

# On underconsumption theory

We are grateful to [Michael Roberts' blog](#) for making us aware of:

*"...one of the earliest and best denials that underconsumption is Marxian economic theory, see this [article](#) by John Weeks back in 1982."*

Clarifying these issues is an essential part of the process of rebuilding the international working class movement.

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## **Sarkozy back in political activity and Beefing up the bonapartism! Warning of a real danger! by Balazs Nagy**

Not long ago, Nicolas Sarkozy was unceremoniously bundled out of office. Now he's back on TV in all his pomp and glory. France's second channel (chaine 2) is supposed to be a public enterprise run by the state, or successive governments, but in any case at taxpayers' expense. Now it gives Sarkozy the red carpet treatment. The way they transformed him from a duplicitous agent of the bourgeoisie into a messianic liberator was amazing and shockingly servile. One faithful retainer, Yves Jégo, was moved to comment in astonishment, and with some justice: "It can't be right to give 45 minutes on a

current affairs TV show to a Presidential contender" (*Le Monde*, 23 September 2014).

Now, it was Sarkozy who appointed the boss of this channel, and the current President, Hollande, was daft enough to keep him in the job. This man virtually prostrated himself in front of Sarkozy, and the simpering nonentity who conducted the interview like a willing stooge more or less got down on all fours. It may not make much sense, but that's the way things go in this general political climate.

### **Trials and tribulations of post-war Bonapartism in France**

The government of the so-called Socialist Party and its associates – what a lot of people still call "the Left", is visibly on its last legs. It is too closely tied to moribund capitalism, too definitively compromised in the twilight decadence which drags all down in its gloomy wake.

But, debilitated as it is by this decline, the bourgeoisie still has to do something about the fact that its social-democratic servant is bankrupt and too weak now to face the growing perils. This is what explains the growing strength of fascist organisations and the disproportionate extension of their influence right across the old capitalist countries. But Trotsky warned that between social democracy and fascism there is a whole spectrum of intermediate regimes which the bourgeoisie can use to replace their failed social-democratic business managers without going straight over to fascism, with all the burdens and risks that brings. Fascism is an option they keep on a back burner, ready for use as a last resort, but at the moment they are hoping to get by without it, especially since the memory of the traumas it inflicted is still very much alive. But, above all, the ruling class lives in hope that the virtual vivisection that has been performed on the world working class means they can take refuge in less rigid intermediate regimes which might avoid the brutal shock of fascism. (Indeed, the changes the working class has undergone, the way it has been scattered and physically

weakened, and its theoretical and political arms changed and perverted, plus a series of retreats and serious defeats, have disarmed the working class and considerably weakened it in action.)

Under these conditions the capitalists think that, for the moment, a bonapartist regime is the most appropriate political form in which they can secure their position. But even in modern France such a political system is nothing new. The French bourgeoisie originally created this type of regime. They have often had to face bold challenges to their power, and are all the more inclined to rely on this particular crutch because it can easily be used as a massive club. But the bourgeoisie had no easy job trying to dust it off after World War II. De Gaulle had everything it takes to do the job and solidly established the Fifth Republic as the prototype of modern-day bonapartism, but in the end even he got the boot in the aftermath of the powerful 1968 general strike. While he himself paid the price for trying capital's strong-arm tactics on the working class, the Fifth Republic itself survived the onslaught of the oppressed thanks to the connivance of Stalinists and reformists.

You don't need to look very hard at France's political history since De Gaulle's humiliating fall from grace to see that French bonapartism, in the shape of the Fifth Republic, has followed a particularly chequered and contradictory path. None of the heirs to the Fifth Republic's bonapartist institutions has had anything like what De Gaulle had in terms of means, inclination and courage to destroy working-class gains in an open frontal assault. Every single one of them, without exception, has been steeped in the tepid pseudo-democracy of the Fourth Republic, imbued with the long tradition of flabby pacifism, compromise and unprincipled shilly-shallying as a way of evading or bypassing conflicts and difficulties. The majority of them are impregnated to the very marrow of their bones in the spirit of this bourgeois democracy, whose pillar

and vital principle is precisely the *class collaboration* guaranteed by opportunist workers' leaders.

But above all they were terrified by very lively recollections of the 1968 general strike, especially since, as irremediably civilian bourgeois, their links with the armed forces have been ad hoc and ambiguous. Mitterrand and later others went on the attack, directly and across the board, on the gains working people have made, but it was under the influence of the general international turn to so-called neo-liberal policies, and it was done tangentially and with many reservations and in the shape of a sustained war of attrition. While what they did was already unbearable for the working class, it has still not been enough to satisfy the bourgeoisie.

So the reason why today's bourgeois politicians and ideologues bitterly reproach their predecessors for not thoroughly dismantling all the working class's previous achievements and taming that class is explained by the figures who embodied the Fifth Republic after De Gaulle. All his Presidential successors have liked to dress in the bonapartist lion's clothes, but have turned out to be pretty toothless in practice, even though they were quite prepared to get their claws into working people.

### **Hollande's political incoherence makes him look like a marionette with its strings cut**

None of the civilian bonapartist Presidents of France have had what it takes to carry out the mission conferred on them by virtue of their office, but the last in line, Hollande has without doubt been the least competent for the job. Of course, his limited abilities, narrow mind-set and penchant for double-talk all mean he finds it hard to take the job on properly, but he is no more stupid or short-sighted than any of the others. Events have gone completely over his head because, as head of the Fifth Republic he has had to strain

every nerve to reconcile the policy of class collaboration (normal in bourgeois democracy) with that of open confrontation between the classes (function of the Fifth Republic). And all the while, the stagnation of capitalism in its twilight prevents him from granting any concessions and insistently demands confrontation with the working class.

And so the wider conflict between these two choices faced by the bourgeoisie nowadays is concentrated in the person and policies of François Hollande. The outcome is the way real concessions are turned into broken promises in a series of pseudo-reforms on the one hand, and on the other the harsh daily reality of blows struck against working people, but which the bourgeoisie do not think are harsh enough. Hence the image presented of a government hanging in mid-air and pushed about by whatever wind is blowing at any particular time, as well as an irresistible sense of things finally falling apart.

When you look at the awful state social democracy's doctrine is in, what is most astonishing is that Hollande cannot somehow shake it off. Where he should give up on trying to square the circle between two bourgeois lines, one of which, class-collaboration, has already lost the battle to contain and calm class conflict, he has merely tried to alter the form within which he attempted to reconcile them. He did this by delegating a big part of his bonapartist task to that Socialist Party mini-Napoleon, Manuel Valls, a man whose own natural inclinations have already converted him from a shamefaced social democrat into a pocket Bonaparte. But despite what a lot of activists on the so-called far left expected, the obviously lame form of bonapartism affected by the Socialist Party only served to intensify the obvious signs that the party itself is falling apart, testimony to the insurmountable difficulties involved in turning this party into a pliable instrument for a reinforced bonapartism without major internal shocks and crises. Every attempt along those lines will just drag it closer to ultimate decay.

This historic collapse of social democracy, which expresses both the increasing severity of capitalism's crisis and the bankruptcy of one of the counter-measures the bourgeoisie relied on, also gives Sarkozy a second chance. This simple fact exposes Hollande and co.'s social democracy as the midwife of fascism or, more likely, a more homogenous and resolute form of bonapartism.

### **Sarkozy's bid to be iron-fisted Bonaparte.**

Sarkozy did not beat around the bush. He announced straight off that he was back on the scene as a serious candidate for the role of unbending Bonaparte saviour. He presented his political re-appearance as dispassionate obedience to the requirements of the situation, renouncing any personal ambition and explaining that he was responding to a higher, nay divine, call to help our suffering world. This marked reference to some quasi-mystical obligation as justification for his re-entry into politics and the clear-cut aspiration to be a supreme saviour are sure signs of a would-be Bonaparte. The odd journalist has noticed Sarkozy's occasional bonapartist tendencies, but none have pointed out that this re-appearance basically means he intends to set up a consistent and decisive bonapartist dictatorship.

Sarkozy's declared political project also exhibits all other elements of that sort of bonapartism. All the main ingredients of a pure and harsh bonapartism are present, alongside the insistent and repeated evocation of a supreme call to duty on the part of some divine providence.

First of all comes the claim to be acting for the benefit of society as a whole, above classes. Obviously he could not use the word "class" because he has banished it from his vocabulary, but he explicitly stated he wanted to abolish party differences as outdated leftovers and unite everybody behind his flag.

A whole raft of proposals accompanied and filled out this decision to jump over whatever democratic constraints the bourgeoisie itself has been forced to impose on society in order to channel class contradictions. And, in line with his wish to banish differences between parties, Sarkozy again spoke out against organisations which come between the various classes and the authorities, above all independent trades unions. Moreover, as a consistent bonapartist, he was for regular referendums where class votes are short-circuited by plebiscitary consultations with the "whole of society".

Needless to say, two essential ingredients of properly-established bonapartism were not omitted from his political plans. One is the intensification of overt nationalism, which Sarkozy expressed in his plan to end the Schengen Agreement guaranteeing free movement around the European Union. The other is his decision to establish a political apparatus in the exclusive service of his bonapartism by radically transforming the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) into a homogenous and docile body under his personal control.

And this last point raises the important question: Will this clearly-formulated plan for an integrated, coherent, vigorous and determined bonapartism actually get the upper hand? To answer that, we need to look above all at the working people who are immediately threatened and targeted by this plan.

### **Workers disarmed in the face of this bourgeois dictatorship**

Problems like this usually go straight over the heads of revolutionary and socialist organisations – because of their formalist and sectarian leaderships. To tell the truth, both their revolution and their socialism are no more than vague references to a rosy future; consequently they are quite separate from their day-to-day preoccupations and practical activities. That's why they see very little importance, or none at all, in the political and tactical changes the bourgeoisie introduce in the political form in which they try

rescue their system as the crisis worsens. Even if some of them do draw attention to the danger of bonapartism, as the Lambertist organisation did over De Gaulle's accession, their politics have never gone beyond defending traditional bourgeois democracy. So their day-by-day struggle has been limited by that framework and their commitment to socialism remained at the level of propaganda – necessary, obviously, but restricted to the realm of ideas. Later they supported Mitterrand against De Gaulle's bonapartism in the name of this democracy. But as we know and Hollande has proved most recently, this democracy is no more than the antechamber to fascism or, specifically, bonapartism.

Whether or not these organisations actually mention bonapartism today, their slogans in general do not go beyond defending democracy as a whole against the attacks upon it. But the fact that the bourgeoisie is going over to bonapartism, even in a form masked and softened by remnants of democracy like the Fifth Republic, means that this system is already at a complete dead-end. So the concrete threat to toughen up the current "soft" bonapartism makes it even more vitally urgent to apply a bold and appropriate programme which can open up a *practical and concrete* path to socialism. Sarkozy taking the field to stiffen and toughen up the regime is a signal, a warning of the need to formulate such a programme for a socialist alternative publicly and put it into action. It is a challenge, a veritable tocsin calling all Marxists to reply in one voice, despite and independently of whether they belong to separate organisations, overcoming their divisions and clarifying what this alternative means theoretically and practically.

The Left Front has virtually ceased to exist

Sadly, the Front de Gauche (Left Front) stands out for its complete absence from this particularly agitated political situation. What forces it had have already been dissipated by a succession of defeats in recent (municipal and European)

elections, just when violent political crises have shaken the supposedly-socialist Parti Socialiste (but also the bourgeois UMP), exposing their internal contradictions and driving forward their decomposition (or explosion). The Left Front's main components, the Parti de Gauche (Left Party) and Parti Communiste (Communist Party) are following different political trajectories corresponding to each one's specific character.

Representing a petty-bourgeois layer of a workers' aristocracy ensconced in local government and the trade union leaderships, the Communist Party is throwing itself into variously-configured alliances, above all involving Hollande's disappointed elected representatives and officials. The aim of these parliamentary-style manoeuvres is to re-establish good old bourgeois democracy with "fair" class collaboration using the well-known political method of the popular front. And this at the very moment when the great majority of the bourgeoisie, in its insurmountable torments, has gone far beyond this stage, which is both outmoded and tailor-made to shore up its power. Now this reactionary orientation on the CP's part is dangerous because, outdated though it is, it can still mislead workers (as it did in the past) and channel their anger into an obvious setback. The CP may have willy-nilly had to abjure Stalin, but it would be a serious mistake to ignore that they have not got over their Stalinist conceptions.

The Left Party, meanwhile has been disappointed by its (predictably) poor election results and seems to have backed out of political life completely, just when politics have got agitated and offer a fertile field for determined intervention by an organisation of workers. The party needs some inspiration to lift it from the demoralisation its defeats have caused, but they seem to be intimidated by how harshly reality has treated their rather broadly-drawn and inconsistent policies, and they have retreated into fantasy. Instead of a political programme, they have put forward a propagandist project for a Sixth Republic. But this demand has

turned up all on its own, lacking both a head and a tail and completely detached from the concrete reality of struggles, about as appropriate in time and place as an ashtray on a motorcycle.

This demand is quite unexpected because it is on its own and, as it were, asexual. Nevertheless, at first sight it seems to be opposed both to Hollande's bastardised Fifth Republic and Sarkozy's project of consolidating this regime by reinforcing and accentuating its bonapartism. But if you look past the sentiments which animate it to what it concretely means as a demand, it turns out that this opposition is an illusory appearance, a mirage, and it does not really conflict with them at all. This Sixth Republic is not solidly located in a concrete programme for changing the whole of society; indeed, Melanchon scrupulously avoids any attempt to describe such a republic, so the vacuous nature of the project inevitably exposes it as an attempt to re-establish the old Fourth Republic. No amount of goodwill can change what this slogan ineluctably means. If it remains as it stands, this policy is condemned to rapid failure in this time of ever-intensifying class struggle.

(One cannot here pass over in silence Jean-Luc Melanchon's recent book: *L'Ere du Peuple* [The Age of the People] which marks a new stage in his theoretical and political regression. This is exposed by his explicit shift from being a declared representative of working people to the retrograde and dangerous mythology that exalts the people in general. At the same time he achieves a parallel conversion to a sort of visceral environmentalism, that petit-bourgeois substitute for social struggles and lifebelt for capital. A fuller examination would exceed the scope of this article, but in view of its significance it will be undertaken shortly).

For all that, it would be a premature to reject the Left Party out of hand as a definitively lost cause where working people are concerned. Indeed, it is hard to believe that all its

members and activists will blindly follow that sort of renunciation of the class struggle. It will take an internal struggle to decide the organisation's fate. But in the meantime this party, for now, like all the other far-left organisations, has shut itself out of the current political struggle in which the immediate stakes are capital's desire to reinforce its power using consistent bonapartism. The Left Party's general and summary denunciations of capitalism and/or its Fifth Republic are certainly not enough to make good the glaring shortcomings in their activity.

So an initial response to the question posed above, about whether Sarkozy's bonapartist project can succeed, is this: given the congenital and worsening maladies besetting the political organisations currently available to workers, as summarised above, they are hardly well-placed to prevent this big political shift, unless, of course, there is some unexpected outburst. So the answer depends on the outcome of the internal struggle currently underway between different political segments of the bourgeoisie distributed around the various bourgeois political parties (UMP, centrists, Front National, as well as the Socialist Party). They are in any case (with the temporary exception of the FN) ravaged by struggles between various factions precisely around problems relating to the profound need to transform the bourgeoisie's regime of political governance.

### **Bourgeois parties' deepening internal crises and conflicts**

A relatively strong element in the UMP (to whom the various centrist circles can be added) is lining up behind so-called moderate leaders such as Alain Juppé or François Fillon, who express and represent a wing of the bourgeoisie. This element is still attached to the very relative tranquillity of bourgeois democracy based on class collaboration and is alarmed by the uncertainties of a open, brutal social confrontation and the unforeseeable consequences of a fascist or even just a clearly more authoritarian regime. But their

weakness from the point of view of the bourgeoisie arises from the situation itself, which is more and more conflictual and intolerant of any such compromise, and which they are no more fit to deal with than the Socialist Party is.

This segment of the political bourgeoisie is on the one hand taken aback by capital's need to beef up its power (which means they are impotent in the face of fascism) and on the other disarmed when it comes to breaking the resistance of working people (in particular by smashing the unions). It is true their leaders try to outdo one another in demanding even greater social destruction on their patrons' behalf than that announced and promised by Sarkozy, but this changes nothing fundamental in their position.

This is why, in order to remain in that body and/or advance their careers, more and more UMP leaders are rallying around Sarkozy, sometimes unexpectedly (Raffarin, De Villepin, Wauquiez, etc.). They are following or expressing the clear majority of the right both inside and outside the UMP who are massively opting for the tough solution to the crisis.

Analysis of the forces at work thus points to Sarkozy as the probable victor in a political competition already underway to provide weakening capitalism with a tougher and more stable government more able to bring it the support it needs.

But life is much richer and more varied than even the best analysis, based as it must be on the available data. Imponderables arising from the multiplicity of human activities could shift and change the picture. However, such activities themselves do not fall from the skies, since they are already rooted in objective facts. We can point to some of them, even if it is impossible to predict precisely what the future will bring.

