

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

[threecolumns]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 twilit 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 at 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[/threecolumns]

Appeal for support from DITA workers in Tuzla

A European workers' euro for 100 workers in Tuzla!

A very destructive war cost many lives and split the Bosnian working class. Then an international protectorate imposed new authorities, promising workers a "Swedish Paradise". But what they actually got was a "Greek Hell". There is no work for either young or old, there is little enough medical care and it isn't free; You have to pay for schooling unless you go to a religious school; if the administration delays issuing you a new identity card, you simply lose the right to vote ... Meanwhile they have stopped trying to catch war criminals or doing anything for former combatants or war victims.

Peace is deadlier than war In Bosnia-Herzegovina. Privatisation of industry has everywhere brought factory closures and new capitalists on the lookout for property deals; The Polichem chemical group's seaside hotel in Neum is worth ten times more than all its plant and thousands of workers in Tuzla.

The DITA detergent works are emblematic of political corruption and decay which stand out among the thing that Bosnian workers have suffered. Only 132 of the thousand employees who provided all former Yugoslavia's industrial and household cleaning products remain. Shares that were sold to

workers quickly ended up in the hands of particular people who saddled the firm with bank debt of millions of German Marks (the equivalent of the national currency km), embezzled the money, giving it to "partners" they control and then, either unable (or unwilling) to re-start production, handed the firm back to the state for a symbolic 1km. But neither the state nor the canton of Tuzla wanted this poisoned present. They ruled it "unconstitutional", but they also, incidentally, refused to give it back to the workers until they paid back the astronomic debts ... What do you do in nightmare like this? The hundred or so workers still at DITA have received no wages for 32 months. They have tried everything: factory occupation, hunger strikes, demonstrations, occupying cross-roads, lobbying all the political parties and trying all levels of the justice system. Even now, whatever the weather, they go on the street once a week and protest angrily. There are many couples with husband and wife working in the same factory. Many workers lost everything in the spring floods. Since February they have been the first to demonstrate, and today they are still the last to leave the demonstrations. But morally and materially they are at the end of their tether. Should we wait until one of them pours petrol over her or himself or jumps off the public gallery of Parliament onto the Mafia men and their mouthpieces below, to burst the bubble of fear and "every man for himself"? A Romanian worker did just that recently.

Only the working class in the rest of Europe can help Bosnian workers. Internationalism must not remain an empty phrase. Fortunately there are still workers in Europe who can spare a pound or a euro to save their brothers in Tuzla from despair, like the members of the First International who paid a shilling a year to help their brothers on strike in a foreign country.

DITA symbolises struggle and resistance in Bosnia Herzegovina. If they fail, a wave of demoralisation will drown the Tuzla area like a new flood. To support them now is to support ourselves tomorrow,

Radoslav Pavlovic

Monika Karbowska

Emina Busuladzic is the chair of the strike committee. You can read (below) an interview she did with Monika Karbowska, and her banking details for international aid (please mention "DITA") are as follows:

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Version française ci-dessous.

Bosnia:

"We want to live by our own labour, and for that workers need to control production"

Sunday 5 October 2014

Last June, militant feminist and internationalist Monika Karbowska visited Tuzla, the "cradle" of the social explosion which shook Bosnia in February. There she met the men and women who work at Dita, a factory which was at the heart of the popular



Emina Busuladjic

mobilisation. This is her testimony and her interview with Eminka Busuladjic, union representative at Dita and one of the founders of the new Solidarnost union.

Tuzla, June 2014: It is very hot when we arrive in this medium-sized town in north-eastern Bosnia. Like almost every town in Bosnia, Tuzla is in a valley surrounded by wooded mountains. These mountains conceal acres of industrial sites nestling in the hillsides: coal and salt mines (salt is the region's historic natural resource) and the chemical plants processing these natural resources. Like all the countries run by the former "communist" regime, these medium sized towns in what was then Yugoslavia were provided with factories and the population had a golden age in the 1970s.

Tuzla is a town rich in long traditions of class struggle and workers' solidarity. In fact it was the site of a workers' revolution in 1920: Bosnian coal-miners came to the defence of Slovenian colleagues who had been sacked, setting up a short-lived Boshevik republic. An imposing statue in the dilapidated town square recalls for all time this gesture of the Tuzla worker.

On 5 February 2014 Tuzla gave the signal for a new workers' revolt in Bosnia. Young people set fire to a public building in protest against the corruption of the canton government. The police retaliated and the little town was shaken by rioting. But then the workers at the DITA chemical complex, who had been protesting in vain for several years against privatisation, joined the movement and brought their Tuzla workers' traditions with them: they convinced the young people to stop burning public buildings down. They also convinced them to support strikes against privatisation.

Then protest movements broke out in 10 other towns in Bosnia, including Sarajevo. Even Republica Serpska was affected, with

demonstrations in Banja Luka. The demonstrators demanded the removal of corrupt elites and reform of the political system inherited after the Dayton cease-fire, imposed by western powers, which generated corruption at every level (municipal, cantonal and federal).

That's when the activists in the Bosnian Left, which came out of the 2009 student movement and organised in several groups such as the Lijevi movement, had the idea of organising Popular Assemblies, or so-called Plenums, in the public cultural centres which still exist in every town in Bosnia.

Women played an enormous role in this renewal of the working class and social movement in Eastern Europe. We follow one of them, Eminka Busuladjic, one of the founders of the new Solidarnost union. Eminka started 30 years ago on the production line at the DITA factory. She worked her way up and is now in charge of research and development. She came under pressure to give up her trade union activities, but she has not let go; it's her factory and her life.

MK: Eminka, can you tell us about DITA and the struggles you have had so far?

EB: DITA, Industrija Deterdženata Tuzla, was one of the biggest chemical complexes in Yugoslavia. DITA produced liquid and powder detergents which were feedstock for industrial and domestic cleaning products as well as cosmetics. DITA was a well-known leader in this field in Yugoslavia and had a big presence in the local market. It had its own rail link and factory shops as well as a big sales centre in Belgrade.

Run on the Yugoslav self-management model, the firm was nationalised when Bosnia was created, then privatised in 1998 for the benefit of "gangsters" who saddled it with 99 million German Mark debts and ruined it. Before privatisation, DITA had 1 000 paid staff and 400 "volunteers". They were all sacked and at present there are only about 118 workers left,

about 75-80 of whom took part in the protests [last February].

When we were privatised, 272 people bought shares but out of those 272, 7 held more than 45%, and that was the management team. The workers were supposed to take out credits to pay for shares, between 1 000 and 10 000km credits on monthly salaries of 2 000km and monthly repayments of 500km [Km is the local currency based on the German Mark].

The director was meant to invest the money raised from the share sales, but he did nothing – the workers' capital was embezzled. There was never any real workers' control of the company management because they abolished public access to the accounts in 1989 and that's why it was so easy to destroy the company.

Since then investment has been zero and the machines deteriorating a bit more every day. But in the chemical industry the plant is so heavy and maintenance is so important that if you stop maintaining it that really does say you want to stop production, since it won't be easy to start up again. DITA is already some way down that road, with several production lines stopped.

