussions on the Program, the Selected Writings and Speeches of James P. Cannon, and others. This selection of books is called the "collected renditions of the revolutionary Marxist tradition." We have decided to publish one to two every year, to gradually introduce these works.

Apart from translating these canonical works, we plan to address present questions (for example, on the present situation in Greece) by publishing collected works of discussions.

How difficult is it to find writings by Trotsky in mainland China? Is the Russian revolutionary leader known at all?

Stone Song: Before the 1949 revolution, to represent the first generation of Trotskyists, comrades of Chen Duxiu (陳獨秀) translated some of Trotsky's works. In the 1960s, during the debates between China and the Soviet Union, the Chinese Communist Party authorities organized people to translate Trotsky's The Revolution Betrayed, The Third International After Lenin, and other works known as the "Gray Books" that were circulated internally. Only government cadres and specialized researchers were allowed to read them.

With the establishment of the Internet in the 1990s came the advancement of the promotion of Trotskyism. The two works I mentioned earlier could be seen in translation and this caused a small amount of reflection from

young people who turned toward believing in revolutionary Marxism. In today's China, it is no longer forbidden to publish Trotsky's works; openly published works include The History of the Russian Revolution, Trotsky on the Struggle Against Fascism, Trotsky on the Chinese Revolution, and others. The work with the most published editions is My Life. These books are openly sold in bookstores and people can easily buy and read them.

But works written by Trotskyist scholars, if they are critical of the Mao period or Deng period, are restricted. Even if published, relevant sections would have to be deleted. The clearest examples of this are the Chinese translations of Power and Money: A Marxist Theory of Bureaucracy by Ernest Mandel and Why Marx Was Right by Terry Eagleton.

As a result, after 1949, China's politics and culture turned towards – and had a one-sided special historical relation with – the Soviet Union and the average person is not unfamiliar with the leaders of the Russian Revolution. The average person knows the names of Lenin, Stalin, and Trotsky, but has absorbed the historical distortions of Stalinism towards revolution and leadership. The older generation views Trotsky as an opportunist and revisionist, and the number one enemy of socialist revolution. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, with the exchange of information and the publication of the Trotsky's works, his leadership role in the Russian Revolution was gradually understood in a new light by people. During the course of this, Beijing non-government affiliated scholars such as Shi Yongqin (施用勤) and some older Trotskyists in 1999 translated and openly published the three-volume biography of Leon Trotsky by Isaac Deutscher. For a new generation of young people, this had a very large effect on their understanding of Trotsky and revolutionary Marxism.

But scholars with a government background belittled the worth of Trotskyist thought, believing Trotsky and Stalin both advocated super-industrialization, that even if Trotsky had been victorious in the internal party struggles, there would not be such a big difference from Stalin. Instead, they appreciated

Bukharin, who advocated market reforms.

With the slowdown of the Chinese economy, labor unrest has risen. Do you sense increasing eagerness among workers for new ideas, more combative politics and/or a critique of "Chinese communism" from the left?

Ji Hengge: From the decline of rapid growth of the Chinese economy, there is a rise in the number of workers' protests. Looking at the quality of the labor movement however, it's still not very high. Up until now, workers' struggles have focused on economic struggles and not political ones. Class-consciousness is still at a level of gradually establishing itself – it's not very mature. The workers who are capable of coming in contact with revolutionary Marxism are very few, almost negligible. Individual laborers may from criticize the CCP from the left, but it's mostly from a Maoist perspective. They absorb ideological information from the government ideology pre-1978.

What about young people in China today? Do you see potential for radicalization or a shift to the left among them?

Ji Hengge: Up until now, most Chinese young people haven't had strong political consciousness; young students still pay more attention to their studies, individual lives, and future work. Until now, there have been two large social tides of thought: nationalism and liberalism. For young people these have had a relatively strong influence, but the influence of nationalism is stronger, as seen particularly in CCP general-secretary Xi Jinping strengthening his personality cult and social control, and increasing the strength of nationalism.

Discussing liberalism on the other side, there are more demands for systemic changes. Their economic advocacy is partial to privatization and marketization, which is unfavorable for workers and peasants. But politically, the majority of liberal demands are only partial ones placed on the authorities. There is opposition to radical changes, that is, revolutionary changes of the system (not even capitalist democratic revolution).