For a start, even if the bourgeoisie would like for the moment to avoid and spare itself the extra expenses (economic, social

and political) incidental to fascism, and would be content just to toughen up its bonapartist regime, it is possible that their calculations could be upset by various factors within even their own ranks which might help the Front National to come to power.

It is also possible that the break-up and decomposition underway in the Socialist Party will provide another candidate for the role of Bonaparte in the person of Manuel Valls, politically converted and personally completely up for this job.

And who can tell with any certainty what the outcome of the various judicial inquiries underway, all threatening Sarkozy, will be. There is not adequate space here to describe in detail how widespread all the corruption among politicians is and explain what it means, nor how lenient bourgeois courts can be where politicians are concerned. However, it is not entirely out of the question that Sarkozy will be found guilty. That would smooth the path for another UMP candidate, or maybe someone from the Front National. In any case, the victor would be the one who offers the strongest guarantees to the bourgeoisie that he or she will tie working people down hand and foot and destroy the gains they have made in order to rescue exhausted capitalism in its death agony.

### **For the working-class solution!**

Finally, and for that very reason, it is also possible that the masses of working people, including some of their political organisations, will rise in salutary fashion and come on the stage to overturn these machinations and change the situation from top to bottom. That will be much more likely if the activists in these organisations get involved in a decisive and unified struggle for the resolute defence of working people against the bourgeoisie's many-sided attacks; that would really lay the basis for a rising of that sort, which would be concentrated, and increasingly confirmed, in

the struggle between the intensified attacks and resistance on the part of trade unions. Hence the vital importance of working flat out to link these organisations to the *workers' unions* and the struggles they are involved in. In any case, such a link is a major requirement of Marxism, as well as a precise measure of all these organisations' real relationship to this revolutionary theory.

This theory clearly states that they have a duty, and one moreover, which the social context itself urgently requires, to offer a way out, a political programme for this resistance by the trade unions, and to organise to get it successfully on the road. The main axis of this policy necessarily must be to bring the unions to a break with the deceptive conception and rotten practice which demeans them to the level of "social partners" with the bourgeoisie. And at the same time bring them back onto the path of struggle for the emancipation of the working class. In the absence of such an opening, embodied in everyday practice, those organisations which claim to stand for working people and the revolution will fail in their elementary duty and, like a blunt and rusty knife, end up at the rubbish dump. That is the decisive choice today.

**Balazs Nagy**, November 2014

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## **Euro-election shock by Balazs Nagy**

*The surprise results of the recent European elections mean all political organisations have to re-evaluate the overall situation and their own policies.*

## **Complete bankruptcy of bourgeois Europe**

Two highly revealing and significant facts stand out about these elections, as a whole and in each individual country. First, and certainly foremost, is the particularly high level of abstentions (approaching 60% in France!), concentrated, moreover, in conurbations where workers and working people live. Abstentions were clearly higher, it needs to be said, in the countries of Eastern Europe (more than 70% in the great majority of them, over 80% in Slovakia and the Czech Republic). This clearly reflects their secondary position within European "unity".

The second is the unprecedented and ubiquitous growth of fascist or semi-fascist oppositions, a far right which actually came first in certain countries (France, UK, Denmark).

Apart from anything else, the first and most obvious conclusion is that the vast majority of Europeans are turning their backs on and definitively rejecting that monstrous construct called "European union". This central conclusion cannot be queried or challenged just by reference to the obviously broad range of views among those who abstained, or even voted for the far-right. Of course each of their various – and sadly all too often reactionary, retrograde or simply backward – motives is crucially significant in its own way. We should note, however, that many of those who voted for the far-right probably did so in protest against that Europe, rather than out of support for fascist ideology. Be that as it may, these results express an irrevocable verdict on the part of Europeans as a whole: They are absolutely opposed to the bourgeoisie's pseudo-Europe, which they massively reject and will not tolerate.

## **Bourgeois leaders' vicious and criminal intransigence**

Late on 25 May, French TV channels ran the election results

and what the various political party representatives had to say about them. The evening's viewing provided a good opportunity to assess the immediate reactions of a whole range of the country's political parties, from the conservative or social-democratic official spokespeople for the Euro-homunculus right through to the opposition, by way of the leaders of Front de Gauche (Left Front) and Front National (National Front) and everything in between. What they said made it blindingly obvious that literally not a single one of the representatives of this bankers' Europe has understood what voters are trying to tell them, clear as that message has been. Not a single one of the social democratic leaders or their traditional bourgeois partner/opponents, nor the various subordinate currents which gravitate around them, had grasped what this means. That, of course, only surprised those incorrigibly naïve people who still take them seriously.

The main leader of the reactionary brain-dead in the Union pour un mouvement populaire (UMP) is [Jean-François Copé](#). All they could offer was the consolation that they had gained ground at the expense of Hollande's Parti socialiste (PS). Their noisy self-satisfaction, however, was tempered by regret at being overtaken by the National Front. They sadly resigned themselves to the fact that the rusty European hulk had just gone under, but had little to offer when it came to explaining why. Not that they even tried. Copé simply blamed Hollande's policies for this setback, obviously without realising that they are both in the same rather fragile European boat. Under these conditions, how could they have seen that the reason their European cockleshell foundered was design and construction defects rather than something the captain had done wrong (Even if the latter's incompetence did accentuate the more basic flaws). As a result, they were all equally baffled by the huge advances the far right made right across the continent, and just saw it as a minor passing accident.

Alain Juppé speaks for another wing of the same party,

allegedly more thoughtful and moderate, but even he could not rise above the same cheap parliamentarism. Being a more serious politician than his less sophisticated colleague Copé, he at least made the effort to sketch a political line to beat the National Front. Quickly adding the 10% of votes won by the bourgeois centre parties to the 20-21 % the UMP got, he triumphantly declared that the resulting 30% of votes cast easily beat the National Front's 25%. All you needed to do was combine the UMP and centre parties' votes, and a thorny political problem tuned into a simple parliamentary manoeuvre.

These recently-merged centre parties came in fourth place just in front of the ecologists, followed in 6<sup>th</sup> place by the Left Front. So they showed loud and overflowing satisfaction and were at pains to emphasise, in their enthusiastic congratulations, that their totally but critically pro-European policy is the way out of the current deadlock.

In fact all these good people were forced to acknowledge that current policy on Europe has suffered a resounding setback. What else could they do? They even bandied words like "failings", "convulsions" and "chaos". Oddly, but completely in character with their bourgeois political commitments, none of them could see that what causes it is this bourgeois Europe's destructive nature. They simply could not see that what people were rejecting was precisely this Europe.

In general, they were all self-critical, although almost all of them more or less blamed the government and Hollande personally, except for the Socialist Party – and Green – representatives. But let's not exaggerate. Any normal person – if he or she were childishly naïve – would expect these politicians and journalists to apologise for carrying out the European policies that the voters massively rejected. Far from it! Every single one re-stated their commitment to those very same policies, then beat their breasts for not having done more to explain (!) the setback

their bourgeois Europe had suffered. But in fact this Europe has been so well explained, not only by pervasive and aggressive propaganda but also by an eloquently destructive practice, that voters rejected it precisely because they know exactly what it means.

### **Socialist Party leaders just as perverse**

This sort of collective blindness on the part of politicians and journalists discussing the stinging rebuff their Europe had suffered is truly amazing. It presents a striking and repulsive image of the system's so-called "elite" which absolutely captures its decadent nature. What it foreshadows – should its miserable existence be prolonged – is an uncertain future full of looming threats, convulsions, pain and repeated shocks.

But the (socialist) government promptly also went in for denial of reality. TV viewers saw a clearly shocked Prime Minister Valls nevertheless insisting that the measures he has been taking in recent times are exactly what the voters wanted. To tell the truth, he had to blind himself to reality so absurdly just to justify staying in government. But so contemptuous a distortion of the truth was contradicted not only by the facts but also the prime minister's haggard and extremely upset appearance and his dazed and lugubrious tone, which clashed oddly with the artificial joviality he sometimes affects in his new role. He really looked like he was falling apart under the seismic impact.

We should point out immediately that the very next day Hollande stubbornly and unblushingly confirmed that they would carry on with their criminal policies which, together with their "responsibility plan", he presented as if it was what the voters said they wanted! This shameless arrogance went much, much further than even Valls' insolent effrontery. The wily old politician's practised and cool cynicism in political lying made up for the panic his rattled minister showed. Just

like all their pseudo-opponents, they both attributed the voters' general rejection of the bourgeoisie to the weakness and inadequacy of the propaganda explaining what they thought and what they were doing in relation to Europe. This brutal travesty of the truth foreshadows a swift deterioration in already difficult living conditions and even greater shocks in future.

### **Others make headway in the absence of working-class politics**

The most telling feature of these elections has been the striking absence of genuine workers' parties. More exactly: none of the various political organisations which actually fight against the bourgeoisie's policy on Europe – and to their credit they undeniably do that – have managed to free themselves from major shortcomings which show their dependence on the bourgeoisie.

For one thing, they do not go beyond a very restricted level of simply criticising the bourgeoisie's policy on Europe. None of them has yet been able to open a concrete perspective of a working-class Europe radically opposed to the kind of Europe the bourgeoisie are concocting. For another, and bound up with this negative position, each of them has developed their criticisms over Europe firmly within the limitations of their own strictly national framework, except for a few sentimental rather than effective solidarity links and the occasional sprinkling of gatherings and resolutions left over from the past.

Altogether and in general, all these organisations are therefore captives of the given capitalist system and submit to its pressure. Here, too, they are still largely influenced, by the enduring ideology of social democracy and Stalinism, whose national, not to say nationalist, political horizon has always been a bulwark against internationalist Marxism. The few scattered allusions to the Socialist United States of Europe we get from certain organisations of Trotskyist origin

do not change anything in this general picture, since these chance references are completely detached from daily reality, hanging in mid-air and placed as far in the future as religion's Kingdom of Heaven.

Under these conditions, the rout inflicted upon the bourgeoisie's policy over Europe has led to not only a spectacular resurgence of fascist and semi-fascist organisations but also the emergence and proliferation of petit-bourgeois formations in general. (We leave aside, for the moment, analysing the considerable advances by UKIP in the UK and the People's Party in Denmark, both of which came first. They campaign openly for putting the bourgeoisie back in the driving seat and, in order to do so, they make abundant use of fascist ammunition against impoverished peoples and the migrants from their ranks and for the restoration of the national state).

As for the advances made by the fascists, it is significant that bourgeois commentators try to console themselves over the setback they have suffered with the thought that the fascists are unable to form a homogenous group in the European Parliament. Splitting hairs like this is pathetic in itself, since instead of explaining why the fascists are growing so strongly, they try to make it disappear by exploiting a problem that arises precisely from their growth. Nevertheless, it is true that there are differences, not to say considerable divergences between them. Maybe you cannot identify Nigel Farage's British UKIP with Golden Dawn in Greece modelled on Hitler's Nazi party, or even with the Front National in France. Nevertheless this UKIP, like the Danish People's Party, draws its politics from the same fascist arsenal. Their frenzied nationalism and clear orientation towards re-establishing a strong national state together with aggression against migrant workers and peoples of the former colonies and dependent states puts them in the same camp of semi-fascists and impels them in that direction.

From a different point of view, the idea that in the past all fascist parties stuck together in unity was always a myth invented by the bourgeoisie – and Stalinists. There were well-known differences and divergences, even between Hitler and Mussolini, for example and even when they were fighting on the same side, which tended to iron them out. To say nothing of the distinctions between Franco's party and Salazar's and others, or the military dictatorships drawn into Hitler's gravitational field.

This crying absence of genuine workers' politics is also what has allowed a set of straightforwardly petit-bourgeois political parties to flourish like mushrooms after rain. They, too, are distinguished from each other in various ways, but in a quite different fashion from the fascist or semi-fascist organisations whose open and resolute support for capitalism unifies them on the extreme right. At the same time there is a significant difference between the majority of the petit-bourgeois organisations developing a critique of bourgeois politics from the left of the political chess-board and others who try to maintain a pseudo-independence. What they all have in common, for all their often quite broad political diversity, is the attempt to camouflage society's division into classes. They replace this with secondary and sometimes quite odd problems on the basis of a shared and savage hostility to the conception of class struggle and Marxism in general.

Whether these organisations are right or left, older and larger, like the ecologists, or recent and local like "Podemos" in Spain, we can for the moment postpone their examination, necessary as it may be. On the other hand, there are, in France at least, organisations which claim to speak on behalf of working people about which it has become essential to reflect seriously.

**Where do Left Front and its European partners stand?**

The Left Front coalition, which took off big time in a left-radical way during the presidential elections and since, has quite rightly raised many hopes. It created confidence that a big, genuine workers' party could replace the old, compromised social-democratic and Stalinist parties mired in class-collaboration. Consequently it also embodied the concrete possibility of the re-birth and development of the new, big revolutionary party the situation requires. And that is why, despite the inevitable and tenacious residues of its origins which blemish its activities and retard its development, it was necessary to encourage and support this initiative. It marked and expressed the possibility of a renewal of the revolutionary movement in the face of the opportunist decadence of the traditional workers' parties and also the sterile blind alley in which various organisations with a more and more blurred reference to Trotskyism find themselves. The fact that more or less identical movements came about and developed in Greece (Syriza) and Germany (Die Linke) indicated that the conditions for their existence were not only present in Europe but had also matured.

However, while supporting the Left Front, we have had to intensify our criticisms around the negative character of its political line, i.e. its reduction to a simple critique of current policy and striking lack of a workers' programme for fighting the bourgeoisie. After the municipal elections, our journal *Lutte des Classes* (no 22) wrote that in the absence of such a programme "the Left Front is condemned to mark time while the National Front has made considerable progress, including among discontented workers." (English translation printed in *Workers' International Journal* no 5, June 2014). A month later, just before the European elections, we anticipated in the same journal (no 24) that "Perhaps a pathetic result at the ballot box will shake these organisations' centrist outlook and unleash a movement for their renewal. It is a hope to cling to". (English translation printed in *Workers' International Journal* no 5, June 2014).

Indeed, the Left Front's disastrous election results fully confirmed these fears and our criticisms. In view not just of the much better results they had got in the presidential elections but also the much worse current situation, their miserable 6.3% of the vote represents an obvious decline. This real collapse exposes a disparity, not to say a contradiction, between the Left Front's programme on the one hand and the steadily worsening situation working people face on the other. But sadly, the initial reactions to this resounding defeat are worse than disappointing, expressing a level of astonishment at the meagre results matched only by an inability to comprehend them.

The morning after the elections, J.-L. Mélançon presented his party cadres and the media with the plaintive and tearful commentary of a beaten chief. He more or less repeated what he had said on TV the previous night (mentioned above). He was so grief-stricken that he could hardly hold back the tears and he drew his comments to a rapid close to avoid breaking out in sobs.

This physically awkward appearance itself revealed a man moaning on at his wits' end rather than a fighter reflecting on the lessons of a temporary defeat. Indeed, the lamentable way he presented his interpretation of the results completely matched the whining and recriminatory content of his remarks. Faced with the cresting progress of the National Front, he lost any sense of proportion and got bitterly distressed about this "end of civilisation" (?), just as over the top as a few days earlier when he had shown boundless confidence that the Left Front would amaze everyone with how well it would do. (Sadly, the phenomenon this exaggerated and one-sided judgement failed to address was the very high level of abstentions.)

He said absolutely nothing about the possibility that his own organisation's political line might be mistaken – any such idea seemed to be outlandish, not to say sacrilegious – so

all that remained was for him to try to lay the blame on the situation and/or working people. Comrade Melancon avoided saying it outright, but at the end of his breast-beating he couldn't stop himself from appealing to working people to take heart again and see where their real interests lay, which was a barely-disguised way of making them responsible for the setback.

Syriza in Greece, with visibly the same politics, did manage to come out clearly on top in the elections with 26.6% of the votes, but that was solely because the situation there is different and more favourable. The bankruptcy of Pasok, the social-democratic party, already happened earlier. Together with the servile way the bourgeois New Democracy party fell into line behind Brussels and its Troika, this opened the door wide for Syriza, and this was extended even further by the openly and repellently Hitlero-fascist politics of Golden Dawn. However, these more advantageous conditions should not make us forget that the conservatives came hard on Syriza's heels with 23.1% of the votes, while here, too, abstentions amounted to more than 40% of the electorate. In Germany die Linke also saw their share of the vote drop to 6.5%, more or less the same as Left Front, given that quite a number of voters could see no difference between this formation and the SPD (Social-Democratic Party of Germany) in "opposition".

As for Tsipras (Syriza) standing against Barroso in the election of the new President of the European Commission, this was just opportunist grandstanding. By doing this, these parties justified and legitimated this instrument of bourgeois dictatorship for grinding the working people of Europe under the iron heel of its policies. Tsipras' political line, with a tinge of anti-German feeling (such is his nationalist resentment at the supremacy of German capital within the bourgeoisie's arrangements) clearly express the content of this opportunism. What it actually indicates is that he thought – and still thinks – that he can use the same

rotten and anti-democratic organs ... for policies in favour of working people. This involves bourgeois policies without austerity, a big investment programme, a New Deal, he says credulously. So it's no surprise that now, instead of Barroso, he is backing Juncker from Luxembourg, the close and fervent friend of the big bankers, the initiator and boss of the hated Troika! There's only one way to describe this kind of clowning: going backwards.