(...) [The workers] know that DITA got big credits because the local director of [the Austrian bank] Hipobank was on the board, but nothing was invested because there was no workers' control over it.

(...) The management strategy was to have the workers believe they would be paid once the liquidation of the business went through, so pushing workers to wish for the destruction of their own work-tool, selling off assets to pay themselves. (...) The aim was to wind up production and invest the money in tax havens.

MK: Can you tell us how DITA workers' recent struggles went and what your involvement in last February's Plenum movement was?

EB: Realising, because of the successive sackings, that privatisation simply meant destruction, the workers who were left at DITA started a strike and occupied the entrances to the factories from 4 April 2011 until 19 March 2012. The canton government promised it would be bought by the Serbian Bohemia group.

Wages were paid for two months, but in that period equipment and products worth 2 million km were sold off, and that is probably what that manoeuvre was all about.

In November and December 2013 the workers revolted properly and blocked the entrances and exits to the factory. The company used private security guards to expel the workers from the site. The struggle came to a face-to-face showdown in front of the factory: the workers told the security guards they were not going to move and that they would not leave because they owned shares in the company.

That's when they realised that management were trying to close the plant. It became clear that the credit lines the firm had taken out were never re-invested in production. Moreover, the management were sub-letting part of the factory on behalf of the subsidiary, LORA, whose shares are also owned by DITA directors.

We used to meet every Wednesday to protest. On 29 January 2014, we once again demonstrated outside the canton government office. That's when the Marxist group, Lijevi, joined us and publicised our struggle in the media with photographs, films and articles. Then the protest movement took off in a massive way on 5 February. Police tear-gassed the workers and young people who were demonstrating. Police repression finally united the two components in the struggle, the workers and the youth.

10 000 people demonstrated outside the canton government building. In the end the government started negotiations. As

it went on, the President of the canton resigned, but the situation at DITA was not resolved. The canton symbolically bought the company back for 1 mark, but the question of wiping out the odious company debt, which workers were demanding, never got mentioned.

The chemical union federation gave us no support, so we realised we had to act at a local level, with the support of local townspeople, our neighbours. For that, the experience of the Plenums, the Assembly and hundreds and then thousands of townspeople, open debates which took place at the cultural centre was an enormous school of democracy for us, and of rebuilding the links at a local level.

I took part in the first Plenum on 7 February thanks to meeting a Lijeviski activist. I talked about our struggle at DITA and that's how unity between the workers and the other demonstrators was achieved.

There were 25 people at the first Plenum, and seven of them were arrested by the police. So we went to the court with them. There was a real risk that the police would actually start shooting. Trade unionists, including us, came along to stop the police firing at the demonstrators. At the Plenums, we set up working parties with economists to demand a review of all privatisations. It was the young people in Lijeviski who helped us. The Plenums demanded: "Put the workers in the front!" The workers wanted to develop production and stop any new privatisations, and above all to raise the question of the company's debts to the banks.

MK: How could the establishment of your union change the situation as it stands?

EB: The Plenums movement changed a lot of things because it put pressure on the courts, who started prosecuting "Mafioso" style privatisations and destruction of production machinery.

At the moment management organise "yellow" unions or call in

people who did not join in the demonstrations to split the workers. It was to put a stop to that that DITA workers set up the *Solidarnost* union, to continue to put pressure on and struggle against the criminalisation of the Plenum movement: some people are still being prosecuted for “sabotage” and “crimes against private property” since the movement! Moreover, the unions are very fragmented. That’s why the Plenums had the aim of unifying the unions in a common front.

Anyone can join the *Solidarnost* union. You can be a member even if you don’t work at DITA. That broadens its base and turns it into a school of struggle. We want unemployed people, pensioners and students to get involved in the struggle. For example, pensioners from our industry have been a valuable source of support, and so have trade unionists in the electrical industry and health.

Before the war the unions were strong, but after they were talked down and destroyed. I’m a member of *Solidarnost* union but I’m on the strike committee too. Management accused me of lying and manipulation. They may even take me to court. Sub-contractors have also accused me of stopping them from working on the site. I don’t think what these sub-contractors are doing benefits the factory. In any case they can’t get me barred from the site because I’m a shareholder!

MK: What future do you want for the factory and what can activists around Europe do to support you?

EB: Every day the machines deteriorate a bit more. There is no time to lose. Two thirds of production has stopped, and some of the buildings are rented out to sub-contractors who store unidentified chemical products here and don’t produce anything. Why should workers have to pay for the management’s corruption and refusal to do its job? The workers won’t let up the pressure: We are occupying the factory and we demand an independent inquiry into the mafia-style privatisation and we want the privatisation cancelled.

As for what activists elsewhere in Europe can do: The European Left can help us by sending activists who can publicise our struggle and our work ... We want to revive the region, we want to live off our own labour, and for that workers need to control production.

Tuzla's trade unionists need support, publicity and solidarity from working people in Europe. The most important thing is the working people's committee of the Plenum. We need to work to build up confidence between workers. A new revolt is brewing.

MK: Do any women work at DITA and are they involved in the struggle?

EB (laughs): Women are cleaner-living and more dangerous and have more endurance! The men can get drunk and put the struggle in danger! Women don't.

The demand to have the privatisation reviewed is revolutionary. Workers in Tuzla look on the privatisation as simply a criminal act when all's said and done, just like working people at Walbrzych in Poland who denounce the way their town has been destroyed by closures and privatisation and seizure of their property by oligarchs who have no right to it. It's not just about stopping a criminal act, but declaring it null and void, i.e. re-nationalising the firm. The emergence of this demand is a huge step forward in Eastern Europe. Workers never gave up Yugoslavia's past, and it's coming back with the dream of new solidarity, a country where working people can once again have the respect that is their due, and, why not, power?

Bosnie : « Nous voulons vivre de notre travail et pour cela les ouvriers doivent contrôler la production »

dimanche 5 octobre 2014



Emina Busuladzic

Nous présentons ci-dessous la contribution de Monika Karbowska, militante féministe et internationaliste, qui en juin dernier s'est rendue à Tuzla, « berceau » de l'explosion sociale qui a secoué la Bosnie en février. Elle y a rencontré les travailleuses et travailleurs de DITA, usine qui a été au cœur de la mobilisation populaire. Elle nous fait parvenir son témoignage et l'interview d'Eminka Busuladjic, responsable syndicale chez DITA et fondatrice du nouveau syndicat Solidarnost.

Tuzla, juin 2014. Il fait très chaud lorsque nous arrivons dans cette ville moyenne au Nord Est de la Bosnie. Comme presque toutes les villes de Bosnie, Tuzla est située dans une vallée très encaissée entourée de montagnes boisées. Ces montagnes cachent des hectares de sites industriels nichés dans le creux de la vallée : mines de charbon, de sel, la ressource naturelle historique la région, ainsi que des usines chimiques de transformation de ces ressources. Du temps de la Yougoslavie, comme dans tous les pays de régime « communiste », ces villes moyennes ont été dotées d'usines et la population y a vécu son âge d'or dans les années 70. Tuzla est une ville riche d'une longue tradition de lutte de classes et de solidarité ouvrière. En effet, en 1920 Tuzla a été le théâtre d'une révolution ouvrière : les mineurs de charbon bosniaques prirent la défense de leurs collègues slovènes licenciés. Ils ont fondé alors une éphémère république bolchévique. Une imposante statue dans un square délabré rappelle toujours la geste du travailleur de Tuzla.