But after the fall of Bo Xilai (薄熙來) in 2012, some young people who originally supported Bo's right-wing Maoism (essentially nationalists) have become disillusioned; after reflection some of these young people have abandoned their originally nationalist positions and turned to a more left position. This has caused the number of radical young people to increase after a few years – but fundamentally, this is a growth in every shade of left-wing Maoism, and the young people that believe in revolutionary Marxism are still marginal. In the past, the discussion of topics like socialism was bound together with patriotism and nationalism. More and more radical youth begun to realize now that China has been a capitalist society for a long time, and socialists should oppose nationalist logic.

The government has escalated its repression against labor activists. In your view, to what extent does this discourage workers? Do these developments signal the emergence of a new revolutionary left in China?

Ji Hengge: Although government actions repressing labor NGOs organizers are escalating, it cannot really put down labor struggles of Chinese workers. With the economic decline, workers have lost jobs, there are more cases of owed wages, and moreover, the quality of Chinese social security is very poor. Capitalists' pressure is very deep, inciting more and more workers to rise up and struggle for the sake of their most fundamental economic security. The total number of worker protests in 2016 are predicted to be 1.5 to 2 times that of 2015, which saw more than 2,944 protests. Some workers in the middle of struggle strove to establish their own trade unions or to demand unions founded on principles of democratic choice, because until now Chinese laborers haven't yet been able to throw off the control of the official union, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), and haven't been able to establish independent trade unions.

At present, China's far left is still small groups of people who rely on individual methods to organize (and even then, the large majority

are left-wing Maoists). The most important activities are confined to political propaganda (and even then, you have to be extremely careful: you can only express political opinions in a roundabout manner). Accurately speaking, most radical left-wing individuals still cannot unite with present labor struggles, and very few of those workers who participate in strikes and other protests have encountered radical left-wing individuals.

But growing worker struggles are in the process of establishing a foundation for increased unity between such struggles and the radical Left. Although Chinese laborers are currently in a situation without organization, this also means their activities at least do not suffer the restrictive control of bureaucratic labor unions. Struggling workers deliberately exclude Marxism, as Marxism is thought of as the government or ruling party ideology. On the other hand they don't believe the liberals and don't believe in the government. Moreover, they believe they can only rely on their own strength to realize changes. Maybe in the future this can become the opportunity to realize the Chinese worker's leap in development. To be able to use this opportunity, there needs to be revolutionary Marxists in a large-scale worker's movement that can push their political awareness, with the ability for propaganda work.

The most important task for China's new generation of revolutionary Marxists is to explain clearly to the people the fundamental difference between the path of socialism and Stalinism/Maoism's bureaucratic socialism, to allow the people to clearly understand the need for socialism and its feasibility, and the true meaning of socialist democracy.

A controversy known as the "One Party, Two Publications" debate erupted in 2014. The debate began when the party's theoretical journal, Qiushi (求是), stated that class struggle still exists in China, a claim that was flatly rejected by Study Times (學習時報), the publication of the Central Party School of the Communist Party. What was behind this controversy and what are its implications?

Ji Hengge: Regarding this question, I have to first explain, the CCP's official theory of China's current central contradiction is "the contradiction that people gradually have increased their material cultural demands while at the same time social productivity lags behind. As a result of internal factors and international influence, class struggle is still limited in scope to long-term existence and may radicalize under some kind of condition, but that isn't the central contradiction." Qiushi's "Red Flag Manuscript" (紅旗文稿) said that "class struggle still exists in China," but then Study Times published an article stating, "According to class struggle, determine program" (but the truth is, for them, the important contradiction isn't class struggle). The two don't present fundamental differences – much less a situation of "One Party, Two Publications."

But relatively speaking, the "Red Flag Manuscript" more strongly emphasizes the traditional values of the CCP, hoping to revitalize the CCP's ideological system, and the other essay emphasizes the desire to not make class struggle the central contradiction – to prevent disrupting the stability of present China and establishing the normal establishment of the capitalist market.

Outside of this, it still needs to be emphasized that the class struggle put forward by the CCP and the class struggle put forward by Communists is not the same. The CCP points to the class struggle as between the "the CCP/people and enemies" and "continuing to walk the road to socialism with Chinese characteristics and walking to multiparty western capitalism" as a contradiction (in truth, during the Cultural Revolution, the CCP's asserted class struggle was not real class struggle, they had in China put an end to the capitalist class and landowning class, and discussed overthrowing party internal and party external capitalists and landowners, but this was only a slogan for advancing political purges). To put it simply, the real contradiction is supporting the CCP regime or opposing it, which is not really a contradiction between capitalists and workers.



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