### **Responsibility of the traditional far left**

The general decline in these promising formations (with the exception of Syriza in Greece where it is prospering due to various objective factors) is completely mirrored by the spectacular advances the far right is making. Now such symmetry is not somehow caused by the balance of nature; the pitiful retreat by the former has directly conditioned the considerable progress the latter have made. But where is the so-called Marxist far left?

If one looks in France, for example – and also at a European level – , for reasons why it has not been possible to re-discover and develop a genuine workers' programme, there is no doubt that a significant share of the responsibility rests with the three biggest organisations which have come out of Trotskyism and profess that tradition. Without of course pretending to be able to describe them completely here, some general comments are required in relation to this responsibility.

First and foremost, for all the differences of outlook between the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA of Alain Krivine and Olivier Besancenot), Lutte Ouvriere (LO, Workers Fight, formerly of Arlette Laguiller) and the Lambertist Parti des Travailleurs (Workers Party), differences due mainly to their respective histories, all these organisations have taken a negative attitude towards the Left Front. They have regarded this newcomer with a lot of distrust and not a little

jealousy: after all, they come from the suspect milieu of social democracy and Stalinism and, what's much worse, trespassed on private hunting preserves.

From the outset they carefully avoid getting "compromised" with the Communist Party and Melancon's new party in the Left Front, which they treated with hostile suspicion. Moreover, they unanimously rejected the slightest sustained cooperation in struggle, a united front, indeed, and even any electoral alliance with these plague-carriers who had come to disturb their established daily routine. In fact, after the last big battle of clarification in Trotskyist ranks in 1952-1953, they settled down comfortably into their special role of licensed public revolutionary, a role they practice according to an arcane ritual they call Marxism. In fact it was and remains a profanation of the Marxist method, opposed to it in every way and which, to put it briefly, consists in trying to separate and fix, restrict and freeze the conditions of struggle, in particular the activity and circumference of the revolutionary organisation.

How can you expect these organisations to apply the policy of the united front or join in this Left Front coalition or at least form an electoral alliance with it, when they have been virtually incapable of establishing such an alliance between themselves for the last 60 (!) years.

Since the 1952-1953 split, the ditch separating them has just got bigger and bigger and each on its own side has settled into the split in the Fourth International as an eternal destiny in which each one has its own special corner. They have demonstrated their complete incapacity to sort out rebuilding the Fourth International, considering the two other organisations to be enemies definitively and totally lost to that process of rebuilding. In the absence of any ability to resolve or even confront the problem at the base of the break (i.e. the problem of re-building), the split intensified further and dramatically the original cause of the separation,

that is, Pabloite revisionism, systematising it into generalised opportunism via Mandel's "neo-capitalism" and finally culminating in the furtive abandonment of Marxism. But this fatalistic mutual acceptance of the break, on the other hand, also reinforced the sectarian isolation of the anti-Pabloite critics, fixed their sterile enclosure in the ivory towers of their verities singularly lacking in any perspective that offered a solution.

Where did this monumental historical deficiency arise from, a deficiency whose effects have gone on for decades and transformed what started off as a split into a veritable dislocation of the International, then into today's yawning abyss where, alongside false propositions, reaction too takes root?

Throughout their history, the French Trotskyist organisations (like the others) have been more or less intensely affected by the influence of Stalinist conceptions, often preponderant and always corrosive. Even while Trotsky was still alive, this defect was made considerably worse by the petit-bourgeois composition of the organisation, driven to the margins of the workers' movement by the Stalinists. After Trotsky's assassination, followed by the total collapse at the end of the war and then the split, whatever organisations emerged divided again, not between the real Marxists and the others, but along the lines of the various – but all equally mistaken – strategic versions which the Stalinists applied in the course of their history. The different Trotskyist organisations followed either Stalinism's right-wing orientation, or the ultra-leftism of the "Third Period". Very often they mixed the opportunism of the one with the sectarianism of the other.

But as concerns the method of political struggle in general and building the party in particular, the former Pabloites currently in the NPA, the Lambertists in the parti des travailleurs and Lutte Ouvriere invariably shared the same

outrageous sectarianism, firstly towards the other "Trotskyist" tendencies and then in relation to the workers' movement as a whole. They looked at the Left Front in the same way.

Trotsky once commented that the Stalinists regarded Rosa Luxemburg with a great deal of suspicion, unable to tell whether she was a friend or an enemy. Now the NPA, with its Pabloite origins, looks askance at the Left Front in exactly the same way (not, of course, that that makes the Left Front into any sort of Rosa Luxemburg). These hesitations have, nevertheless, already caused a number of splits in the NPA. First, a group led by Christian Picquet, then another one, split away and joined the Left Front. These breaks, however, have not led to the necessary re-awakening of the organisation as a whole. So the groups that split away have maintained their centrist character and remained unable to change anything at all in the Left Front., while the NPA has continued its unprincipled hesitation waltz.

As for Lutte Ouvrière, it has continued imperturbably on its solitary way, marked from its very origins by hostility to the proclamation of the Fourth International and by its nationalist seclusion. It persists in its isolation with an inveterate sectarianism in which both their behaviour and the arguments they use look strangely similar to the ultra-left politics of "Third Period" Stalinism. True to form, this organisation gleefully reported the Left Front's latest electoral setback as if this justified its hostility to the Front.

One can describe Lutte Ouvrière's sectarianism as intrinsic. That of the Lambertist organisation, on the other hand, is, one might say, "tempered" by its special and occasional opportunism (in contrast to the more generalised opportunism of the NPA). The Lambertist organisation is sectarian in relation to the Front de Gauche and the CFDT trade union and even the CGT, but flatly opportunist in relation to the Force

Ouvrière trade union, which has been its privileged partner since that union came into being. Apart from its opportunism towards social democracy, which it likes to identify with the working class, the Lambertist organisation's Achilles' heel is its inclination to substitute the struggle for national sovereignty for the international class struggle. And so in 2013 the congress of their "International" suddenly decide to concentrate the international mobilisation of its militants in the "defence" of Algeria against some imaginary threat of US military intervention! Obviously this "threat" never materialised, but the whole thing worked marvellously to distract the attention of activists from, for example, the problems of Europe.

So, with either an occasional or an intrinsic sectarian conception (which they claim to be Marxist) in relation to every other organisation such as the Left Front, they too took their own lonely, isolated stand in the recent European elections. Obviously (what is more) they lacked a clear working-class policy on Europe dealing with concrete and current problems. And of course they each in their own corner garnered about 1% of the vote – actually worse than usual, while the Left Front just got weaker.

Such sectarian outlooks, and the concomitant opportunism, are the natural products of an aristocratic conception of the party (their party!), separated from the workers' movement as a whole in a water-tight compartment, whose building is reduced to the rigorous and individual selection of the few elect into a separate elite. This sect conception, detached and distant from the masses, is only applicable at most to clandestine conditions, but it is disastrous in open political struggle. Right through modern history, it has been opposed to Marxism and its application. Since the Communist Manifesto, Marxism has clearly established, against any sectarian or elitist point of view, that it is the workers' movement as a whole, all the changes it undergoes and the methods it uses,

that constitute not just the terrain but the very skeleton of the revolutionary party itself.

The Manifesto unequivocally emphasised: "The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties. They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole". Nor do they "set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement". And in conclusion: "the communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing political and social order of things". Political – and theoretical – struggle unfolds within this framework as a necessary means of clarification, not as some sort of selection criterion.

Now isolated and besieged as it was, and giving way to the pressure of capital, Stalinism in the USSR perverted Marxism, including Lenin's heritage. They adapted it to the requirements of staying in power: conciliatory towards capital and violently opposed to the workers' movement as a whole. Once Trotsky was lost, his heirs in turn succumbed to this de-natured and corrupt "Marxism".

Concretely each and every one of these "Trotskyist" formations think that in and through itself the revolutionary party already exists, and building it is simply a matter of linear and progressive growth through recruiting individuals one after another. With strictly individual recruitment of this sort – which is normal in a secret society but absolutely alien to Marxism – they can denounce all other organisations, lumping their members together with their leaderships.

These organisations are condemned to decline, although this is masked and retarded by their prolonged vegetation, punctuated by successive electoral setbacks. It is a fact which should stir their members to study past and recent experiences very carefully and draw the necessary conclusions, especially since

the long decades of defeats and setbacks the international workers' movement has suffered, made particularly worse by the liquidation of the USSR and the changes in the composition of the working class, have profoundly altered the habitually-known conditions for resuming the struggle.

The essential feature in these negative changes has been the general repudiation of Marxism and socialism at the same time as the Soviet Union collapsed and was disowned. Since this workers' state was associated with the Stalinist bureaucratic regime, Marxism in turn was identified with the falsification of it at the hands of the same bureaucracy. The whole thing was greatly facilitated by the evolution and changing composition of the working class which was happening at the same time and the growth of petit-bourgeois intermediary layers. The results were not long in coming: On the one hand a shrinkage and ossification of living Marxism reduced to the level of dogma in ancient texts; on the other, a more and more flagrant contradiction between the growing size of the mass movements and their theoretical poverty, not to say the complete absence of any theory. Under these conditions, the masses' apprenticeship in struggle needs more explanations and time, and activists' development requires much more patience.

### **Ramblings based on impressions replacing theory**

Flagrant impotence, therefore, is sadly what characterises all the organisations on the far left who oppose bourgeois politics and its Europe. Their impotence in a situation which should actually favour their development means we must undertake a serious critique of the theoretical arsenal underlying the political dead-end they are in.

We have already glanced at the way the organisations which arose out of the dislocation and often repudiation of the Fourth International share responsibility for the Left Front's stagnation. They have been through a long death-agony and floundered, inflicting their own death-blow by repudiating or

diluting the Marxism that alone could provide a theoretical, either by simply and clearly dropping it (NPA), or by letting it ossify into a collection of classical assertions (“Lutte Ouvrière” and the Lambertists).

Consequently there has been no pressure on the Left Front on sharpen up its theoretical armaments by accepting and developing creative Marxism, so that it remains captive to profoundly mistaken theoretical considerations which it peddles, like birth-marks inherited from its social-democratic and Stalinist parentage and which tie it to the existing social and political order. A recent work by the Left Party’s leading economist, Jacques Généreux, provides a useful opportunity to evaluate concretely the dominant theoretical conceptions in the Left Front. *Jacques Généreux explique l’économie à tout le monde (Jacques Généreux Explains Economics for All)* is a 331-page book published quite recently (May 2014) by Seuil. It sums up rather well the theoretical nonsense the Left Front has strayed into, but which affects all organisations on the far left to one degree or another.

This economic inspirer of the Left Front thinks that the post-war period known as the “thirty glorious years” of the economy “... which persisted until the 70s, had very little to do with capitalism in the strict sense.” (p.41), because “... the big industrial countries developed in a new system in which the holders of capital no longer had complete freedom or the powers which that confers”. (p.42) It is important to note that as far as he is concerned, this “new system” is the goal for which we must strive.

To bolster this bold and surprising conclusion he lists some of the rules he claims limited the omnipotence of capital, although he carefully avoids putting a name to this “new system” which supposedly replaced capitalism. This prudent approach enables him later to note that during the 1980s capitalism returned in strength, simply thanks to various counter measures.

We should not waste too much time on this – to put it mildly – extremely cavalier way of dealing with the change of a whole mode of production, which in principle (and in historical practice) can only be the outcome of significant social factors accompanied by political overturns. We merely need to underline that this crude and simplistic view exposes total ignorance, not just of the real reason for the “thirty glorious years”, but also of the resounding social struggles that took place during those years. In fact it is fairly easy to understand the historical movement of powerful social and political forces whose interaction engendered these so-called “thirty glorious years”.

Capitalism entered the war in order to suppress its insurmountable and prolonged economic political crisis which broke out in 1929. It came out of the war in 1944-1945 even weaker and more exhausted than at the beginning. In the course of the war the relationship of forces between it and the world working class had shifted strongly in favour of the latter. From the beginning of 1943, the proletarian revolution was spreading in several countries in Europe and Asia, stimulated by the Soviet Union’s Red Army’s powerful offensive.

The bourgeois political regimes which had been vassals of fascism or had fallen victim to it collapsed one after the other. The revolution was on the march – but enemies were at work within its own ranks. Above all, it was the active collaboration of the leaderships of the workers’ movement, the Stalinist parties especially and in particular, which saved the capitalist system from total collapse, a powerful rescue operation prepared and orchestrated by the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union as a resolute ally of the “democratic” bourgeoisie.

Now if this new-style Holy Alliance actually did strangle the revolution, which failed everywhere (except in Yugoslavia and China, where it was brought to an abrupt halt) it nevertheless left a deep impression on the bourgeois regimes which re-

emerged after the war. In other words, the bourgeoisie's faithful servants who had sold the revolution for a mess of pottage had to be rewarded. Within a relationship of forces clearly in favour of the proletariat, this mess of pottage had to be paid for.

Such was the particular class configuration which formed the basis for the "thirty glorious years", whose backcloth was the open and direct going-over of the Stalinist bureaucracy and its agents as a whole to the active counter-revolution. To be sure, they did not perform this immense service for free and without a recompense that let them justify and retain their influence. The extent of the concessions the bourgeoisie granted in turn reflected the degree of danger that menaced capitalism. It also demonstrated the bourgeoisie's great fear, since it went very far into these compromises in its concern to preserve the system, even so far as to grant concessions which altered its very appearance, and to adjust the form of its rule. It changed its face without altering its character. The capitalist wolf mutated into a loving grandmother who carefully retained her "big teeth".

A lot of people were fooled by this ability of the bourgeoisie to manoeuvre in order to stay in power. The whole of what they call the "Left" fell for it. The chief ideologue of the Left Party, the economist Jacques Généreux, expresses this fundamental and general error like this: "Between 1945 and 1975, many industrial countries were no longer within a real capitalist economy. What rescued the industrialised countries from the damage caused by capitalism ... is precisely the fact that they got out of the capitalist system as Marx described it. In place of this capitalism ... they substituted a mixed and highly-regulated economy in which salaried managers and civil servants had more power than the capitalists." (p.43).

Here, Jacques Généreux says openly what people on the "Left" and even many on the far left thought more quietly without daring to put it so crudely. This way of looking at things

rests entirely on the firm conviction that this whole lucky mutation came from the bourgeoisie itself which, acting freely and of its own accord, decided to make capitalism more bearable out of its infinite wisdom and magnanimity.

The class struggle, indeed any sort of struggle at all, is totally conjured away in this imaginary society ruled by understanding and discernment. The theoretical crutch upon which this conception rests presents itself as an obviously wrong interpretation of Marxism, which Généreux reduces to a few formulae, missing out the essential part. This is indicated already by the simple fact that throughout the whole 331 page book the word "class" (to say nothing of "class struggle") does not even appear!

The basis for this misunderstanding and, more concretely, the idyllic transformation of capitalism into a regulated and more humane (but undefined) system is, therefore, an obvious ignorance of capitalism itself. To be more exact, it is a total misunderstanding (or deliberate omission) of its nature and its historic evolution, as well as of their inner driving forces and content. Even more concretely, it is capitalism moving on from its classic, ascendant phase to its decline, death-agony and the manifold determinations involved which are missing in this fixed, immobile, capitalism. It is a well-known procedure frequently used by pseudo-Marxists who refer to Marx but deliberately leave out how Lenin and Trotsky developed his theory. This is how they strip Marxism precisely of its spirit as an analysis of living reality and petrify it into ancient immutable texts.

This is the method Jacques Généreux uses too when, claiming to present Marx's conception, he carefully excises Lenin's contribution. This surgical operation allows him to present the way capitalism was rescued from complete collapse by making concessions (1945-75) into proof that it had metamorphosed into a higher social order. Alchemists of old had a similar blind confidence in the miraculous ability of

base lead to mutate into noble glittering gold. But in the end science taught us that that kind of transubstantiation exists in religious beliefs, but not among the natural elements, nor in social reality.

This kind of superstitious speculation abounds in Jacques Généreux's book when it comes to the desirability and possibility of a repeating the "thirty glorious years" in today's base society. They replace any serious reflection of the programme which flows from the situation itself, since they are so pervasive that they simply push aside the harsh realities of everyday life. But essentially this unbridled speculation masks and hides above all the reality of the concrete and particular historical conditions of the "thirty glorious years".

The first condition for the really significant concessions made in those post-war years was the actual strength of the working class in the industrial countries, where revolutionary movements (and a series of revolutions) placed the capitalist order in mortal danger. But also the imperilled bourgeoisie, weakened as it was, had to be able to offer concessions, even on a temporary and cavalier basis, by digging even deeper into its own shrinking reserves. Finally, it also required that at the head of the revolutionary working class there should be degenerated and corrupt leaderships prepared to sell the revolution out cheaply in exchange for these concessions, while still able to produce arguments to justify imposing this abuse of authority.