Le 5 février 2014 Tuzla donnait le signal d'une nouvelle révolte ouvrière en Bosnie. Des jeunes brûlèrent un bâtiment public pour protester contre le gouvernement cantonal corrompu. La police riposta et des émeutes secouèrent la petite ville. Mais voici que les ouvriers du complexe chimique DITA qui protestaient en vain depuis plusieurs années contre les privatisations se sont joint au mouvement en lui apportant les traditions ouvrières de Tuzla : ils ont convaincu les jeunes de ne pas brûler les bâtiments publics. Ils les ont aussi convaincus de soutenir les grèves contre les privatisations.

Alors des mouvements de protestation éclatèrent dans 10 autres villes de Bosnie dont Sarajevo. Même la Republika Serpska a été touchée avec des manifestations à Bajna Luka. Les manifestants exigeaient le départ des élites corrompues et la réforme du système politique hérité du cessez le feu de Dayton, générateur de corruption à tous les échelons (municipal, cantonal et fédéral) et imposé par les puissances occidentales.

C'est alors que les militants de la gauche bosniaque, issus du mouvement étudiant de 2009 et organisés dans plusieurs groupes dont le mouvement Lijevi, ont eu l'idée d'organiser des Assemblées populaires, dites Plénums, dans les centres culturels publics existant encore dans chaque ville de Bosnie. Les femmes ont joué un énorme rôle dans ce renouveau du mouvement ouvrier et social à l'Est. Nous suivons l'une d'elles, Eminka Busuladjic, fondatrice du nouveau syndicat Solidarnost. Eminka a commencé il y a 30 ans dans la production à la chaîne de l'usine DITA. Elle a gravi les échelons et actuellement elle est responsable de la recherche et développement. Elle a subi des pressions pour arrêter le syndicalisme. Mais elle ne lâche pas prise. C'est son usine et c'est sa vie.

MK : Eminka pouvez-vous nous présenter DITA ainsi que les luttes que vous avez menées jusqu'à présent ?

EN : DITA Industrija Deterdženata Tuzla, était un des plus grand complexes chimiques de la Yougoslavie. DITA produisait

des détergents liquides et en poudre, qui servaient de matière première à des produits de nettoyage industriel et domestique, et aussi des cosmétiques. DITA était un leader dans ce domaine en Yougoslavie, connu, très présent sur le marché local. Elle avait un accès propre au chemin de fer et des magasins d'usine ainsi qu'un grand centre de vente à Belgrade.

Gérée en système d'autogestion yougoslave l'entreprise a été nationalisée lors de la création de la Bosnie puis privatisée en 1998 au profit de « gangsters » qui l'ont endettée à hauteur de 99 millions de Deutsche Mark et ruinée. Avant la privatisation DITA comptait 1000 salariés et 400 « volontaires ». Tous ont été licenciés et il ne reste actuellement que 118 travailleurs dont 75-80 ont participé aux protestations [de février dernier].

Lorsque la privatisation a commencé les travailleurs ne se rendaient pas compte que cela menait à la fermeture de l'entreprise. Le directeur de l'époque avait été élu « manager de l'année » et promettait monts et merveilles. Il insinuait que l'usine n'était pas productive car l'électricité ainsi que les matières premières seraient trop chères.

Lors de la privatisation 272 personnes ont acheté des actions mais sur les 272, 7 détenaient plus de 45% et c'étaient les cadres de l'administration. Les ouvriers ont dû prendre des crédits pour acheter des actions – de 1000 à 10 000 KM de crédits sur des salaires de 2000 KM avec des mensualités de 500 KM.

Le directeur devait investir l'argent des actions mais il n'a rien fait – le capital des ouvriers a été détourné. Il n'y a jamais réellement eu de contrôle de gestion de l'entreprise parce que la comptabilité publique a été abolie en 1998 et c'est pour cela que c'était si facile de détruire l'entreprise.

Depuis l'investissement est nul et les machines sont détériorées de jour en jour. Or dans la chimie l'équipement est tellement lourd et son entretien tellement important qu'un manque d'entretien signale fortement l'envie d'arrêter la production qu'il ne sera pas facile de reprendre plus tard.

DITA est sur cette voie après l'arrêt de plusieurs de ses lignes de production.

(...)

[Les ouvriers] savent que DITA a obtenu de grands crédits parce que le directeur local de Hipobank [une banque autrichienne] était au conseil d'Administration mais rien n'a été investi parce que les ouvriers ne l'ont pas contrôlé.

(...) La stratégie de la direction était de faire croire que les ouvriers seraient payés une fois que la liquidation de l'entreprise serait prononcée, en poussant ainsi les ouvriers à vouloir la destruction de leur outil de travail afin de vendre les actifs et de se payer ainsi. (...) L'objectif était de liquider la production et de placer l'argent dans des paradis fiscaux.

MK : Pouvez-vous nous dire comment se sont déroulées les luttes récentes des travailleurs de DITA et votre participation au mouvement des Plénums de février dernier ?

EB : Commençant à force de licenciements successifs que la privatisation est une destruction, les travailleurs restant à DITA commencent une grève et occupent les entrées de l'entreprise du 4 août 2011 au 19 mars 2012. Le gouvernement cantonal promet le rachat par le groupe serbe Bohemia. Deux mois de salaires ont été payés mais pendant ce temps-là l'équipement et des produits de la valeur de 2 millions de KM [1 million d'euros] a été vendu et c'était bien le but de la manœuvre.

En novembre et décembre 2013 les ouvrier/res se sont révolté/es définitivement et ont bloqué les entrées et sorties de l'usine. La direction a expulsé les travailleurs du site par des vigiles privés. La lutte a pris l'aspect d'un face à face devant l'entrée de l'usine : les ouvriers répondaient aux vigiles qu'ils ne partiraient pas parce qu'ils sont des actionnaires de l'usine.

La prise de conscience que la direction cherchait à fermer l'usine est venue alors. Il devient évident que les crédits accordés à l'entreprise n'ont jamais été réinvestis dans la production. De plus la direction sous-loue une partie de

l'usine et l'argent part sur le compte de LORA la filiale dont les directeurs de DITA sont aussi actionnaires.

Nous nous rassemblions tous les mercredis pour protester. Le 29 janvier 2014 nous avons encore protesté devant le gouvernement cantonal. C'est alors que le groupe marxiste Lijevi nous a rejoint et a médiatisé notre lutte par des photos, des films et des articles. Puis le mouvement de protestation a démarré massivement le 5 février. Les policiers ont gazé les ouvriers et les jeunes qui manifestaient. La répression policière a finalement unie les deux composantes de la lutte, ouvriers et jeunes.

10 000 personnes manifestaient devant le bâtiment du gouvernement du canton. Finalement le gouvernement a commencé la négociation. Par la suite le président du canton a démissionné mais la situation de DITA n'avait pas été résolue. Le canton a racheté l'entreprise symboliquement pour 1 Mark mais la question de l'effacement de la dette odieuse de l'entreprise que les ouvriers réclament n'a pas été abordée.

Le syndicat de la Fédération de Chimie ne nous soutenait pas. Nous avons donc compris que c'est au niveau local qu'il fallait agir, avoir le soutien des habitants de la ville, des voisins. Pour cela l'expérience des Plénums, Assemblée de centaines puis de milliers d'habitants, de débats libres qui ont eu lieu au Centre Culturel a été une énorme école de démocratie pour nous et de reconstruction de liens au niveau local.

Le 7 février j'ai participé au premier Plénum grâce à ma rencontre avec un militant de Lijevi. J'y ai parlé de notre lutte à DITA et c'est ainsi que l'unité entre les ouvriers et les autres manifestants se fait.

Au premier Plénum il y a 25 personnes. 7 personnes sont alors arrêtés par la police. Nous les avons alors accompagnés au tribunal. Le risque que la police tire à balles réelles était grand. Les syndicalistes dont nous étions sont venus pour empêcher les policiers de tirer sur les manifestants. Au Plénums nous avons fondé des groupes de travail avec des économistes pour exiger une révision de la privatisation. Ce

sont les jeunes de Lijevi qui nous aident. Les Plénums exigent « mettez les ouvriers en premiers » ! Les ouvriers veulent développer la production et éviter les autres privatisations. Surtout que la question des dettes de l'entreprise vis à vis des banques se pose.

MK : Comment la création de votre syndicat peut-elle changer la donne ?

EB : Le mouvement des Plénums a beaucoup changé les choses car il a mis la pression sur les tribunaux qui ont commencé à condamner les privatisations mafieuses et la destruction de l'outil de production.

Actuellement la direction organise des syndicats « jaunes » ou elle appelle des gens qui n'ont pas protesté pour diviser les travailleurs. C'est pour contrer cela que les ouvriers de DITA ont créé le syndicat Solidarnost. Pour continuer à mettre la pression et pour lutter contre la criminalisation du mouvement des Plénums : des personnes sont toujours poursuivies pour « dégradations », « sabotage » et « atteinte à la propriété privée » depuis le mouvement ! De plus les syndicats sont très fragmentés. C'est pour cela que la lutte des Plénums a pour but d'unifier les syndicats pour un front commun.

Solidarnost est un syndicat ouvert à tous. On peut en être membre sans être un travailleur de DITA. Cela élargit la base et constitue une école de lutte. Nous souhaitons que les chômeurs, les retraités et les étudiants rejoignent la lutte. Par exemple les retraités de l'industrie ont été un soutien précieux ainsi que les syndicalistes de l'électricité et de la santé.

Avant la guerre les syndicats étaient forts mais après ils ont été décriés, détruits. Je suis membre du syndicat Solidarnost mais aussi du comité de grève. J'ai été accusée par la direction de mensonge et de manipulation. Il se peut que je sois poursuivie par le tribunal. Je suis aussi accusée par les sous-traitants de les empêcher de travailler sur le site. Je pense que ces sous-traitants ne font rien de bon pour l'usine. De toute façon ils n'ont pas le droit de m'interdire d'entrer sur le site car je suis actionnaire !

MK : Quel avenir souhaitez vous pour votre usine et que peuvent faire les militants européens pour vous soutenir ?

EB : Chaque jour détériore davantage les machines. Nous n'avons pas de temps à perdre. Les 2/3 de la production est arrêtée et une partie des bâtiments est louée à des entreprises sous-traitantes qui y déposent des produits chimiques non-identifiés sans rien produire. Pourquoi est-ce aux ouvriers de payer la corruption et l'absence de gestion de la direction ? Les ouvriers ne relâcherons pas la pression : nous occupons l'usine et exigeons qu'une enquête indépendante sur la privatisation mafieuse soit menée et la privatisation annulée.

En ce qui concerne ce que peuvent faire les militants européens, la gauche européenne peut nous aider en envoyant des militants médiatiser notre lutte et notre travail. (...) Nous voulons que la région revive, nous voulons vivre de notre travail et pour cela les ouvriers doivent contrôler la production.

Les syndicalistes de Tuzla ont besoin de soutien, de médiatisation et de la solidarité des travailleurs d'Europe. Le plus important est le comité des travailleurs du Plénum. On doit travailler à créer de la confiance entre les ouvriers. Une nouvelle révolte se prépare.

MK: Est-ce que DITA emploie des femmes et est-ce qu'elles participent à la lutte ?

Eminka rit : Les femmes sont les plus propres, plus dangereuses et plus endurantes ! Les hommes peuvent boire et mettre la lutte en danger, les femmes non !

La revendication de révision de la privatisation est révolutionnaire. Pour les ouvriers de Tuzla la privatisation n'est rien d'autre qu'un acte criminel finalement, tout comme pour les travailleurs de Walbrzych en Pologne qui dénoncent la destruction de leur ville par les fermetures et les privatisations et l'accaparement de leurs biens par des oligarques illégitimes. Il ne s'agit pas seulement stopper un acte criminel mais de l'annuler donc de renationaliser ! L'émergence de cette exigence est une avancée énorme en Europe

de l'Est. Le passé yougoslave que les travailleurs finalement n'ont jamais renié revient sous avec le rêve d'une nouvelle solidarité, un pays où les travailleurs auraient de nouveau le respect qui leur est dû et pourquoi pas le pouvoir.

Cracks recently appeared in the edifice of world capitalism

By *Balazs Nagy*

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

* * *

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. [/threecolumns]

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

[threecolumns]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 bourgeois 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 bourgeois 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 bourgeoisies 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[/threecolumns]

New Valls government: A government of anti-working class struggle

[threecolumns]By *Balazs Nagy*, April 2014

The recent local government elections and the formation of a new government are a good opportunity, indeed a direct incentive, to say more about the mean, twisted and nasty way the Hollande team running the country think. Their politico-social reasoning is very simple, not to say simplistic. It is what you might call classical social-democratic thinking of a kind well-known over the last hundred years or more.

Resolute defenders of decadent capitalism

The main thing that really marks these people out, among all those who claim to be on the side of working people, is that they present capitalism as an eternal system whose existence you just have to accept. So according to this disgrace to the name of socialist, everything we do is necessarily limited and determined by the framework of capitalism and its general rules. But as a consolation to working people, according to this conception, the capitalist system can be put right, amended and improved, and our job is to contribute to that. This cheapskate philosophy which has long been selling the mission of liberating the working class for a mess of pottage still had some limited validity when, in return for this sell-out, the bourgeoisie was still able to concede various actual reforms. But imperialism is the period of capitalisms decline – something which social democrats obstinately deny – in which, because it is exhausted, this system is organically

unable to concede the slightest reform.

Now the present crisis has brutally revealed that this decline has got to the point where not only have reforms become impossible for this moribund system, but in order to survive it needs to attack and destroy previous reforms. This need is what explains its general offensive against existing reforms and its intransigent determination to fight that right through to the end.