Not a single one of these conditions is fulfilled today, or to be more precise, that are radically changed. The powerful and vigorous working class of then has suffered crucial successive defeats, and the endless retreats have merged into one general rout. Moreover, it has seen its forces drastically diminished, its make-up radically changed and its movement now only a shadow of what it was at the end of the war. Moreover, not only has it become impossible for the bourgeoisie to offer

anything whatsoever to working people, its decline has grown even worse and impels it to violently and dictatorially destroy all past reforms and concessions, something it finds easier because of the weakening of the workers' movement. We should add that, following their open and brutal collaboration, the bureaucratic leaderships of the workers' movement have lost their former decisive position in the workers' movement. The historic defeat of Stalinism and social democracy's open avowed and cynical role as a direct pillar of the bourgeoisie have practically put an end to their organisational grip on the working class. (Even if the influence of their conceptions is still rife and serves to muddle the political consciousness of the majority of left and far-left activists.)

And this is how it goes with the Left Front and Left Party, one of whose most significant leaders, Génèreux, in his book not only heaps praises on the class collaboration of the "thirty glorious years" but advocates a return to these policies as the right and proper programme with which to oppose the devastation caused by austerity. But we have just seen that the very specific social and political conditions, historically determined by particular circumstances, which combined to give birth to this special form of class collaboration, have disappeared. More concretely, the quite exceptional relationship of class forces at the time, with a working class on the offensive against a bourgeoisie forced onto the defensive and retreat, has today turned into its opposite.

It is the bourgeoisie which has taken the initiative and developed a general offensive against a working class weakened and disarmed, destroying their previous gains. Trying to force the bourgeoisie to make significant concessions when it is developing an offensive against a working class in disorganised retreat, quite apart from betraying a petit-bourgeois expectation of alms from the master, is in any case

a terrible nonsense which confuses two entirely different situations.

In concrete daily politics, this muddle inevitably appears as a serious mistake, as Généreux's book as a whole illustrates. The endless rambling about the possible and desirable changes in capitalism prevent him from even mentioning the current and real bourgeois offensive against all the gains that working people have made. And so fundamental problems of the day, such as the growth in unemployment, the unbearably high levels of debt, the rapid fall in wages in the face of overwhelming price rises, and the continuous dismantling of rights and benefits, to mention only a few, are completely missing from this book. So it's no surprise that one looks in vain for any sort of programme that could respond to these problems which workers face every day. All you can hope for is that something (the Holy Ghost, perhaps?) will touch the bourgeoisie and inspire it to transform its offensive against the working class into a new version of the "thirty glorious years".

It seems little short of incredible that activists endowed with the capacity to reflect, the will to fight and solid experience should fall for such twaddle. But in the Left Front and certain other far-left organisations, it is nonsense of this kind that guides and orientates their struggles. There is, therefore, an absolute contradiction between their sincere commitment to changing the world and the skimpy, retrograde conceptions which tie them to this world. That is why the main task is to overcome this contradiction by adopting a conception and policies in total harmony with this real determination to change the world.

### **For a radical theoretical and political turn by the far left**

Theoretical and political independence in relation to capitalism, its system and its bourgeois class, is the indispensable condition for establishing harmony between, on the one hand, sincere and ambitious aspirations and, on the

other, limited objectives of the struggle. Only that sort of independence allows a concrete perspective to be defined which actually goes beyond the system. All past and recent history proves that, without independence of that kind, even the firmest determination to change capitalism is reduced to patching it up, and that in principle this can only work in the short term.

But this theoretical and political independence cannot be the fruit of disembodied speculation or mental play. It is rooted in the working class, whose existence and fate are tied to those of capital, but opposed to them in a profoundly contradictory way. Hence the indissoluble organic link between theoretical and political independence vis-à-vis capital and the struggle of the working class. Now, only Marxism expresses this cohesion and thus puts into words the necessary class independence in thought and action. *All* other theories are tied to this system or inevitably fall back into its well-worn tracks. That is why this theory alone clearly says that, instead of trying to patch up capital's dilapidated and unhinged system, the central and immediate task is to overthrow it and move on to socialism. In conclusion, the historic task of the moment is reduced to and concentrated in a vigorous return to Marxism and its reaffirmation as the theory and guiding thread of the political activity of all organisations fighting against the grip of capital.

However, as the election results have repeatedly and relentlessly confirmed, the prospects of the Left Front and die Linke in Germany have been broadly compromised. These two coalitions, in thrall to their reformist theories, are seriously threatened with disappearing or shrivelling into political insignificance. (Syriza in Greece still has the benefit of a respite due to the specific situation in that country.)

Sadly, the Left Front obviously lacks the internal resources which could enable it on its own to make the veritable leap

that is necessary if it is to turn to Marxism. From now on it is useless and in fact damaging to hang around waiting for any such "cultural revolution" on its part. Instead of that kind of turn, it is attempting to avoid the more and more obvious fate that awaits it with a confused and many-hued mixture of inconsistent scraps and reformist recipes. Its recent political evolution proves this.

Within the structure of the Left Front, the weight of those formations which, formally at least, linked it to Marxism and the workers' movement has noticeably diminished and that of those which came from other horizons grown (obviously one is not speaking here of the Communist Party, which long ago silently dropped even the caricature of Marxism to which it used to lay claim). For example there were groups which broke away from the NPA (Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste – New Anti-capitalist Party) like that led by Christian Picquet and others, which have lost their role and significance in this coalition, whereas the frankly petit-bourgeois group "Ensemble" ("Together") of Clémentine Autain, a loose, obscure and indeterminate assemblage, is coming to the fore. This surely represents a political slide to the right on the part of the Front, despite the fact that the groups coming from the NPA have shown not the slightest aptitude to inspire anyone with Marxism. Faithful to their Pabloite heritage, they have continued their old politics of adaptation, this time not to triumphant Stalinism but the reformism pervasive in the Left Front. Nevertheless, their loss of influence has loosened even further the Left Front's already tenuous links with Marxist traditions.

Finally, like a drowning man clutching at a straw, the Left Front has clung even closer to the "enrichment" offered by the environmentalists and their doctrine. But environmentalism (and the politics of the "Greens" as a whole) is another way – different from the well-known, traditional, reformism – of asserting that it is possible to cure capitalist

society, i.e. to maintain it, through ecological rather than socialist policies and measures. In this it is (if possible) more reactionary than traditional reformism: politically further to the right and intellectually inferior, since it squarely abandons the concrete social terrain to situate its struggle elsewhere, in man's (general!) relationship with nature – much to the delight of the capitalists! In line with this evasion, it turns its back on the workers' movement, in particular the trade unions, to place itself in the heart of the urban petit-bourgeoisie. And then, since unlike traditional reformism, it has been and remains utterly incapable of producing a perspective, a general theoretical vision, it does not even have a coherent political programme and makes do with negative criticisms and repeating a few nostrums.

Now the Left Front (or concretely its political motor force, the Left Party) has turned even more closely towards these reactionary ersatz politics, decorating its wobbly political line with a few environmentalist trimmings. This highly-embroidered adventure it has baptised "eco-socialism", which strictly speaking is entirely devoid of meaning. What it does actually mean, very clearly, is that the Left Party (the Left Front), instead of drawing closer to Marxism, is moving even further away. Two very important political conclusions flow from this.

The first is that, despite everything, the Left Front's retreat and its slide to the right should not serve as an alibi for abandoning it or turning one's back on it. Despite all its growing imperfections, its petit-bourgeois and centrist character, it remains the only political formation which has not renounced its opposition to the policy of the bourgeoisie. It thus still has within it the real possibility of developing and improving that fight and the struggle for Marxism. It is the natural crucible par excellence for these battles.

The second conclusion is precisely the lesson that the initiative for a renewal of Marxism can only come from outside the Left Front, in particular those organisations linked to Marxism and the working class movement.

However, we have seen that the three political formations which claim to be Marxist are incapable, as organisations, of providing an impulse of that sort. Their Marxism, if they still profess it, is nothing but a collection of bookish and formal references to old texts, detached from current reality. The politics they carry out alongside these references flagrantly contradicts them. From that point of view their policy on Europe and their attitude to other anti-bourgeois organisations are equally eloquent.

Under these conditions, the impulse can only come from an organisation (or organisations?) which, like Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International, openly and publicly fight for the renewal of Marxism and for socialism cleansed of Stalinist dross. It goes without saying that such a struggle ought to rally and unite all those who, though they may be in separate organisations, wish to fight openly for genuine Marxism and revived socialism.

By *Balazs Nagy*, July 2014

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## **Some problems of the Fourth International – And the tasks involved in rebuilding it**

By *Balazs Nagy*, August 2014

To approach this multi-faceted subject, which ranges over an extremely wide variety of topics, and to bring out the essential points, we have to go a long way back and examine certain decisive problems in the history of the Communist movement. Without a rigorous and objective reckoning, even an incomplete one, of the historical activity of the Fourth International, it is impossible to establish correctly what the real problems are or define the tasks involved in rebuilding it.

We cannot here get into detailed consideration of the process by which Communist Parties were set up during and just after World War I, but we can, and should, be clear that, apart from the Bolshevik Party, not a *single* one of these parties conformed to the image of the kind of real Marxist Communist party that the general revolutionary situation required. For all its break with Menshevism, even the Bolshevik Party had to undergo a profound crisis on the way to its political and theoretical rearmament by adopting Lenin's April Theses in order to arrive in the leadership of the revolution.

In fact, history teaches us that revolutionary parties have to undergo a more or less lengthy longer or shorter crisis-studded periods in order to arrive at the Marxist maturity needed to accomplish historic tasks. The whole Leninist Third International was an enormous construction-site-cum-school for understanding and assimilating these tasks by passing on the experiences of the Bolsheviks. But hardly had this process started when Zinoviev took it off course and then Stalinism completely falsified the development, lending it a content, direction and methods at first wrong and then reactionary. One could say that this was in a certain sense the revenge of the opportunist, Menshevik line defeated by the April Theses.

We should note that one consequence of this was that even the Opposition's struggle against Stalin evoked only a relatively lukewarm response on the international scale, and that a large part of even this got lost in the blind alley of opportunism

or ultra-leftism.

In any case, Eleazer Sointsev's report in a letter to Trotsky in the autumn of 1928 depicted a weak, motley and chaotic opposition in Europe and the USA. This letter reported that there "indubitably existed the beginnings of the formation (sadly only the very beginnings) of a left wing in the Communist International" whose "process (of development) will be long, difficult and very painful". He then rounded out this warning with the following statement: "It is ... premature to hope to have a united left (in the CI) within the near future". He went on to state that the cause of this diversity was "many groups to which we have given our label have come into opposition by such varied and with good reason different paths that you have to expect the most unexpected combinations and groupings".

We know that in fact, when he was at first in exile, Trotsky started his activity by drawing the line rigorously. Over the course of those first years of line-drawing and new groupings, the forces of the Marxist Opposition lost many experienced old cadre (who went over to the right or the left wings of the workers' movement) and the new forces were mainly drawn from inexperienced young people. Together with Zinoviev's "bolshevisation" of the CI, this whole wide-ranging process of selection pushed the international Opposition to the periphery of the working class and its movement and, incidentally, led to a deterioration in its social composition in favour of the petty-bourgeois intellectual. The triumph of Stalinism accentuated this evolution even more.

Trotsky was fully aware of the great weaknesses of the international Opposition; its serious inadequacies in Marxist education and its lack of experience, as well as its organisational shortcomings. The movement as a whole lacked practically any really Communist continuity.

Again at the beginning of 1936, Trotsky wrote that: "even

today, the Fourth International already possesses its biggest, most numerous and best-tempered section in the USSR", at a time when it was severely decimated and almost all its members in prison and the camps.

Thus Trotsky's entire struggle concentrated on an incessant activity of transmitting Bolshevism and its teachings in every possible form to the young, and sometimes not-so-young cadre and activists of the nascent Fourth International, because he knew all the flaws and the politically immature character of the majority of these young people. On 25 March 1935 in France, he noted in his diary: "I believe the work that I am doing at this moment ... is the most important in my life, more important than 1917, more important than during the Civil War, etc." And further on he added: "what I am doing now is in the fullest sense of the word 'irreplaceable' ... the collapse of the two internationals had posed a problem which none of the chiefs of these internationals has the slightest ability to deal ... it is a task which no-one apart from myself is able to fulfil..." Then he estimated how long it would take to fulfil this historical task: "I need at least another five years of uninterrupted work to make sure this heritage is transmitted".

We know that he had barely five years before he was assassinated, but subsequent developments showed that he had not been able to pass this Bolshevik heritage on, that the leaders he was teaching had only understood it very imperfectly and had not assimilated it.

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In retrospect, there is no doubt that the big split in the Fourth International in 1952-1953 marked a much more significant event than a frank and open break with the revisionists contained in the orientation and practices of

Pablo and co. In reality it marked a historic turning point, a point of demarcation after which the Fourth International definitively entered its phase of rapid fragmentation, decomposition and disintegration into sects, many of which no longer even claim its name.

At the root of this dispersion and decline was the inability of these anti-Pabloite leaders to take their criticism right through to the end, the incomplete nature of the act. It was confined – and that was in itself an important positive fact – to a critique of Pabloite revisionism as it appeared, without deeply examining the conditions which, in the course of the Fourth International's history, had fostered this revisionism and made it possible to such an extent that the sudden emergence of Pabloism took everybody by surprise, including its opponents, whereas the conditions and specific features of that history had long since accompanied, fermented and prepared all kinds of deviations, including Pabloism.

However, it was the incomplete, partial character of the criticism which made it possible for the American SWP – followed by several other organisations – to return to the bosom of international Pabloism, thus blocking any further process of clarification. We know that this volte-face on the part of the SWP and others, signifying their refusal to take this criticism (not to mention any more consistent criticism) onboard, was in the last analysis the basis and profound reason for the complete degeneration and almost complete disappearance of this SWP and others.

On the other hand, the great historical merit of Pabloism's two main opponent organisations, which later became the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste (OCI) in France and Socialist Labour League (SLL) in the UK, joined together in the International Committee of the Fourth International, resides not only the fact that, in breaking with it, they provided a Marxist analysis of Pabloism, but that they also undertook in part the job of studying and correcting the

conditions which favoured its development.

That is how they arrived at the determination that one of the roots of the appearance of Pabloism lay in the fact that the Trotskyist organisations were not adequately rooted in the working class. This shortcoming reflected and expressed an unfavourable, particularly petty-bourgeois, social composition in Trotskyist organisations, particularly in France. It is certain that taking account of this problem, which Trotsky denounced several times, and the steps taken to remedy it, constituted an immense step forward which we should not only recognise but develop further.

But steps to ensure the working-class composition of organisations, and their implantation in the class as well as in the workers' movement, essential as they are for the International and its organisations – and we still have a long way to go in order to achieve it – do not of themselves guarantee anything, since they are a matter of the organisation and how it functions, without defining its content. In such a way that even solving these problems, indispensable as they are for a Marxist organisation, could – and indeed can – serve various ends, some of them in contradiction with the interests of the working class. The Stalinist organisations made up of workers furnish various examples of this.

So it is necessary to go further and confront the fundamental political shortcoming which was, in my view, at the root of all the inadequacies in the activity of the Fourth International and formed the basis for all deviations which have arisen in the course of its history, including Pabloism but also many others.

This was the inability to understand what the Fourth International is, its mission and its task, and, thus, its nature. Right through the history of the International Opposition and then the FI, this lack of understanding was

omnipresent and appeared clearly in the difference, not to say opposition, between Trotsky's views on this matter and all the leaderships and cadres of the International.

This fundamental and important difference has run through the entire history of the Opposition and the FI and surfaced very frequently. To present Trotsky's views, I merely refer to two of the most significant texts. The first (38 pages) is "War and the International" of October 1934 (note in passing how characteristic of Trotsky's approach it is that he spoke about the Fourth International – and not the Opposition – well before the FI was formally proclaimed.)

Having established that "without a proletarian revolution, a new world war is inevitable" – a judgement unique in its far-sightedness at the time – Trotsky specified that "This fact alone makes the attitude towards the coming war the *key question* of proletarian politics." (my emphasis, BN).

Here he clearly and without the slightest equivocation defines the task of the Opposition: "*The transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war* constitutes the general strategic task to which the whole work of a proletarian party during war should be subordinated." (Emphasis in original).

For Trotsky, the central objective was therefore the proletarian revolution and its preparation, and, let us note, quite apart from the limited strength of the ranks of the Opposition (later the FI). That is why he says, in the same text, "He who tomorrow will capitulate in the face of fascism and war, who will fall silent on the task of arming the workers, is not a revolutionary, but an impotent parasite" – consequently he here broadly developed what was involved in this arming! Then he stated: "If the working class turns out to be unable to prevent a war by means of a revolution – and that is the only way to prevent a war – working people, along with the whole people, should *participate in the army and in the war.*" (Emphasis in original).