But social democrats are incorrigible; they have not abandoned their grotesque fantasies, but adapted them precisely to the many-faceted requirements of this offensive on the part of a bourgeoisie with its back to the wall. For all Hollande's solemn oaths – and this sheds some light on the social democrats consummate duplicity – they then told us all the fibs about the need on the one hand to swell the coffers of international capital by paying back the debt, and on the other to help our own impoverished capitalist with yet more billions. Against all the evidence they still maintain the lie that thanks to this aid the grateful bourgeoisie will do everything it can to secure the well-being of working people. Even a few weeks ago Hollande was still handing out dozens of billions in line with this plan, but he and his ilk were the only ones (like all self-respecting social democrats) who still believed the incredible dream that in exchange the bourgeoisie would give unemployed people work. (Through these outrageous deceptions they hoped to justify making savings by drastically cutting expenditure on health, education, all welfare benefits, wages, right to a job and so forth, to the point of threatening their very existence.) Alongside this savage demolition of genuine previous reforms – and to show that they are true reformists carrying out actual reforms – they have flooded the country with a wave of so-called societal reforms – at the margins of and even outside of social and economic life – such as same-sex marriage, electrical cars and so forth. The main function of these

pretend reforms has invariably been to distract attention from the activity of destroying previous reforms.

The local government elections brought a stinging defeat to those who, in their arrogant and pretentious duplicity, thought that working people had swallowed this hogwash hook, line and sinker. They were sincerely and profoundly surprised when they saw the results. But to go from there to imagining that Hollande and co would revise their policies and adapt them to what working people want would be an absurd illusion. Far from it!

A build-up of losses and other miseries threaten workers.

The new government is not just a body committed carrying on Hollande and co.s bourgeois policy of robbing working people. In view of the preceding governments alleged dawdling in getting on with the job and also the bourgeoisies growing appetite, not to say bulimia, it is going to toughen up considerably. After 26 March, the employers body Medef trumpeted: A more ambitious trajectory than the 50 billion cut already announced is now absolutely imperative, (Le Monde, 30-31 March 2014). Then the headline on the same newspapers editorial of 1 April spelled out what the government has to do: Hold course! No wobbling, get on with it! And then Hollande's road map made it clear: The only responsible outcome is to set afoot and then roll out reforms aiming at securing an economic recovery. We all know the terrible reality hiding behind these anodyne words. The self-proclaimed leaders of the bourgeoisie in Brussels have also jumped at the chance to insist on greater rigour from the French government. And the commercial treaty being prepared between Europe and the US has up its sleeve further blows which will make any hopes of an economic recovery by France, already pretty well compromised, even more precarious.

Hollande reacted swiftly, obeying not indeed the wishes of the disappointed voters but the requirements of his real,

bourgeois, bosses. He quickly established a new government team tightly organised around his closest social-democratic partners. His new prime minister, Valls, is ready-made to epitomise it, with his even more pronounced right-wing political orientation and aggressive character. It is no accident that he has long wanted to rid his party's name of the adjective socialist. So right from the start this team presents itself as an advanced detachment of a bourgeois attack formation. The odd reassuring and soothing phrase where required do not alter this truth. We shall have occasion later on to comment in greater detail on this new governments anti-worker offensive, the first elements of which, aiming to dismantle the social security system, we have just seen.

There certainly is a change, not to say a turn. Here is an end to the procrastination and shilly-shallying which, however much they suit Hollande's innate weakness, have become intolerable to the bourgeoisie and seem contrary to the nature of the new government. The presence of people with a left aura like Hamon and Montebourg has nothing to do with any real left. Much more, it signifies the end of equivocation or misunderstanding surrounding these careerists reputations. Indeed, if there is a real left in this party, apart from the usual fake-left loud-mouths like Lienemann and co., now would be the time to say so in opposition to the deployment of definite measures and attacks against workers gains. Above all, now is the time for all organisations who speak and act in workers interests to rally round the Left Front to prepare together a broad united front of all working people against the redoubled attacks by capital and its new government.

Balazs Nagy, April 2014[/threecolumns]

Euro-election results reveal signs of Political turmoil in Europe

[threecolumns]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.[/threecolumns]

**Down with the bourgeois
politics of the Front
National! Against**

reactionary, nationalist fascism!

[threecolumns]By *Balazs Nagy*, May 2014

The forthcoming European elections will no doubt produce unprecedented advances by the French Front National (FN). It gained considerable strength by its spectacular advances in the recent municipal elections, which have clearly given it a head-start in the European elections. So a critical examination of its programme, in particular in relation to Europe, is not only vital in itself but allows us to clarify what the essential problems for Europe are. It also allows to look at all the other parties European policies.

Now, to decode what the FN's orientation towards Europe is and what it means, we must first of all describe its national policy. We must do this not on the basis of that party's own deceptive slogans or what other people say about it, but on the firm basis of the only objective criterion for political evaluation, i.e. its class character.

What is the Front National's real class character?

Actually, we need to establish clearly what the FN's social basis is and indicate unequivocally which class's interests are expressed in its programme and activities. This is the fundamental question which politicians and commentators either evade or completely muddle up, but it is the most important one.

There are, of course, some vague and hesitant answers which describe the Front National as a petit-bourgeois party, or one that speaks on behalf of layers of de-classed workers. And it is true that in the FN's various shenanigans you will see out-and-out, provocative and panicked members of the petit-bourgeoisie as well as disorientated and desperate working people who follow this party. A large number of bourgeois propagandists also call this a populist party, alluding to its

social demagoguery. But the only concrete content of this description is simply the bourgeoisies familiar contempt for anything in the slightest way connected with the people.

All these descriptions are superficial. The adjective populist is so devoid of meaning that brain-dead journalists, in deference to the futile and inconsistent great minds they follow, apply it not just to the FN, but to Melanchon's Left Party (Parti de Gauche) too! What do they care that the class nature and objectives of these two parties are radically opposed, or that by acting in this way they are depriving themselves of an investigative method that actually has some validity.

But it is also superficial to view the FN as a petit-bourgeois party, even if there is an element of truth in it. It is true that the Front National is petit bourgeois in its composition, like similar bodies all over Europe. That was also true in the past of Hitlers and Mussolini's parties, and the rest of them, before they seized power. This widely-held opinion arises from immediate impressions based on superficial features of these parties, which various cohorts of petit-bourgeois do flock to join. It goes no further than the social composition of these parties, and completely neglects to describe their clearly and explicitly bourgeois programme.

The NF's bourgeois nature is clearly underlined by the party's programme and – as we shall see in detail later on – by what it actually does. But so-called classical bourgeois and social-democratic politicians and all their spokesmen make all that disappear as if by magic. This blindness is the intellectual expression of the class and social stratum to which they belong, and they also display it towards all past fascist movements (from Hitler and Mussolini to Franco and Salazar).

This conception, which camouflages the social nature of fascist parties behind their social composition, was taken up and amplified by Stalinists in the 1930s and pressed into service for their Popular Front policies to rescue bourgeois society. Certainly the tenacious persistence of this

superficial point of view right up to the present owes a lot to the still considerable influence of Stalinist ideology, which continues to poison minds at large, long after its progenitors power collapsed. As for the kinship between the FN and past (and present) fascist parties, it can be confirmed to the extent that their specific – and shared – bourgeois character is clearly understood. To check this we need first to make a brief detour into the past.