And he finishes with these words: "Even if the real revolutionaries should be in a tiny minority at the start of a new war, we should not doubt for an instant that this time the move of the masses to the path of revolution will occur more rapidly and more decisively and relentlessly than during the first imperialist war. A new wave of insurrections can and should win throughout the capitalist world."

We have to say that the war as a whole and the Yugoslav Revolution in particular – despite the Stalinist leadership forced upon it by circumstances – provide a stunning confirmation of this strategy, backed up by the revolutions which broke out in Greece and Italy, for example, channelled and stifled by the Stalinist and others.

Another basic text (of 51 pages) of May 1940 analysed the same task central task even more concretely. Written for the so-called "emergency" international conference in New York, even its title formulates the matter very urgently: "Manifesto on imperialist war and the world proletarian revolution". Here one can read: "Our policy (that of the FI) in war is merely the pursuit in a more concentrated form of our policy in peace." And this programme "is formulated in a series of documents available to all. Two words sum up its substance: *proletarian dictatorship*." (Emphasis in original). In other words, the aim is proletarian revolution. So it should be abundantly clear that for Trotsky the immediate aim of the International was to prepare this revolution.

Now the leaderships both of the FI and its sections saw this aim as at best a more or less distant perspective, and in no way as the task of the moment. And this significant deviation became brutally evident in the course of World War II.

(It was precisely during my investigations on the development of the world revolution during and just after World War II and the process by which it was channelled and strangled that this tragic reckoning appeared to me more clearly. This study

constitutes vol. 2 of my work: *Marxist Considerations on the crisis*).

This historical event faced the Fourth International with a test which exposed and violently accentuated its principal weakness. This is what impeded the development of the International Opposition right from the start. All in all, this general lack of understanding (confusion, wrong and/or limited understanding of tasks, etc.) of the Fourth International and building it severely hampered its development and, in the end, not only threw it back but formed the basis of profound change in its objective and hence its nature. It was this relatively slow change – delayed by the contradiction with the pressure of the working class transmitted by militants resting on it – which formed the precise content of its impotence, which went to the very threshold of extinction.

To bring out this veritable opposition between Trotsky's view of the Fourth International's mission and that of its leaders and cadres, it suffices to see how the latter – a mere few decades later – saw the reason why it was proclaimed and was born. In his pamphlet *The Fourth International*, published by Maspero in 1969, Pierre Frank refuted the arguments of those who opposed its proclamation saying it was "premature" with a statement that was no less strange. According to him "...he (i.e. Trotsky) did not see it as a question of numbers of forces, (etc.), but first and foremost of political perspective and continuity." To further back up this misunderstanding approximating to mystification, he stated that: "In hindsight ... one can see that if we had gone into war without the Fourth International having been proclaimed, that would have allowed all the alien pressures and centrifugal tendencies ... to act a hundred, a thousand times more intensely." And he baldly hurled at us his false conviction: "By proclaiming the Fourth International Trotsky aimed mainly at ensuring this continuity in a period full of dangers".

In this Frank was expressing a view widely-held by leaders and cadre of the Fourth International who saw in the Fourth International – and still do – a sort of talisman of supernatural power which will protect against all the threats of a dangerous environment.

So how did Frank's anti-Pabloite adversaries in 1952/1953 see the Fourth International's *raison d'être* in opposition to his view of his? The standard-bearer of the anti-Pabloite struggle in France and for a good part internationally, Pierre Lambert, published a pamphlet in 1970 under the promising title *Some Lessons of Our History*. (It is worth pointing out that, although he was the unchallenged leader of his group, the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste [OCI], he did not venture to state in public his paternity of the pamphlet). Nevertheless, on page 29 of this pamphlet we can read the opinion, to which he often laid claim, i.e. that Trotsky thought " ... they had to proclaim the Fourth International with the aim, precisely, of allowing the vanguard ... to stand up to the terrible pressure World War II was about to inflict on them..." He went on: "... it was precisely because defeats and setbacks ... were inevitably going to grow with the new imperialist war ... that the Fourth International had to be proclaimed." Let us follow Lambert as he wanders off into fantasy: "Proclaiming (it) was the only way to allow the working class to secure the heritage of October and resolve positively the contradictions ..." and so on, followed by a long, confused and scarcely understandable list. So he invoked precisely the same "arguments" as his Pabloite adversary Pierre Frank and thus confirmed that they were profoundly in agreement over this point, specifically that the enemies of Pabloism did not take their criticisms right through to the end because they were and remained standing on the same terrain of negating the mission of the Fourth International which after all, had allowed Pabloism to arise and fostered its progress.

A rigorous and detailed examination of the intimate interdependence and close kinship between pabloism and its adversaries reveal very clearly and obviously their common refusal to take on an open and direct commitment to the Fourth International in order actually to prepare the proletarian revolution. Pabloism has proved itself to be one of the more finished forms of this refusal, while the Lambertists who criticised and denounced it represented and still represent one of its more subtle, concealed variants. It is essential to take this analysis further and enrich it. But for the moment, we should continue our examination, which merely sketches out the main lines of a critique in order to assist the assimilation of the true lessons of our history with a view to reaching conclusions able to re-orientate our activity.

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During World War II this terrible contradiction between Trotsky's view of the immediate mission and objectives and that of the leaders of that same international became an actual antagonism. Moreover, and Trotsky's assassination assisted, this disagreement swelled immeasurably and culminated during the war in the paralysis of the international for which the sporadic positive actions of this or that section of its activists compensated hardly or not at all.

As we have seen Trotsky saw the war as a significant matrix of the proletarian revolution, a fertile ground for its preparation, something that nourished everything that he wrote, whereas the leaders and cadres of the International only saw in the war an inter-imperialist conflict – which of course it was! – in which they had nothing to do beyond speaking for and defending the proletariat just as they did in peace. From the incontestable truth that the war was between two imperialisms and was not their war, the overwhelming

majority of leaders drew the false and formal conclusion that Trotskyists had nothing to do with this war. In general – apart from the British and the Americans – they rejected military involvement, identifying it with serving the interests of Anglo-Saxon imperialism. Above all, from the outset they all rejected the armed struggle for power which presented itself then in the specific form of taking up arms alongside the partisans. By doing so, they placed an enormous question mark over Marxism, specifically the teachings of Lenin and Trotsky about the epoch as one of “wars and revolutions”.

Thus the Fourth International turned itself from being an instrument of imminent revolution into a sort of sacred icon heralding a radiant future. The tragic scorn its pontiffs had for its objective softened the sharp edge of this potent instrument of struggle to turn it into an amulet. And like ancient peoples in the distant past, they firmly believed – as many still do – that it would protect them against whatever accidents befell them and against all disease and deformation.

One of the powerful sources of this perception was to be ignorance of Lenin’s teachings on imperialism, a sketchy and superficial knowledge of the death-agony of capitalism, its definitively declining nature. They were thus blocked by a partial and incomplete understanding of this imperialist decadence as the basis of the immediately revolutionary role of the International.

In fact, with the exception of the Bolsheviks, the whole international workers’ movement had been fed reformist traditions transmitted and reinforced through a thousand channels. Still in his *Diary in Exile*, Trotsky noted as early as March 1935: “After the World War, Blum” (Leon Blum – BN) “considered, (and still in fact considers) that conditions were not ripe for socialism. What naïve dreamers were Marx and Engels, who from the second half of the nineteenth century expected the social revolution and prepared for it! ... For Blum

there exists ... who knows what absolute 'ripeness' of society for socialism, a maturity determined in itself by objective symptoms alone ... I have conducted the struggle against the mechanically fatalist conception since 1905 (cf. "A Balance and Prospects").

One can measure the ravages of this objectivist lack of understanding by the dreadful fact that even after World War II the period of thirty years of fake prosperity of capitalism was attributed by the whole of the Pabloite Fourth International to capitalism's supposed ability to develop the productive forces. The contamination caused by this speculative perversion advanced by the Pabloite economist Ernest Mandel was so great that even at the start of Workers' International we were obliged to conduct a sharp discussion against this conception supported by the Argentinian Comrade Garmendia and the Italian "Gruppo Operario Rivoluzionario" (a group which, as far as I know, has disappeared into the catacombs of the workers' organisations in Italy). Be that as it may, the belief in the ability of imperialism to regulate its contradictions and regenerate is so persistent that today it forms the basis for the general platform of petit-bourgeois currents and renegades from Marxism who call for a return to the Keynesian measures of the so-called "thirty glorious years".

The profound influence of this anti-Marxist view does not just come directly from the old reformism but from the way it has been adopted and "contributed to" by Stalinism. Stalinism's reactionary nationalism, asserting the possibility of socialism in a single country, assumed that capitalism would go on developing in the rest of the world. This distortion of Marxism also rested upon another aspect of the reformist conception which viewed the world capitalist system not just in its organic entity but as a sort of adding together of countries with different systems. This is an overall view whose source was and is ignorance of the nature, role and

functioning of the world market which long since unified the world on the basis of capitalism. The *Communist Manifesto* already said: "The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country." And further on: "In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations." It could not be clearer. However, that has not prevented the widespread and frequent expression of reformist views of a fragmented world such as that expressed above. However, I shall not dwell on this question. Suffice it to say that in her analysis of imperialism, even Rosa Luxemburg fell into the error of suggesting that for the realisation of surplus value there had to be a market external to capitalism. We know how lively was Lenin's reaction in his critical notes to this unexpected back-sliding on Luxemburg's part into the platitudes of the Narodniks, for all that she had rejected them. Suffice it to say that, despite this error of a reformist kind, Luxemburg did not follow the revisionist trajectory of this conception, but asserted herself as a true revolutionary.

We have seen how, in criticising Blum's blinkered view that capitalism was somehow not yet ripe (whereas it had already entered its phase of decline into decay), Trotsky made reference to his work *Results and Prospects* published in 1906. On the morning after the 1905 Russian Revolution and on the basis of rich experiences, he reached, in this work, the conclusion that after the great developments of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the dynamics of the class struggle would lead the proletariat, even in the more backward countries, to take power before capitalism had completely matured. Consequently the proletariat would be pushed by its struggle into accomplishing the bourgeois revolution while continuing its struggle for socialist objectives. So Trotsky wrote in opposition to the fatalists of so-called objective development:

“But the whole point lies in the fact that the processes which are historically pre-requisite for socialism do not develop in isolation, but limit each other, and, reaching a certain stage ... undergo a qualitative change, and in their complex combination bring about what we understand by the name of social revolution”. (*Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, Leon Trotsky, New Park Publications Ltd., 1962, p. 219.)

I do not see any point recapitulating the whole theory of permanent revolution here, but must just say that this remarkable conception enabled Trotsky put the class struggle with all its inner driving forces, elements and combinations back in the centre as the main agent and pivot of historical development. By doing so he relegated all those who punctiliously weigh the various signs of levels of capitalist development into the ranks of all the other dogmatists.

Without any fear of exaggeration one can say that these two works which absolutely complement each other: Lenin's *Imperialism* and Trotsky's *Permanent Revolution*, constitute a real renewal and fundamental enrichment of Marxism. It is no accident that all of today's vulgar reformists and renegades – even the ones who try to hide behind Marx – carefully avoid facing up to these two theoretical monuments.

Obviously we should not compare supporters of Trotsky with vulgar reformist like Blum. Even if their understanding of Lenin's analysis of imperialism (in particular its outmoded, decadent nature, its decay and parasitism) is very summary and superficial, they wanted to overthrow capitalism and sincerely believed in the socialist revolution. It's just that this belief, even certainty, remained at the level of a scientific conviction and political hope, but never became the diligent practice of concretely preparing it. Besides, an old prejudice approaching superstition laid hold of most Trotskyists and held them in a strange passivity in this domain.

They were, rightly, convinced that it is the working class which makes the revolution, and so were hostile, also rightly, to any adventurist idea of "making the revolution" themselves. But from this correct understanding, they drew the general, false and anti-dialectical conclusion that all they needed to do was to wait for the working class to make the revolution. But in 1902 Lenin devoted a whole book to the struggle against such a submission to the spontaneity of the proletarian masses, writing, for example: "... the spontaneous working-class movement is trade unionism ... and trade unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie." (Lenin, *What is to be Done?*, Pekin, 1975, p. 49.)

For all that, the influence of this spirit of spontaneity on the members of the Opposition was so strong at that time that Trotsky thought it necessary to return to the question. In 1935 he wrote a significant article, "Luxemburg and the Fourth International: Cursory Remarks on an Important Subject" (*Writings of Leon Trotsky [1935-36]*, Pathfinder, New York 1977 p. 29.) It is necessary to quote from this at some length. First of all, one reads that, "... the preparatory selection of the vanguard, in comparison with the mass actions that were to be expected, fell too short with Rosa; whereas Lenin ... took the advanced workers and constantly and tirelessly welded them together into firm nuclei ..." (p.30.)

And it was precisely here – against spontaneity! – that he first put into words: "Without the slightest exaggeration it may be said: the whole world situation is determined by the *crisis of revolutionary leadership.*" (P. 31, emphasis in the original!)

And then he explained: "great actions require a great leadership. For current affairs, the workers still give their votes to the old organisations. Their votes – but by no means their boundless confidence. On the other hand, after the miserable collapse of the Third International, it is much harder to move them to bestow their confidence upon a new

revolutionary organisation. That's just where the crisis of the proletarian leadership lies. To sing a monotonous song about indefinite future mass actions in this situation, in contrast to the purposeful selection of cadres of a new international, means to carry on a thoroughly reactionary work". (p.31.)

He concluded: "The crisis of proletarian leadership cannot, of course, be overcome by means of an abstract formula. It is a question of an extremely prolonged process. Not of a purely 'historical' process, that is, of the objective premises of conscious activity, but of an uninterrupted chain of ideological, political and organisational measures for the purpose of fusing together the best, most conscious elements of the world proletariat beneath a spotless banner, elements whose number and self-confidence must be constantly strengthened, whose connections with wider sections of the proletariat must be developed and deepened."(p.32). I believe we should think about every sentence in this text in order to assimilate the message, which is entirely valid for our activity today.

But despite all these warnings of Trotsky's and all his efforts, he could not put right a general tendency towards spontaneity which strongly marked the activity of the Fourth International. After his assassination, the international leaders completely by-passed his recommendations. To be more exact, they interpreted them in their own way, just as they understood them in their own schematic, formalist and anti-dialectical way. Thus, during the war – since Trotsky had predicted there would be a revolution – they expected it with the fervour of the Jewish people awaiting the Messiah.

And the revolution did arrive. But the revolutions of 1943-1946 in Europe, lacking an appropriate leadership and therefore unable to attain the pinnacles of mass mobilisation and intensity of struggle that were seen in the revolution of 1917, emerged in barely-sketched outline. Then they started to

recede rapidly. And then many deeply-disappointed Trotskyist revolutionaries expressed their bitterness: "There was no revolution!" They were so deeply disillusioned that a whole series of leaders turned their backs and deserted the organisation, leaving the field to younger people, complaining that "Trotsky deceived us" and "Marxism cannot explain anything"! Not one of them realised that the revolution is not inevitable and does not fall out of the sky. It does not even arise necessarily and inevitable from the action of the masses, – if conscious revolutionaries do not, like good midwives, prepare the way for it, facilitate its progress and organise its tools – but turn their backs on it, abandoning the armed struggle against fascism and the rickety states in its pay. There is no rise of the revolution without conscious revolutionaries!

For there is a relationship, a dialectical inter-dependence between, on the one hand, the revolutionary action of the masses, and on the other, the conscious vanguard of the revolution. Without the latter, the spontaneous movement of a mass revolution can bring down a hated regime, but without the corresponding activity of a revolutionary vanguard, its inevitable ebb will only bring another hated regime to power. A whole number of revolutions testify to this truth, most recently the history of the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. The incontestable fact that these revolutions have yet to utter their final word does not change that.

In fact the leading Trotskyists back then did not at all understand Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach", or to be more precise they understood them the wrong way. Nevertheless, these Theses condense the whole Marxist philosophy into a few words as "revolutionary practice", concluding with the famous assertion: "Philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it".

In any case a good number of these Trotskyist leaders of the first period of the Fourth International (1938-1946),

convinced that there was no revolution, deserted the struggle. Trotsky's dramatic prediction anticipating such a serious result rings prophetically. In the 1940 Manifesto quoted above, he wrote: "If bourgeois rule emerges unscathed from this war, all revolutionary parties will degenerate". Not only did this extremely grave prognostication become terrible reality, it also described that reality's cause and content.

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# Capitalism between hammer and anvil

by *Balazs Nagy*

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In our last issue, we briefly noted "cracks" emerging in world capitalism, including, among other things, weaknesses in relation to the international monetary system organised on the basis of and governed by the US dollar. We do know that, to ward off the last great crisis, the big chiefs of US finance decided to supply the economy, which was gasping for breath and quite unable to meet astronomic levels of losses and needs, with even greater massively and artificially swollen credit arrangements. To put it another way, the crisis had revealed the imperative urgent need to deal quickly and urgently with the yawning gap between real production on the one hand, hampered and dragged back by the growing limitations on effective profits, and on the other the phenomenal pile-up of dollars not backed by anything whose job was to make good the market's organic deficiencies. Let me repeat: the whole edifice of runaway and inflamed world finance operates under the auspices of the US dollar.