Past lessons help us to understand the present

What we need, to help us orientate ourselves correctly, is a theoretical elucidation of the historic experience of those years, in particular Trotsky's Marxist explanation, which remains totally valid today. Against all the general, botched and inconsistent characterisations one encounters today, he alone provided a serious analysis of fascism based on the class struggles and movements in capitalist society in its period of decline. Of all the many writing he devoted to this subject, let us pick his study: What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat (1932), which I strongly recommend to all activists.

In it, Trotsky notes that in the period of its imperialist decline, capital is able to stay in power only through the entire support of either social democracy or fascism. And if the strength of the proletariat is paralysed by the lack of its own political organisation or the inability of its leadership to march towards the seizure of power, these auxiliary arms of capital will grow stronger. But the inevitable accentuation of the general crisis of capitalism and its growing exhaustion sap and undermine the traditional pedestals upon which social-democratic activity is based: reforms and parliamentary democracy. The exacerbation and prolongation of the general crisis thus abolish the foundations upon which social-democracy rests (reforms) and alters the framework within which it operates (parliamentary democracy). So social democracy grows noticeably weaker while

the fascists, with their unbridled social demagoguery, grow stronger.

Only a thin membrane today separates France – or indeed the majority of European countries – from a similar situation. To be able to re-establish capitalism's former equilibrium and check the decline that threatens it, the bourgeoisie urgently needs not just to completely demolish the gains the proletariat made previously, but also to smash (or completely domesticate) its organisations. At the moment, they reckon that they can do that without recourse to the direct terror of fascism. They have already appreciably weakened democracy in an authoritarian and Bonapartist direction both within each country and at a European level. They have also succeeded in destroying a considerable mass of social rights and advantages, and all without any large-scale social shocks. Even if they still have a long way to go, all the signs are that they will be able to continue along the same lines. So you can sum it up like this: The so-called democratic rule of the bourgeoisie, profoundly corrupted by the virus of bonapartist authoritarianism, has already shown much more muscle in imposing tough decisions, while at the same time that class is still afraid of the kind of leap into the unknown involved in going over openly to fascism, the memory of which is still painfully alive. It prefers to stick with the social democrats who anyway seem determined enough to destroy social gains and rights and working class organisations (or at least severely discipline them). Above all, they are reassured by the remarkable weakness and torpor of the workers organisations, the virtual absence of a vigorous response by the proletariat. So everything encourages them to continue as they did in the past.

But despite all that, the crisis has grown more severe and instability has increased. Bourgeois voices are raised demanding a further and more decisive turn, pressing ahead to restore capitalism's health. The European Commission, the French employers organisation, Medef, and other members of the bourgeoisie show no gratitude to Hollande for services

rendered but grow yet more demanding and openly arrogant. Alongside this, the fascists strength and influence spread and they prepare to take power. Under these conditions the bourgeois nature of Front National stands out increasingly and its kinship with fascism becomes obvious.

An aggressive bourgeois party custom-built to save moribund capital at any price.

The class character of the Front Nationals programme leaves no room for doubt. It is flagrantly bourgeois. At the same time the FN takes care not to place too much emphasis on its total open support for capitalism, so as not to compromise the social posture it has usurped. However, its programme and the corresponding propaganda nowhere put in question capitalism as such as a well-defined social and economic system. Its criticisms are aimed not at the system itself but solely at its current policies, against which it advocates the application of different policies of the same capitalist system.

So of course it carefully avoids seeking to overthrow capitalism or agitating for this. Consequently it is deliberately opposed to the social revolution and looks forward to coming in power in accordance with all the rules and customs of bourgeois parliamentary politics, even if it would not hesitate to shoulder them aside should the need arise. But, like all other fascist formations past and present, they wont lay a finger on the sacrosanct private ownership of capital.

Now unlike the traditional bourgeois parties and their social democrat partners and rivals, the FN and its like do not rest content merely to present a different programme. These parties base theirs on a virulent and provocative social and political criticism of economic, social and cultural defects, not as something inherent to the capitalist system, but as the direct consequences of alleged corruption of national space and its invasion by various ethnicities and nationalities.

This is where the fascist nature of the Front National and its ilk right across Europe emerges clearly and unequivocally. Sociological and political criteria are replaced by nationalist and racist phrase-mongering. Hitler and his supporters found an explanation for the social sufferings of the masses in an imaginary Jewish plot. We know what atrocities this vile anti-Semitism led to. At present the Front National focuses its attacks on Arab-origin French workers and working people and on refugees. But of course they have merely adapted the self-same genocidal propensities to demographic and political changes and are keen to shrug off the highly-injurious association with the still vivid memories of the death camps. But as long as capitalism continues and tries to halt its decline, anti-Semitism and its fascist thugs will also remain active.

Now this nationalism and racism do not emerge – and never did historically – as excessive national sentiment somehow outside of or above classes. As they always did, they form the foundations of a policy and propaganda with a clearly-defined class basis. Its violent anti-Arab attacks are concentrated on and aimed against the most numerous and most vulnerable section of the French working class and working people, which is those of Arab origin and/or identity. But curiously they spare rich emir parasites and, as if by magic, turn into fascinated admiration when it comes to Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, these great rentier parasites of world capitalism. (Ingrained anti-Arabism on the part of a few fanatical mystics does not alter this fundamental political fact).

This bourgeois-fascist lineage or genealogy on the part of Front National is entirely confirmed by its real attitude to so-called austerity policies. It castigates them in general and as a whole as mistaken and useless, since in their view all problems would be solved if only all foreigners were expelled, but in reality it does not engage in the slightest struggle against the anti-working class measures involved. One would look in vain for any plan or real struggle by the FN against the constant pension cuts, the systematic erosion of

rights at work, or unemployment. On the other hand, it is well known that it was really the FN who thought of slapping the disgusting and contemptuous label welfare dependents on social welfare recipients, especially the unemployed, and call for payments to be stopped. If they have for now shut up on this typically ignoble fascist demand, it is because the fascist contamination is so strong that other bodies are doing their work for them (Like Sarkozy through his fascist adviser Buisson, and after him the Socialist Party interior minister Valls against Roma, or now the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) MP Wauquiez on welfare dependency)

The programme of national isolation is a fascist policy

The fascist character of the Front Nationals bourgeois programme emerges most brutally in relation to Europe and its future. To strip it down, we need first to cast a brief glance at the bourgeoisies own orientation on Europe.

Painfully, and at the cost of two world wars involving massive destruction, this bourgeoisie, or rather its dominant faction, has arrived at a significant pragmatic conclusion: that the powerful contradiction between the forces of production, which have become European (and even global), and the strict maintenance of national divisions, is one of the causes of capitalist decline and thus a permanent source of war; that even this massive destruction, despite an unheard-of level of devastation, has done nothing to stop this decline but only slowed and prolonged it, all the while growing in extent and intensity. It was this empirical understanding which forced the bourgeoisie to undertake among other things the unification of Europe under the iron rod of its larger monopolies.

Now the whole undertaking of building Europe is completely impossible for the bourgeoisie, whose birth was linked to and completely bound up with the birth of nation states. For the same reason, the death of these nation states will for sure only come over the corpse of the bourgeoisie. Events in recent

years completely confirm this truth. The more the bourgeoisie has engaged on the road to its version of European unity, the more it has stoked up its crisis, the more it has weakened itself and torn itself apart. Its very first hesitant and shaky steps towards its alleged European unification already increased the general destruction at every level and increased many-fold the difficulties all working people have suffered. Above all and despite these unprecedented ravages, difficulties of every kind continued to grow, the class struggle has intensified, doubts persist and become widespread – and the death agony of capitalism worsens.

The Front National certainly picks up in a very lively way on what is badly wrong in the traditional bourgeoisies (and its social democratic allies) attitude to Europe, not to correct it, but to denounce European re-unification as an unsuitable, not to say harmful, approach to resolving the general crisis of the system. Against it they advocate the abolition of the Euro and other attributes of unification and a frank return to national sovereignty as we used to know it.

But such a jump backwards into the past is nowadays impossible; it would create immense upheavals which could quite possibly throw humanity a long way back. How damaging that would be was proved by the atrocities of war as long ago as 1914 and confirmed by the even worse atrocities between 1939 and 1945. Nowadays the European jigsaw of nation states existing separately from each other as independent entities is no more than an historic relic based on differences of language and culture. When we look at the material basis of life, we see economies really intertwined, an organic linking or fusion between the economic products of the various countries which has far outgrown any kind of self-contained national economies existing in parallel and lends them an increasingly integrated character at the European and even international level. Even if this unification is being done in a capitalist way, i.e. by cruelly grinding away involving material destruction, suffering on the part of millions, and above all glaring imperfections and inadequacies, it is

concretely being done and there is no possible way to turn the clock back that does not involve general chaos.

This is because what is at stake here is the historic development of the socialisation of production on a grand scale, something that even the bourgeoisie has continually had to adapt to, albeit in its own capitalist way, in order to mitigate the growing and murderous contradiction between this process and the private character of ownership. The absurd, rickety, incomplete character of their European turn faithfully reflects their fear and inability to see things through to the end, and then on top of that they had to adjust to the international socialisation that has been (wrongly) described as globalisation. Their grotesque attempts to mitigate the threats of serious instability that arise in the capitalist system from this growing international socialisation by establishing official but ramshackle European, American, Asian etc. regional groupings and then the G20 are testimony to how potent this socialisation process is. These bourgeois reactions to the challenges posed by the socialisation of the world (and European) economy cannot but be timid and incomplete, because not only do they rest on the basis and framework of capitalism, they also aspire to consolidate the system. But instead of mitigating the sources of disequilibrium and instability, they increase them and sharpen the contradictions even more. And so the bourgeoisies European adventure has considerably increased imbalances across the continent, increased economic instability and further deepened the contradictions between the various countries in the continent. The persistent isolation which has greeted French intervention in Africa (Mali and Central African Republic), then the paralysing cacophony of contradictory interests over Ukraine and Putins policies express this natural inability to achieve real European unity.

For a workers programme for Europe!

The conclusion is obvious: All criticisms of the Front

National which do not expose its bourgeois character badly miss the essential point. Obviously none of the bodies such as the (Conservative) UMP, the Socialist Party (PS), etc., can do that, so their criticisms of this dangerous rival are reduced to angry shouting of a generally moral order. Their hands are particularly tied in this respect in that they all on occasion draw from the same nauseating bourgeois political arsenal as the Front National without a second thought. Their policies towards Roma and other refugees illustrate this perfectly. At a European level they are compelled to defend their own anti-working class machinery in servile and ingratiating terms against the spectre of the aggressive FN nation-state.

In fact, expecting any political organisation that is not itself resolutely opposed to the bourgeoisie to come up with a class critique of the Front National is really like trying to square the circle; it's literally impossible! And the absence of such a fundamental critique on the part of organisations which nevertheless put themselves forward as opposing the capitalist system as a whole reveals how seriously they lack any such ambition.

But a few additional comments are required on the European policy of the Left Party (Parti de Gauche), who do aspire to represent working people and so deserve a closer examination. For all our political sympathy for this organisation, or rather, precisely because of the solidarity we feel towards it, we are obliged to repeat a criticism we already made during the French municipal elections: It quite clearly does not have a working-class programme. It didn't have one during the previous elections and the lack is possibly even more glaring in relation to Europe.

Of course we do know this party's criticisms of the bourgeoisies current European monstrosity and its austerity policies. We agree with them. But it is essential to recall that even the harshest, severest and most extensive criticisms workers pour out on this Europe do not add up to a political programme. If they themselves were enough to create such a programme, you would not need a political party. On the other

hand we are undergoing the terrible effects of the Europe imposed by the PS, UMP and their allies. We also know that in this area the Front National wants a return to nation-states. These are the two orientations available to the bourgeoisie. But what, concretely, does the Left Party want? In the absence of a clear and direct answer, one can only speculate.

The party's documents talk about the need to reject Europe as it is so as to open the way to put it right socially, economically and ecologically. It also demands that Europe should be re-founded on social, ecological, democratic and peaceful foundations and also wants a new model of development in Europe. It declares it wants to put an end to the Europe of finance, asserting the need to break with productivism: set up a Europe-wide ecological planning system.

The way these desires are formulated suffers from a dreadful lack of precision, expresses unforgivable naivety and at times betrays crass ignorance. It very clearly shows that instead of an exact and precise political programme, the Left Party presents a fairly confused jumble of vague aspirations and scrambled and indistinct hopes and desires. In any case, the one priority that does stand out clearly in this wish list is to leave the capitalist structure of economy and society fundamentally unchanged, since all this party wants to do is at most alter (or re-found) it in the sense of relegating finance to a subordinate position and reorganising the economy according to ecological doctrine.

In doing so, this list abandons all the tried and tested methods of working peoples struggles such as putting social demands in the foreground and the alliance with trade union struggles. It replaces them with the cheap and tacky ideology of ecology, whose main function is to absolve the capitalist system of its innate responsibility for destroying nature and to re-direct this accusation against people in general.

Now all these specific wishes are entirely compatible with preserving the continued existence of capitalism. They do not at all demand that it should be destroyed, but merely that it should be corrected and improved. (Clearly this party's

leaders do not realise that even some of these innocent wishes are in complete contradiction with capitalism as it really is. And in that case capitalism will either tolerate these garrulous but basically inoffensive charlatans or it will confront them brutally because its crisis is getting more serious. As always happened throughout history, when that occurs, the great majority of these nave quacks will choose capitulation while a tiny minority will decide to fight but, unprepared and overtaken by events, will go down to certain defeat.)

But a workers programme takes an entirely different route: It calls things by their proper name. So it starts resolutely and publicly from how flagrantly and obviously bankrupt capitalism is when it comes to providing the slightest solution to or improvement in the day-to-day difficulties working people in Europe face. The future capitalism holds for them is getting gloomier and less secure, and the system itself cannot accurately predict even the main lines of where it is going. It will not find refuge in any one of its long-past variants: certainly not its old, bankrupt, democratic version and even less whatever it can lash together in terms of the nation-state. Such a programme would clearly enunciate the need to abolish this bankrupt capitalism and replace its pseudo-Europe with the goal of a United Workers (or Socialist) States of Europe, the only road to any real level of continental economic and social integration. We call on all worker-activists and their political organisations, especially the ones in Left Front, to adopt that sort of programme.