We know that immediately on the outbreak of the crisis,

capitalist governments carefully put the corpse of capitalist economy on life-support, injecting hundreds of billions of dollars (and euros) to soften the sudden absence of billions of fictitious dollars which had gone up in smoke. The managers of the US dollar in the Federal Reserve System (the US central bank) panicked and decided to institutionalise the allocation of billions of dollars into the economy through regular purchases of American Treasury bills, i.e. to buy these bits of valueless paper with billions of newly-created dollars (85 billion a month!) hot off the press and not backed by anything in the proper way. This blatant forgery they pompously baptised "quantitative easing", and it is no more than an act of common counterfeiting. But this time the forgeries are done by the state and swapped for other state bonds which are also worthless, i.e. they are buying government debt with paper. As the notoriously blunt billionaire Warren Buffet commented recently: "The Fed is the greatest hedge fund in history" (Bloomberg.com/news September 20 2013). Indeed, the whole business casts a glaring light on the fact that the whole mechanism of capitalism-imperialism today rests on a swindle.

Now, as we commented in a previous article, the US central bank, the Fed, has stated that it will now aim to progressively reduce these purchases with a view to ending them. Obviously by doing so the Fed hoped to help, in its own way, to contain the unbridled proliferation of un-backed credit which even they admit is a permanent crisis-trigger. But as our previous article said, the bare mention that they would eventually do this shook capital around the world.

The first consequence of the Fed's announcement that it wanted to turn off the easy dollar-tap was to provoke a swift and inevitable rise in interest rates in the dollar's US home country, and elsewhere, given that currency's preponderant role. This rise in interest rates meant that credit became more expensive, which cut across the imperative need for cheap money. This fact immediately unmasked all the claims about an

economic recovery as mendacious bragging. Next, it started a massive flight of capital from the so-called "emerging" countries in search of more profitable investments. This defection abruptly exposed a bitter truth for the bourgeoisie: that the best part of economic growth in these countries (India, Brazil, etc.) is not based on real production, but is artificially doped by financial juggling with the cheap dollar. So the announcement that the easy dollar was shortly to be withdrawn cut the transfusion needed for their economic growth, and as they were left short of blood, their markedly lower real growth rate emerged in the light of day and their currencies depreciated. A terrible new stage in the crisis started to loom on the horizon in these countries. But while they were waiting to hear what the 22 May announcement about reducing and then stopping the flow of easy dollars actually involved, the Fed took everybody by surprise on 18 September by finally announcing its spectacular U-turn. The same Bernanke who had disconcerted capitalists with his astonishing announcement that he would deprive the economy of cheap dollars, caught the whole world napping with the Fed's final decision contradicting its previous announcement. It turned 180 degrees, stating that "the Fed would continue to buy long term treasury paper and other bonds worth \$85 bn a month, believing that tightening financial conditions could slow down the rate of recovery" (Le Monde, 20 September 2013.)

Despite the coded and extremely careful language, this is a resounding and honest public confession. It relegates the servile press's enthusiastic reports of a supposed economic recovery in the US and elsewhere to the level of lying fantasy on a level with the Coué method of optimistic auto-suggestion. More generally it is an involuntary admission that capitalism actually is undergoing a prolonged worsening of its death-agony, and in particular that merely keeping it going pushes and drags the economy towards an even more corrupt state of putrefaction and parasitism than was already revealed by Lenin's analysis of imperialism. The major fact is and remains

that finance, or more exactly omnipotent credit and the way it is manipulated, tend to supplant production in simply making sure that capitalist economy keeps functioning (accumulation, investment and circulation). But here we must remember what Marx said about credit in volume 3 of Capital: "Banks and credit become the most potent means of bringing capitalist production out of its own limits and one of the most effective bringers of crises and fraudulent speculation". To support this judgement he quoted a contemporary (J.W.Gilbart, The History and Principles of Banking, London 1834, pp 137-8): "It is the object of banking to give facilities to trade, and whatever gives facilities to trade gives facilities to speculation. Trade and speculation are in some cases so nearly allied, that it is impossible to say at what precise point trade ends and speculation begins." To which Engels adds a note: "To what extent the entire business world of a country may be seized by such swindling, and what it finally comes to, is amply illustrated by the history of English business during 1845-47." (Capital vol 3, 1984 p. 406). What would they say about things today!

The dead hand of finance is precisely the concrete form that the increasing rottenness of the system takes today. Massive parasitism in the economy – and in daily life – are its inevitable outgrowths. In the same way, the amazing growth in the social stratum of rentiers, as well as the appearance of a series of rentier states and their expansion and their significance testify to an unparalleled growth in parasitism.

It is really characteristic that when the Fed announced it was going to reduce the flow of dollars, economic growth immediately tended to slow down, especially in the "emerging" countries, whereas immediately after the bank turned 180 degrees, stock markets around the world marked up considerable gains. Even the European Central Bank (ECB) is now itself proposing to pump some fresh liquidity into the deathly anaemic European banks, having vainly allowed them a thousand

billion euros in 2011-1012. But it is still a lot more reticent than its US colleagues.

In fact world capital as a whole is trying to walk a tightrope between two pseudo-solutions, both equally risky: either they will continue to pour billions into keeping their system ticking over, and in doing so all the while preparing a series of upheavals even more devastating than the one we have not yet got out of. Or, anxious about that way out, they will try to control credit parsimoniously, which seems to be the option which the ECB favours. But both potential outcomes of this tightrope-walking lead to the same blind alley of capitalism. With or without injecting billions, production in this system keeps marking time and has not even managed to make good past and current losses.

Two things are certain. The first is that these two false capitalist options will both deepen the systems congenital sickness, bringing redoubled attacks and suffering on working people. The second, which flows from it, is that the overthrow of this cruel system in its death-throes is now on the agenda.

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# **Cracks recently appeared in the edifice of world capitalism**

By *Balazs Nagy*

First published in *Lutte des Classes* No. 11, September 2013.

We really ought to draw our readers' attention to two major current events which – each in its own political and economic way – testify to a considerable deterioration in the painful

death-agony of capitalism-imperialism. On the one hand, there is the current stage reached in the breakdown of its arrangements in the Middle East with the in itself unusual and surprising but real political blockage affecting this system in relation to the civil war in Syria; on the other, the fresh upsurge of world crisis in the – for many – unexpected shape of a general fall in the rate of growth in production among more or less all the so-called “emerging” countries: India, Russia, Indonesia, Brazil, South Africa, etc., including China. This fall is expressed and accompanied by a real upheaval in their financial system through a brutal fall in the values of their currencies, excepting China. As luck would have it, all of these serious problems of imperialism have matured and are concentrated at the Moscow meeting of the 20 countries which are considered to be the most important, the famous G20 on 7 and 8 September 2013.

The attempt to consolidate imperialism’s rickety mechanism in the Middle East has turned into its opposite in Iraq and Afghanistan, accelerating its decomposition throughout the region. This historical set-back has laid bare its congenital weaknesses and its contradictions to such an extent that, faced with the rise of the proletarian revolution, even in its incomplete and unfinished form, in North Africa, and the Middle East, it finds itself almost completely impotent and incapacitated. The civil war in Syria has completely paralysed it; its leaders no longer have a clue what to do or how to do it to win back dominance. And that is their only pre-occupation. Their breast-beating about the miserable fate of the Syrian people is merely a hypocritical facade to mask their real concerns. To put it more exactly: the existence of a near-unanimous camp of those who advocate inactivity and abstention shows their disarray in the face of uncertainty. Imperialist war-lust has been reduced to the roaring of a toothless lion. But beware – it is still a ferocious predator!

On the other hand, there few better indications of the notable shortcomings and retreat of the workers’ movement than the total absence of its voice and independent initiatives on this whole question.

Under these conditions, the process of decomposition will go on, as we can already see in Libya and Turkey. But this disarray is also an opportunity which the various oppressed peoples (like the Palestinians and Kurds) will seize in order to break free from the imperialist yoke and its local satraps, who will not give up easily, so that there is a risk the whole region will become the seat of a future inter-imperialist war. The charges are already laid and the fuses lit.

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The other event of considerable international import is the sudden economic deterioration in the so-called "emerging" countries, with a significant and rapid drop in their economic growth, which since the beginning of the new century had been spectacular. The basis for this fall was when the US central bank (the Fed) decided to stop the artificial issue of millions of dollars not backed by actual production. It is common knowledge that in the last six months alone, this bank has bought back worthless bonds to the value of \$86 billion a month (!) in order to bolster the sickly US economy.

As soon as this policy was announced, US interest rates started an irresistible rise, so much so that capital massively deserted the economies of India and other "emerging" countries. At the same time their currencies depreciated dangerously, thus expressing the fact that the value of their production was actually rather modest. At a stroke, their real growth was shown to be quite a lot lower than it had appeared to be previously. Even China's growth rate fell because her exports are marking time. At a general level, what we are dealing with is a persistent phenomenon which lays bare the organic inter-dependence of national economies within the contradictions of the system as a whole. Despite what the proponents of so-called "globalisation" say about the economic levels of these countries as a whole tending to converge, with the more backward ones catching up with the more advanced (really?), following the same scheme of development as the

advanced countries, this inter-dependence actually makes the differences between their levels greater and more obvious. As it happens, the massive displacement of dollars – the expression of the economic dominance of the US – has placed the “emerging” countries at a disadvantage and caused their fictitious growth to evaporate. In place of growing “equality” or “catching up” harmoniously, what we have is the development of contradictions. In place of the fantasy of the everywhere uniform and even capitalism that was an article of faith for those who swore by “globalisation” or “mondialisation”, we see an ever greater accentuation of capitalism’s internal contradictions. The problems of China, which still has a non-capitalism system, are at a different level, even if, overall, she cannot absolutely escape the constraining effects of international economic interdependence and its contradictions.

All of this also drives forward and exacerbates international competition, which contains within itself the germ of a new international conflagration, the warning signs of which are already visible. We shall have occasion to return to its various aspects in greater detail in future.

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## **On some lessons of the French municipal elections (March 2014)**

By *Balazs Nagy*, April 2014

The entire French press is unanimous. Whether left or right in their traditional political colouration – the difference is actually pretty superficial – they compare the so-called socialist party’s resounding discomfiture in the municipal

elections to Napoleons historic disaster on the Berezina River in Russia in 1812, the prelude to his ultimate defeat. For once the accuracy of their judgement is beyond dispute. So our first response is above all to see what we can learn. Its a perfectly straightforward and normal thing to do, although our conclusions differ noticeably from everyone else's.

First of all it is important to emphasise that elections change absolutely nothing in the fundamentals of the capitalist social system or, therefore, in the overall situation. This view is sharply opposed to the popular belief carefully fostered by the usual politicians and organisations of the left. Even if elections do change that systems form or shape, they move within the framework it imposes and are an integral part of it. Whether municipal, parliamentary or European, they are just part of how the (most democratic!) system in place functions, while remaining profoundly bound to the way it moves and works.

How true this is has been more than adequately demonstrated, and two major and opposed schools of thought on the matter were in evidence during the elections. One body of opinion – an extremely heterogeneous one (especially if you include the right wingers) – traditionally asserts that elections really can bring about effective changes in the system. It has to be said, regretfully, that even a party such as the Front de Gauche (Left Front) and its component parts – which we see as actually standing on the side of working people, and as such on our side too – remains a prisoner to these blinkered electoral (parliamentary) politics. Its leaders, in effect, leave us to suppose mistakenly, or even themselves assert, that a strong showing (and all the more so outright victory) at the polls would enable them radically to change the capitalist social system.

### **Abstentions are a kind of vote**

In contrast to these shallow parliamentary politics, another

large and growing section of the population regularly and deliberately abstain. Although municipal elections supposedly affect people more directly, these latest ones saw record abstention levels of 36.6 per cent, particularly among young people.

Most bourgeois politicians and commentators get onto their moral high horse over this. They have the nerve to impugn such peoples republican credentials, and the audacity to accuse them of helping the right wing. Here or there, the reproach is added that they make it impossible for the Left Front and/or its component parts to make consistent progress, and so change the system.

These abstentions, however, express a definite verdict on the existing capitalist system as a whole, fundamentally rejecting it and repudiating the absurd belief that voting can change the system. In this sense, they are right and we defend them against those republican paragons of (questionable) virtue, even though we think that abstaining is negative and sterile and therefore inadequate.

An accurate map showing the percentage of voters who abstained in the recent French municipal elections would clearly show another France living on the periphery of the cities in the proletarian banlieues. It is working-class France, including the unemployed, suffering under savage austerity. The bourgeois press was so bold as to reveal a tiny corner of its extent and significance. In Paris red belt there were 58.6 per cent abstentions in Ivry, 56.8 in Stains, 56.7 in Vitry-sur-Seine; then 56.7 per cent in Vaux-en-Velin in the outer suburbs of Lyon and 55.5 per cent in the disaster-stricken working-class town of Roubaix in the North. The figure is the same for Trappes in the outer suburbs of Paris, the biggest victims of galloping inequality. Bourgeois journalists and all the petit-bourgeois milieu editorialise about this in the abstract – wringing their hands over the losses suffered by the middle class! The working class and its fate simply

disappear from these peoples preoccupations. This arises from a deliberate desire to minimise this dangerous class's importance, even to the point of denying its existence. So you can bet they will never draw up any such map because it would cast rather a pall over their chatter and somewhat upset their peace of mind.

### **On the importance of elections**

Elections cannot change the capitalist system (as we can see in the daily more severe blows it inflicts on us), but political organisations would be making an unpardonable error if they concluded that there is no point in elections. In the first place, they are important because they quite faithfully reflect each party's impact and influence, providing a pretty accurate graphic image (including abstentions) of the level and nature of the populations political consciousness.

This political thermometer marked a general defeat for Hollande and his government and, in passing, wiped out all the myth-making that had gone before about municipal elections being all about strictly local issues: all those who in 2012 had expected this government to protect them against the attacks of capital, this time around voted against his party or abstained. That message is clear. In this sense the bourgeois way the newspaper Le Monde explains what this vote means is deliberately misleading. They write that Holland is now paying the bill for a poor start to his tenure because it was not sustained by a clear and clearly-articulated project. (Editorial on 1 April 2014). But the obviously bourgeois nature of his project was exactly what working people did understand and voted against. Nevertheless, in its usual convoluted way, the newspaper does express the bourgeoisies innermost concerns and its insistence that greater determination should be shown in serving that class. Their complaint expresses these requirements and their preferred response, which is to take matters directly in hand via their own traditional parties. In this they are encouraged by

Hollande's own bourgeois proclivities. That explains the significance of the heightened profile of the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), the Union of Democrats and Independents (UDI) and the Democratic Movement (MoDem), parties which express the bourgeoisie's desire to press ahead with the destruction of social gains. We can be quite sure that Hollande will do everything he can to satisfy these expectations and will (if possible) become even more hostile to what working people want.

### **The strength of the fascists (barely) conceals their bourgeoisie character**

The considerable advance made by the National Front (FN) is almost entirely due to its demagogic propaganda which appears to defend the interests of workers and working people. But watch out! This tactic of appearing to defend working people is a well-established and well-known trick used by all extreme-right parties. In the 1920s Hitler developed the same stratagem, presenting himself as a defender of working people. He went so far as to call his party socialist, merely adding the adjective national. As for Mussolini, he came straight out of the Italian Socialist Party. As with all fascists, social demagogy was their most important weapon, and this is what the National Front has picked up on. But how demagogic this political line is, is revealed clearly by the fact that it does not attack the whole bourgeoisie and its social system. It only sets its sights on one of its political lines, the one currently in the foreground: Europe. It advocates a different line, i.e. the withdrawal into nationalism represented by the other, minority, section of the European bourgeoisie. So the FN attacks the bourgeoisie's majority (European) policy, but not the bourgeoisie as a class which exploits other classes, nor its capitalist system. Far from it, it vigorously attacks immigrant workers, in other words the majority of the working class, and carries on alarmingly about workers' gains, denouncing various benefits. It has derived great advantages

not just from this lying demagogy, which continues to conceal its avowedly bourgeois nature, but also the fact that no single party has yet unmasked it as a bourgeois party. Normally, criticisms merely affect its anti-European stance and its racist and nationalist phobias, without touching on the bourgeois basis on which they grow like excrescences.

### **Why is the Left Front marking time?**

Elections are also an opportunity for all those united around shared political aims to rally together so as to further extend their ranks. This is particularly true of all those who wish, on the basis of a programme, to make a step forward towards freeing working people from the yoke of the capitalist system. So the elections offered the Left Front a chance to develop. So how to explain that, despite the terrible crisis of capitalism and the fact that workers rejected this society, the Left Front did not just fall a long way back from its spectacular results in the presidential elections, but was clearly overtaken by all bourgeois parties, including the FN and the UMP?

This absurd situation is a consequence of the Left Fronts political ambiguity. While it makes it clear that it thoroughly opposes the French and European bourgeoisies recent austerity policies, it does not come out clearly against the capitalist system as such. It stays vague and enigmatic on this cardinal point which really does require some straight talking. This obscurity is revealed in the lack of a clearly working-class programme directed against capitalism as the social system at the root of all austerity. This lack of a programme and the fact they are locked into the normal bourgeois election framework have condemned them to limp along far behind the others. In short, their position does not measure up to the situation. How can you expect the Left Front to unmask the National Front as a bourgeois party if they equivocate over their own objectives? The municipal elections show that, under these conditions, the Left Front is condemned

to mark time while the National Front has made considerable progress, including among discontented workers.

So the main lesson of the elections is obvious. They show ever more clearly that, instead of looking for scapegoats, the main task facing our Left Front is to make an objective assessment of its activity as a whole, above all its political programme,

Balazs Nagy, April 2014

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## **Euro-election results reveal signs of Political turmoil in Europe**

By ***Bob Archer***

Politicians and the media talked a great deal about earthquakes as the results of last months elections to the European parliament were published. This was especially true in France and the UK, where the established parties were beaten at the polls by the Front National (FN) and the UK Independence Party respectively.

Failing to assuage voters anger could mean the erosion, if not the destruction of the union in a matter of years, said veteran Austrian journalist Erhard Stackl, writing in The New York Times International Weekly. In some countries, the vote against an integrated Europe was profound.

He consoled himself with the observation that nevertheless two-thirds of the votes were cast for pro-European parties. And in Germany, the economic powerhouse of the 28-nation bloc, Chancellor Merkel and her allies still command a comfortable majority.

Smarting under a series of lost seats in the European parliament, many established bourgeois parties needed all the consolation on offer.

Actually integrating and developing a unified economic unit in Europe is a historic necessity. How urgent it is has been adequately demonstrated by two terrible world wars centring on the continent.

The simple fact that the bourgeoisie finds it profoundly difficult to carry out this fundamental task is striking proof of how deep the crisis of capitalism is.

But their brainwashing machine quickly springs into action to distract attention from this problem to a series of real or imaginary surrogates:

There are three main reasons for the voters anger, Herr Stackl continues: dissatisfaction with political leaders, who are seen as uncaring and arrogant; frustration because of the slow economic recovery; and the growing fear of foreigners. Encouraged by demagogues, citizens of the well-to-do countries are blaming immigrants from poorer countries for many of their woes.

All established political parties from conservatives to social democrats speak and act on behalf of the capitalist class. They work might and main to remove all the social gains working people have made in previous decades and centuries. This includes all the so-called socialist parties, whether PASOC in Greece, the SPD in Germany, the Parti Socialiste in France or Labour in the UK, who all chant in unison that the debt ? which is really a tax levied by bankers via national state fiscal systems on working people all around the world ? has to be paid down, and that in order to do so, government spending on all social services, state education and health provision, housing and welfare and all the rest has to be cut, and whatever fragments remain, privatised.

It is not the personal qualities of politicians which is the question here, but their attachment to the needs of a particular class, the bourgeoisie. Whether or not people are conscious of it, their anger towards these politicians is caused by a series of attacks on working people on behalf of this bourgeois class.

The slow economic recovery is caused by the global depth of the crisis of capitalism and, indeed, by what the bourgeoisie

does in order to overcome it, for example cutting the living standards of swathes of working people across the continent, attacking benefits and wage levels, and so forth.

The growing fear of foreigners really is not just encouraged but fanned into flame by demagogues.

But, besides the vile gutter press which has carried out a sustained campaign of vilifying and scapegoating migrants, those demagogues also include significant forces in parties as respectable as the UK Labour Party. People who cannot recognise and fight their real enemy, concealed within a fog of business deals and obscure financial transactions, are incited to turn on their neighbours because of some imagined ethnic, national or religious difference. They are taught by these demagogues to judge their fellow working people by such standards and to blame them for a crisis they have not created.

Many commentators lump the FN and UKIP together with radical socialist parties like Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain and others. This is sowing deliberate confusion. The FN and UKIP deliberately seek a turn back into national economic isolation from the rest of the continent while whipping up backward chauvinism. Syriza and the others are a very different matter, and represent an attempt to resurrect political organisation among working people.

There are indeed some forces on the left which follow UKIP and the FN in denouncing European unity and migration, groups such as the Communist Party of Britain's NO2EU campaign in the UK, but in fact anybody who agreed with these bourgeois politics were always mainly going to vote for an openly right-wing grouping anyway.

Indeed, the media also played a role in this, completely ignoring the left anti-EU candidates but adoringly splashing pictures of Nigel Farage and Marine Le Pen at every opportunity across front pages and the TV screen.

The subsequent media rhetoric about earthquakes hides the odd fact that most of these right-wing parties did less well in these elections than they have previously. The Dutch Party for Freedom of Geert Wilders saw their share of the vote tumble from an earlier prediction of 20% to a mere 13.3%. The Finns Party (True Finns) saw similar shrinkage in their vote. In recent Hungarian elections, Jobbik won 20% of the vote, but in

the Euro-elections they claim as a break-through, they only achieved 15%.

However, the outcome of the 2014 European elections strengthen and embolden some of the most reactionary forces across Europe. With resistance by working people to cuts and austerity continuing across the continent, often inchoate as is it, such forces will soon be unleashed to impose the bourgeoisies attacks on working people.

More than ever, a step forward in building a workers movement across the continent for a Europe of working people is essential. The answer to fascism does not lie in relying upon the bourgeoisie to sustain democratic methods when it is wracked by crisis. It lies in mobilising working people to fight for the needs of their class.

But this must involve overcoming the damage to working class organisation and consciousness brought about by the bourgeoisies attacks, the collapse of the USSR and its satellites and the degeneration of socialist and communist movements.

The articles by [Balazs Nagy](#) in the [Wirfi Journal No.5 June 2014](#) deal with all these issues through the prism of the French municipal elections and preparations for the recent Euro-elections. They provide the essential basis for grasping the current political situation and acting upon it.

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## **Numsa President Opening Speech during Central Committee at The Lakes Hotel and Conference Centre on 12 – 16 May 2014**

20 Years After 27th April 1994: what is the state the South

## African Revolution?

*“Nothing demonstrates better the increasing rigor of the colonial system: you begin by occupying the country, then you take the land and exploit the former owners at starvation rates. Then with mechanization, this cheap labour is still too expensive. You finish up taking from the native their very right to work. All that is left for the Natives to do in their own land at a time of great prosperity, is to die of starvation.” (Jean Paul Sarter, 2001)*

Numsa National Office Bearers,  
Delegates to this Numsa CC,  
All Numsa Staff,  
Invited guests,  
Media present.

On behalf of the National Office Bearers of Numsa, I welcome all of you to this first Central Committee meeting of Numsa after our historic December 2013 Numsa National Congress.

As we seat here, we are meeting after the first South African National Elections in which Numsa as an organisation did not support any political party.

This Central Committee must help all of us to fully understand the moment we are in, from a clear Marxist-Leninist class perspective. There should be no confusion over what Numsa resolved to do, in the Numsa National Special Congress.

All of us must be very clear what these just ended elections mean to the working class of South Africa. All of us must be clear what our revolutionary and trade union responsibilities are, post the Numsa historic Special National Congress.

From the beginning, please allow me to thank the General Secretary, the Deputy General Secretary of Numsa and the entire Head Office and all our staff in all our Numsa provinces for putting together a most comprehensive information and documentation package for this important

Central Committee. This is as it should be.

Among other important matters this Central Committee must initiate is a serious and urgent national dialogue among all the left formations in general and in Numsa in particular, on the fundamental question of the form and content of the socialism we want for South Africa and the world.

We are required to go beyond theoretical formulations to concretely defining the economic and social formation we would like to see South Africa and the world become, when we win the struggle for a socialist South Africa and socialist world.

In order to help us all fully appreciate the moment we are in, and the state of class struggles in the whole world in general and in South Africa in particular, I want to, very briefly, tackle the following:

- A. The state of the world capitalist system;
- B. The South African revolution: its theory and revolutionary practice;
- C. The Freedom Charter as the minimum programme and basis of the class alliance of the forces that spear-headed the South African violent revolution for freedom in South Africa;
- D. The South African negotiated settlement and post 1994 South Africa;
- E. Numsa and post 1994 South Africa and the Numsa Special National Congress;
- F. The 2014 National Elections and their class significance; and
- G. What is to be done, to build the power of the working class and accelerate momentum towards a Socialist South Africa as the only viable alternative to the savagery of the current racial capitalism and imperialist domination?

Obviously, in the course of this Central Committee delegates must make time to reflect upon these and all the other business of this Central Committee. My hope is that when we

depart this meeting on Friday the 16th of May 2014, no one who will have attended this Central Committee Meeting must be a source of confusion when we are back in our regions, locals, communities and on the factory floors.

Numsa is a serious, mature and revolutionary Marxist-Leninist inspired trade union. We pride ourselves in being a worker driven and worker controlled revolutionary trade union. Internal robust debates and discussions before decisions and resolutions are taken is our democratic lifeblood. This is the cornerstone of our democratic centralism.

It is my duty to always remind ourselves that our Constitution charges us to, at all material times, grow the power of the working class in the factories, in our communities and in the whole world so that we can win the war against exploitation, oppression, discrimination and for socialism.

We are a socialist trade union precisely because we know that our real war is ultimately for winning the dictatorship of the proletariat as the only true democratic state of affairs.

We understand capitalism as the dictatorship of the bosses, of the capitalist, no matter how well concealed this fact may be, behind false liberal hopes as captured in all liberal constitutions.

Very briefly then, allow me, Comrades, to deal with the matters I said I will tackle above.

A. The state of the world capitalist system

We all have a duty and revolutionary responsibility to understand, in class terms, the world we live in. This is important because we need to be fully aware at all times, of the actual revolutionary potential for winning the war against the barbarism capitalism inflicts upon the world working class and peasant populations.

We also analyse the world in order to understand how our own

class struggles are linked to the rest of the class struggles taking place in the world, so that we may better grow faster the power of the world working class against our class enemy: the capitalist class.

The world capitalist system is in a deep terminal systemic and structural crisis. The world capitalist system is terminally sick, it cannot recover. Unless the world capitalist system is soon destroyed by the world working class and replaced by revolutionary and democratic scientific socialism, the Earth and all life on it are faced with the real possibility of being destroyed!

This is not an empty threat, nor is it a false alarm: capitalism has today developed enough atomic, nuclear, biochemical and other kinds of bombs to destroy the Earth and all life on it.

We now know that land, sea and air pollution are all at record high and life systems in all these spheres are threatened with total destruction. Global warming is not a joke. It is real and is fast destroying the energy balance of our Earth system as we know it.

As Marx and Engels so scientifically and correctly explained more than 150 years ago in the Communist Manifesto, the world today is ruled by the money form of value. Everything has been reduced, is being reduced, into a money relationship – finance (money) capital is dominant today. No human value or relationship is immune to the penetration of money.

We live in the true age of imperialism as the phase of human history in which finance capital is truly dominant.

The world capitalist class that owns and controls the global economic production and financial system ultimately controls all our lives, as they make sure that nothing that does not serve the interest of money can survive and thrive! The search for faster, more efficient, global means of accumulating money

is conditioning all economic and social activities, and therefore all human life on Earth today.

Even our poverty, diseases, homelessness, ignorance and all miseries are everyday being converted into businesses for making money. If ways have not been found to make money out of any of our problems, those problems will not receive any attention until money can be made out of them!

All this is happening at a time when the development of productive forces have never been so advanced! We now live in the age in which no human being should go to bed hungry – there is enough agriculture and food science to properly feed more than 100 times the current entire human population.

No one should have no decent modern house to live in – there is in fact too much construction science and technology to ensure that every human being lived in a luxurious and palatial house!

There is so much medical science and health technology that each human being can today have their health problems attended to, and medicines provided, according to their individual needs and specifications.

There is so much communication knowledge, technology and science that in fact nursery schools, primary schools, colleges and universities as they exist today are actually museums of ancient education: information technologies and computers, and manmade robots have made learning, transferring skills and education such a simple and accessible process that every human being can virtually learn anything, know anything, acquire any skill, communicate in an instant, as often and as many times as they want in their life time.

In the meantime, billions of human beings live miserable lives because the world capitalist class controls and dominates the world production system, all for money, for profits, and not for serving human beings and protecting our Earth.

Thus we see that on one hand, at no time have the productive forces been so developed such that every human being can live a full, enjoyable and happy life, on the other hand, precisely because a small and minority world capitalist class owns and controls the world economy for their profits, the majority of the world peoples suffer terribly, and the Earth itself is threatened with total destruction.

Thus there is no alternative to the victory of the world working class over the world capitalist class, if we must save human life and the Earth, from the potentially inevitable destruction from the power of the world capitalist class. We are engaged in a life and death war with world capitalism!

Because of their greed, the world capitalist class has actually already started curving up pieces of the moon for themselves, even as we seat in this CC!

B. The South African revolution: its theory and revolutionary practice

South Africa today is firmly and fully imbedded in the world capitalist system. The 1994 negotiated settlement had as one of its most important objectives the full and rapid integration of the South African economy (inevitably, society too!) into the world capitalist system.

This is not to imply that before 1994 the South African economy was not part of the world capitalist system, rather, the negotiated settlement removed all the impediments which the Apartheid government had caused, and a post-Apartheid neoliberal and vicious capitalist trajectory was adopted to fast-track this "integration".

But, when we say that there was a struggle for freedom in South Africa prior to 1994, what do we mean? What were we fighting for? What was the theory and revolutionary practice of that "revolutionary struggle"?

Was our struggle for the fuller integration of, and the

normalization of the white minority South African economy into the world capitalist imperialist system?

Was our struggle a struggle for a neoliberal capitalist South Africa?

Was our struggle for social grants?

Was our struggle for the protection of white minority cultural, social, political and economic rights at the expense of the majority of South Africans who are Black and African?

Was our struggle for the mere reform of Apartheid education, health and other social services?

Was our struggles for us to merely participate in choosing which faction of the capitalist class should be in government through the lottery of capitalist elections once in every 5 years, and then pretend that we too have “political power”?

Was our struggle merely for “basic services” in our apartheid designed geographical ghettos?

Why was our blood shed? Why did we shed blood? Was it for BEE? For Nkandla? For Ghuptas? For tenders perhaps?

Indeed, was our violent revolutionary struggle just for “a better life for all”?

For more than four centuries, why did we kill and risk being killed?

Today, especially after the 2014 National Elections in which the ANC has won a majority in both the national and provincial legislatures, it has become extremely important to sharply remind ourselves why we waged a violent revolutionary struggle, what its theory and practice was.

Only when we fully connect to this understanding will we then have the necessary and sufficient theoretical preparation and understanding, to enable us to summon the courage we need to continue the revolutionary struggle. For, indeed struggle we must, precisely because the revolutionary war has not been

won!

Our struggle was about ending forced and violent colonial occupation. Today, less than 8 percent of the white population still own more than 80 percent of our land.

Our violent revolutionary struggle was about ending social and cultural domination.

Today, 25 million Africans live a life no cat or dog of the rich white 10 percent of the population enjoys! They are classified as extremely poor. 23 million Black and African people in fact survive on less than R650 per month, far less than the weekly dog food for a rich white and Black middle class dog!

Our violent revolutionary struggle was about ending exploitation of the Black and African majority who are the bulk of the South African working class! Today, the majority of Black and African people cannot survive without selling themselves very cheaply to white or white black parasitic capitalists!

Today, 20 years after 1994, the majority of Black and African people, who because of our history of violent white land dispossession were turned into labourers on white farms and factories and mines, cannot find even these super exploitative jobs, thus they are left to die of starvation and extreme despondency, at a time when South Africa is one of the richest countries of the world!

Our violent revolutionary struggle was about ending land hunger among the formerly disposed, and restoring the ability and right to live anywhere where one desired in South Africa. Today, neither land redistribution nor decent affordable housing has been made available throughout the country to enable the destruction of Apartheid distributions of our population.

We fought and shed blood, not so that a few corrupt Black and

African elites should become the new prison warders of Black and African labourers by becoming instant credit card billionaires!

In South Africa as elsewhere in the capitalist and imperialist colonies, we violently fought to end colonial occupation, to abolish colonial domination, to abolish exploitation, to end gender oppression and domination, to restore the right to land to all the people of South Africa, to return the wealth of the country to all the people of South Africa.

In a nutshell, we fought – we killed and shed blood – to restore the humanity of both the oppressors, dominators, exploiters and dispossessors and the exploited, dominated, oppressed and dispossessed.

It is my submission that nothing, not even an iota, of the theory and practice of our violent revolutionary struggle has been achieved in the past 20 years.

The extra water, electricity, small poorly located and constructed houses, poor quality but expanded health care, and a raft of empty liberal political rights (precisely because these rights are not backed by economic equality – which is the only foundation of real political freedom) in the past twenty years do not amount to even the smallest achievements of the promise of our violent revolutionary struggle for freedom.

There is nothing extraordinary that has been done in the past twenty years that any ordinary capitalist formation would not have done, I submit.

To the contrary, we now have become the most unequal country on Earth, with the most violent of violent crimes, with an explosive youth unemployment that threatens to blow this this country up any time now, with the world's largest and most violent civil protests against inhuman conditions of life.

Our poor rural populations have simply been forgotten!

C. The Freedom Charter as the minimum programme and basis of the class alliance of the forces that spear-headed the South African violent revolution for freedom in South Africa.

With all the noise making the rounds about “a good story to tell” and the results of the 2014 7th May National Elections, it has become absolutely necessary to remind ourselves of the basic demands that brought together the coalition of forces that participated in the struggle for liberation in South Africa.

The Freedom Charter is the basic document that contains both the principles and the demands for the minimum programme that was the basis upon which the revolutionary block of the African, Black and White working class and other progressive strata in South African society united, and constructed and fought the struggle for freedom and liberation.

We remind ourselves of the 10 demands of the Freedom Charter:

1. The People Shall Govern!
2. All National Groups Shall have Equal Rights!
3. The People Shall Share in the Country's Wealth!
4. The Land Shall be Shared Among Those Who Work It!
5. All Shall be Equal Before the Law!
6. There Shall be Work and Security!
7. The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall be Opened!
8. All Shall Enjoy Equal Human Rights!
9. There Shall be Houses, Security and Comfort!
10. There Shall be Peace and Friendship!

To govern means to have political power. Land and economic power has not been transferred into the hands of all the people of South Africa as a whole. White monopoly capital and US and British and other imperialist finance capital dominates and controls the South African economy. The people are not governing!

The 2014 National Elections perfectly captures the fact that all national groups do not have equal rights!

The results of the Elections perfectly mirror the colonial and racist distribution of the racial political groupings in South Africa today. The results are a perfect reminder of the fact that white monopoly economic and political power continues to live side by side with majority Black and African poverty and extreme inequality. Nothing best captures the colonial nature of South African economy and society than the racial voting patterns.

Black and African people are still condemned to live far away from former whites only economic centres, rely on extremely inferior education, health and housing facilities, are condemned to inferior colonial wages and have no similar access to modern science, technology and the fruits of their labour! This explains why Black and African communities today are warzones.

The fundamental point to note here is that as long as a minority controls and owns the economy, with the support of US, British and other imperialist backers, the essence, the fundamental reason for our violent struggle for liberation will remain unachieved: the transfer of the wealth of the country into the hands of all South Africans!

Racism is a necessary feature of our continuing post 1994 racist colonial economic and social system, whose destruction were the basis for our violent revolutionary struggle.

D. The South African negotiated settlement and post 1994 South Africa

Today, 20 years after the 1994 negotiated settlement, we the revolutionary South African working class are very clear that:

- While the working class in the townships were making the Apartheid government and society “ungovernable” and sorting out traitors in their communities, even by using burning tires, the Black and African middle class elites at the heart of the negotiations were busy stitching together with the

enemies of the working class, secretly, a neoliberal anti working class and capitalist post-Apartheid South Africa, without the formal democratic mandates of either the ANC or SACP members and leadership structures.

- We now know that the totality of the openly and secretly negotiated settlement firmly entrenched a neoliberal capitalist post-Apartheid South Africa, and threw the Freedom Charter into the dustbin of history!

- We now know that the racist dominant and exploiting white block won by simply mutating racial social and economic dominance into economic class domination and exploitation through the South African liberal constitution which protected their old and newly created economic and property rights.

- The 1996 South African most liberal constitution guaranteed both existing and created new property rights for the white minority population, especially in land – thus entrenching racial capitalism, post 1994.

- We are now convinced that BEE was secured as a means both to pay off and consolidate a Black middle class, post 1994 that would act as the new policeman for the new version of the same Apartheid capitalist society and economy that South Africa became, after 1994.

- We are very clear that the 1994 democratic breakthrough was nothing but the mechanism for the racial capitalist transition, entrenchment of the racial social and economic domination order we are now living in.

- The 1994 negotiated settlement laid the capitalist foundation for the post-Apartheid rise of a kleptomaniac, corrupt black and African political class.

- The negotiated settlement contained the seeds for the dismantling of the popular and revolutionary block that had waged the struggle for genuine freedom in South Africa.

We are therefore, not surprised that today, 20 years after 1994, Black and African working class communities will, on the same day, participate in the elections by returning a black government into power, even as they are coming straight from a violent protest against their inhuman conditions of life. This is a perfect reminder that our colonial and racist society and economy are alive, and the struggle for freedom continues!

#### E. Numsa and post 1994 South Africa: the Numsa Special National Congress Resolutions

Numsa is a socialist Marxist-Leninist inspired revolutionary trade union. We make no apology to anyone for this fact.

In our December 2013 Numsa National Special Congress, we confirmed and resolved that the ANC led alliance no longer serves its revolutionary purpose. We, accordingly, ended our political support for the ANC and resolved to campaign for Cosatu to break the Alliance.

We further very correctly recognised that the SACP has exhausted its revolutionary potential in South African politics and in the South African revolution.

In order to prevent Cosatu from being destroyed and converted into a useless and toothless formation of the working class and the poor, we have resolved to call for a Cosatu Special Congress to deal with the class paralysis and leadership question in Cosatu.

I am happy to report that we have placed this demand before the courts.

Our demand for the President of the ANC and the country to resign because of the neoliberal trajectory and corruption in government and the country stands. This CC must determine how to carry this demand forward.

In order to sustain our membership growth and simultaneously to defend and service our members, we produced and adopted a Service Charter for Numsa. We must all live by this Charter,

in Numsa.

F. The 2014 National Elections: Significance for the revolutionary South African working class.

We have already explained above that the continuing ANC victories from all the previous elections and especially the 2014 National Elections are all simply proof of the racist colonial polarization of South African Society – they are all perfect proof of the continuing US/British financed neocolonial economic and social status of South Africa.

The foundation of the South African social and economic formation remains racial capitalism: the super exploitation of Black and African labour.

The ANC negotiated settlement guaranteed this neoliberal and colonial status of post 1994 South Africa. The majority of the population, therefore, who are Black, African and proletariat, in the lottery that is the capitalist election circus cannot be expected to vote for a white minority party with the same capitalist policies as the black party, no matter how rotten the black parties may be!

The solution to this crisis of development lies in the working class (white, black and African) creating their own political organ to continue the struggle for liberation which can only inevitably lead to socialism as the only viable alternative to the savage and backward system of capitalism and imperialism.

Numsa resolved in its December 2013 Special Congress to work to unite the working class behind a movement for socialism, and to work to initiate the formation of a genuine revolutionary political organ of the working class.

G. What is to be done, to build the power of the working class and accelerate momentum towards a Socialist South Africa as the only viable alternative to the savagery and misery of the current racial capitalism and imperialist dominated South

Africa?

Numsa must jealously guard and defend the unity of its organisation as a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist inspired trade union.

While retaining our independence and autonomy as a trade union, Numsa must carry through its resolution to build a united front of the working class in South Africa.

Simultaneously, we must deepen and sharpen our understanding of what we want our socialism to be like, even as we work towards the formation of a revolutionary socialist political organ of the working class which must lead the revolutionary struggle for a socialist South Africa.

The General Secretary will brief this CC on how we expect work to explore the state of socialism in the world is going on. We need to fast track this work. Socialism is international because capitalism is international. The victory of the South African revolutionary struggle for socialism will not be possible if we do not simultaneously struggle for a socialist world.

We must be humble, ready to learn from all other revolutionary and progressive working class formations even as we are very clear about what we want: it is not the resuscitating of any version of some pre-Marxian utopian socialisms: ours is the struggle for scientific socialism in which the dictatorship of the proletariat is the ultimate goal, as the only true democratic state of any society.

I am confident that this CC will do its work properly, and contribute fully to growing our union and firming up our revolutionary struggles for socialism!

Forward to a socialist world!

Forward to a socialist Africa!

Forward to the Socialist Republic of South Africa!

We cannot afford to fail. The future will not forgive us!

Andrew Chirwa,  
Numsa President  
12th May 2014.

original posted here:

[Numsa President Opening Speech during Central Committee at The Lakes Hotel and Conference Centre on 12 – 16 May 2014](#)

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# South Africa's youth unemployment crisis

5 March 2014, Posted in [NUMSA Bulletin](#)

Lessons from Germany

**South Africa's structural unemployment crisis which affects the youth in particular could do with a good dose of German training medicine says Boniswa Ntshingila.**

## **South Africa's youth unemployment crisis**

South Africa's youth unemployment rate is amongst the highest in the world. Therefore one of the greatest socio-economic problems currently facing South Africa is youth unemployment.

According to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey by Statistics South Africa, in the third quarter of 2013, 34.8% of young South Africans<sup>1</sup> could not find a job compared with less than 15% of adults over 34. If one breaks down the youth

unemployment figures by race, the picture becomes more gloomy for African and coloured youth. In 2010, African youth unemployment hit 58%, coloured youth unemployment 45% while Indian and white youth unemployment were at 22% and 18% respectively. However, these figures do not correctly reflect the seriousness of the youth unemployment problem because it excludes young people that have not been looking for employment<sup>2</sup>.

If all young people are considered in the calculation of youth unemployment then the actual youth unemployment rate was 47.5% for the third quarter of 2013. This means that 1 in every 2 young people cannot find a job and has very little chance of ever finding a job.

Since 1994, the South African government has implemented various policies and strategies aimed at tackling this serious challenge. However these policies and strategies have failed to create enough jobs for young people and to dramatically reduce youth unemployment. Instead youth unemployment has continued to increase. Between January 2008 and September 2013 youth unemployment increased by 2%.

South Africa's unacceptable high youth unemployment figures are a ticking time bomb that pose a threat to the country's political stability. Recent events in North Africa and some Euro countries show the importance of creating job opportunities for young people and the need for inclusive growth in South Africa.

South Africa's youth unemployment challenge has increasingly become an important topic in policy discussion. The recent youth wage subsidy and employment tax incentive scheme are just some of the policy proposals from government that have created a lot of heated discussion about youth unemployment and ways in which it can be solved.

It has become very clear from the policy discussions that in

order for South Africa to permanently and sustainably solve its youth unemployment crisis will require that the inherited structural problems that are hindering the creation of jobs for young people must be eliminated. South Africa can draw some key lessons from international experience in order to properly tackle the youth unemployment challenge.

### **Global youth unemployment**

In most countries in the world, whether industrialised, developing or in transition, young people suffer from lower access to the labour market than the adult active population. The global youth unemployment rate increased by 1.1% between 2011 and 2013 and grew to 12.6% in 2013. Global unemployment is expected to continue to increase and by 2018 the global youth unemployment rate is expected to rise to 12.8 per cent. Furthermore, young people continue to be almost three times more likely than adults to be unemployed.

Youth unemployment in the United States and Europe has seen a big increase since the beginning of the recent global financial crisis in late 2008. By the end of 2012, youth unemployment in the European Union stood at 23.3 percent, while it was at 16.3 percent in the United States.

### **International youth unemployment rates**

Although there was a significant increase in youth unemployment for the European Union, however, not all countries in the European Union experienced increases in youth unemployment. Whilst many countries such as Greece, Spain and France witnessed significant and sustained increases in their youth unemployment figures, Germany on the other hand was able to escape this trend and its youth unemployment has continued to decrease. Germany's experiences should therefore be considered because they could draw some interesting lessons for South Africa.

### **The Case of France and Germany**

France and Germany represent two opposites in the European debate about rising youth unemployment. Unlike France which has witnessed an increasing youth unemployment rate Germany's youth unemployment has been on a continuous decline for many years in spite of the recent global financial crisis. By the end of 2012, the French youth unemployment rate was at 25.5 percent. On the other hand, youth unemployment in Germany has been falling continuously since its peak at the beginning of 2005. It now stands at 7.9%.

### **How Germany was able to solve its youth unemployment problem and France was not?**

Germany's institutional settings and public policies have played an important role in influencing school-to-work transitions and ensuring that enough jobs for young people are created.

The labour market institutions and labour policies that explain the differing youth unemployment experience between France and Germany are namely:

- a) vocational education and training;
- b) minimum wages and employment protection; and
- c) activation measures and labour policies.

### **So how does the German dual apprenticeship program work?**

German apprentices sign a training contract that last about three to four years with a firm. It alternates between school- and firm-based training. Over 50 percent of all companies with at least one employee have acquired an entitlement to train. Apprenticeship training is basically provided in all sectors of the economy. Firms bear the costs of work-place training facilities and pay apprentices a standardized salary (about €600 to €700 Euro per month in 2011).

Companies benefit from this type of training scheme because it

allows them to work with new employees and to retain those that perform well. Firms can also show their social commitment. The returns to completing dual apprenticeship training are significant in Germany because 66% of those who successfully complete training subsequently enter employment. Additionally participants of the dual apprenticeship program also have faster entry into the labour market when compared to participants in school-based vocational training (Parey, 2011).

Furthermore, the dual apprenticeship system significantly improves wages and employment stability when compared to individuals with –schooling only|| (Adda et al., 2011). After about 3 to 4 years, about 80 percent are employed (of whom 60 to 70 percent are in –stable|| employment relationships). Their wage profile is similar to university students in early years, but flatter in later years.

The dual apprenticeship systems rely on the broad support of employers, trade unions and the government regarding regulation and financing. In particular, their success critically depends on the trade unions' willingness to accept apprenticeship contracts which are paid below the level of standard contracts—in exchange for a commitment from employers to offer practical training.

The support of the government involves not only developing special vocational schools and training qualified teachers, but also offering preparatory training for young people who are not yet ready to start apprenticeship after leaving school.

This –pre-apprenticeship|| training is essential for low-qualified young people—in particular, when the access to the dual system is as competitive as in Germany (Caliendo et al., 2011). As a consequence of such a broad support, vocational training via apprenticeships is widely recognized by young people, their parents and society as a solid pathway to

employment in Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

1. In South Africa youth are defined as individuals aged between 15 and 34.

2. This paper reports the narrow definition of unemployment (used as the official definition in South Africa by government). Individuals are narrowly unemployed if they “(a) did not work during the seven days prior to the interview, (b) want to work and are available to start work within a week of the interview, and (c) have taken active steps to look for work or to start some form of self-employment in the four weeks prior to the interview”

### **Structural unemployment**

Many countries in Europe and the US are facing cyclical unemployment because of the global financial crisis from 2008 that affected economic growth in those countries. If the economies begin to pick up again, their unemployment figures will drop.

However, South Africa’s unemployment crisis is often called “structural unemployment”. This is because even if our economy is growing, there is still a problem of unemployment because of:

- the apartheid legacy of poor education – “out of a group of 100 Grade 1 pupils, only 40 will reach Grade 12. Of those, 28 will pass matric and four will enter university. Of the four, only one will graduate.” (Eugene Daniels, a former district director in the Western Cape) The less education you have, the less likely you are to find a job.

- the mismatch of skills. Not enough people are acquiring education in the careers that are in demand. Therefore some students get a tertiary qualification but cannot find jobs because there is no demand for their kind of skills.

A comparison of France and Germany’s policies for tackling

youth unemployment

**GERMANY**      **FRANCE**

### **Vocational education and training**

Germany has established a dual apprenticeship system which allows combining work experience, on-the-job training and classroom teaching.

France does not have a dual apprenticeship system but only has traditional vocational education.

The youth that participate in the vocational education and training are low-skilled young people.

The youth that participate in the vocational education are relatively qualified young people, i.e., youths who already have an equivalent or better diploma than the secondary school leaving exam.

This form of vocational training makes up the main path of transition from school to work in Germany. About 66% of the youths completing general schooling each year enter the dual apprenticeship system in Germany; and about 20% participate in full-time vocational schooling.

In France most young people are only exposed to the traditional vocational training program and apprenticeship system.

Businesses are open to hire apprentices.

Businesses are reluctant to hire apprentices.

The course contents and expectations are appropriate for vocational training which is developed through close and continuous engagement with the social partners, aimed at establishing and regularly updating training courses for each type of qualification.

The course contents and expectations for the final exam are too stringent and unsuitable for vocational training. The course content is similar to that of a professional qualification.

The apprenticeship pathway is viewed as a solid alternative in Germany. Every detail is discussed and negotiated, including the duration of apprenticeships, expectations for the final exam, course content and pay levels.

In France there is a negative attitude and perception regarding the apprenticeship programme. Apprenticeships in France suffer from the perception that this training path is only an inferior alternative to full-time vocational schooling.

### **Activation measures and labour policies**

Germany has compulsory and specific systems requiring the public employment service to encourage low-qualified young job seekers to resume their studies, apprenticeships or training courses (i.e. activation measures). The public employment service assists job seekers in searching for employment, preparing for interviews etc.

In France however such a system does not currently exist. This essentially means that young people in France are not afforded the same support in finding employment and becoming employable as in Germany.

Almost everywhere in Europe including Germany young people have access to a minimum income scheme before turning 25 years.

This income ensures that whilst young people are seeking employment with the assistance of the public employment service, they are not plunged into poverty.

France is furthermore an exception amongst European countries because it restricts its minimum income scheme to people who

are 25 years and older. The consequence is that currently half of the poorest 20 percent of the French population are between 15 and 29 years old (Cahuc et al., 2013)