It is easy to see that such a programme could not be achieved all in one go, but needs to be prepared and facilitated by a whole series of obvious immediate demands which, as transitional demands, would lead to the inevitable conclusion that such a programme is needed. Besides providing a framework activists to mobilise, it is essential that, to fulfil the requirements of a genuine workers programme in leading us to socialism (actual break with capitalism, real class independence and living working-class internationalism), such

a programme should contain:

1. Joint planning at a European level of the activity of all political formations really fighting for a working peoples programme for Europe, and standing international co-ordination between them.

2. It is important to state the objective of a struggle for a Working Peoples Europe, as the anti-chamber to the Workers United States, in opposition not only to the current bankers Europe but also the fascists goal of nation-states.

Several partial demands can be condensed into this one:

- a. It implies the struggle to unify legislation right across Europe which embodies social advantages and gains on the basis of the most favourable (minimum wage, pensions, social security, etc.).

- b. It involves sustained activity in relation to and alongside the trade unions with a view to extending co-operation to organise this struggle.

3. The demand to cancel the states immense debts should be prominent in the programme. It is through the reimbursement of these debts and the interest that lenders (banks etc.) regularly siphon off a significant portion of the surplus value produced in the debtor countries. On the other hand, the obligation to repay the debt is used as a pretext to cut and destroy social rights and gains. So debt and repayment constitute the main current source of extra profit and a vital lever for exploiting the working class and working people in Europe. To make it easier to understand and popularise this demand, we should co-operate with all movements calling for a public, independent examination and general audit of these debts.

4. Reducing the struggle against unemployment to the national level is a return to past failed practices or at least represents a serious illusion now that the inter-dependence of the various countries of Europe is so far advanced and the unemployed form about 20 per cent of Europe's active population. This fact makes an active movement essential which challenges capitalisms claim to dominate and direct the

economy. That is the demand for workers control of businesses threatened with closure and the establishment of a struggle for workers control to ban unemployment.

5. Finally, a real fight for genuine European democracy is vital against all the bourgeoisies despotic bodies and arrangements. A real general clean-out is needed to close them down and re-organise them (the European commissions and directorates and all bodies such as the European Central Bank, the European Parliament, etc.) to ensure that there exists a new set of European arrangements that function in a healthy way at the service of working people. The pre-condition for such a clean-out is preparing, convening and holding a European Constituent Assembly.

A workers programme of this kind puts to shame all the various schemes and horse-trading which preoccupy the leaders of the Left Front about what organisations are called and whose names is on the ballot paper as miserable squabbles of a cheap parliamentary politics unable to hide the absence of a workers programme worthy of the name. However, 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.

Balazs Nagy,

May 2014[/threecolumns]

Where is Ukraine going? And where is Europe Going?

Balazs Nagy 26 March 2014

“The Ukrainian question is destined in the immediate future to play an enormous role in the life of Europe.” (Trotsky)

All commentators on the revolutionary process unfolding in Ukraine manifest general confusion mingled with anxiety; their confusion arises from an inability to understand what is going on, while the anxiety is provoked by the pervasive threat of war. They are at a loss, and it shows in the wide range of explanations and solutions on offer and programmes proposed, programmes which, themselves born of the widespread confusion, also help to feed it. But, broad as the variety of conceptions and proposals seems to be, they all amount, either directly or as a variant, to one of two opposing bourgeois programmes: either they accept and even support the new regime in Kiev and its capitalist European and American godfathers, or they “understand” or are inspired by the Great-Russian ambitions of the bourgeoisie that Putin represents. The stance always more or less varies, of course, according to the particular nature of this or that movement or organisation and its specific place in the political spectrum.

An independence struggle the bourgeoisie perverted – and some people deny!

And so for its part the European bourgeoisie asserts that this here is a movement inspired by western democracies which seeks to join their European Union. This refrain is orchestrated across the piece, with development and variations provided by bourgeois propaganda, not forgetting the petit-bourgeois second violins. Listening to them, you might be excused for believing that the Ukrainian people are ready to die on the barricades for the kind of democracy exemplified by Hollande and company. When that Europe – with its unelected leaders answerable to no-one, its peremptory decrees and its Troika dictatorship – tries to play the champion of democracy and national independence, the sheer pretentious arrogance deserves nothing but contempt. The low cunning this involves reveals a profound contempt for Ukrainian workers, making a travesty of their aspirations to real independence and genuine democracy, and imagining that they don't know what kind of

democracy you actually get from Brussels, or what was done to Greece, for example.

Against this vicious and ridiculous lie is ranged the other bourgeois version, that of the Great-Russian neighbour led by Putin, whose menacing, ape-like brutality many people find more repulsive than the honeyed but deceitful blandishments of Europeans whose rough edges have been smoothed by centuries of cheating and hypocrisy. But Ukraine's revolutionary movement developed precisely against Yanukovych, the front man for Putin representing the *parvenu* rapacity of the Great-Russian bourgeoisie. A few thousand agitators rattling their weapons, protected by a thinly-disguised foreign army and venal officials, cannot drown out this whole great people's obvious desire for independence.

Only a Marxist analysis can grasp this whole reality and provide a coherent explanation, above all by asserting that, despite all the commentators, this national independence struggle is an objective, and even fundamental, fact of the Ukrainian workers' movement and not some unwholesome blemish. What distort its content and deform its significance are the fake solutions proposed by the managers of European capitalism and their Ukrainian acolytes, up to and including fascists. Even their ostensible predominance and apparent influence prove, in their own way, the powerful vitality of this desire for national independence.

This is not some recent invention of the European bourgeoisie, nor a diabolical fascist plot. It has a long history nourished by centuries of tradition. There is no point in going over here in detail all the struggles for the independence of Ukraine, trapped between the feudal Polish state's desire to expand and the Muscovite state's efforts to centralise. After the glory decades of this struggle in the 17th century, the country was broken up between the two oppressors, and then above all by Russia, and although the fight was never

abandoned it also never recovered. Here lie the roots of the inseparable link, nay inextricable entanglement of social problems with those of national independence. This close embrace is what, historically, has determined the overall situation in Ukraine right up to the present, as in many other Eastern-European countries. On this point there undoubtedly is a kinship between the struggle in Ukraine and that waged by working people in Bosnia-Herzegovina, however different the forms they take. The close correlation between these profoundly mingled problems has been reproduced in a particular form at every historical stage. In the 19th century, in particular, national independence was integral to the demands of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. Not only was it indissolubly linked to them in every one of these countries, it formed the indispensable pedestal on which they rested.

This organic and uninterrupted connection was naturally reproduced in Ukraine during the Soviet period insofar as the counter-revolutionary turn on the part of the Stalinist bureaucracy installed a political regime which fell far short of bourgeois-democratic freedoms, not to mention those of a socialist character. In his fundamental critique of the Stalinist bureaucracy, Trotsky revealed that this anti-working class caste from the outset erected its counter-revolutionary political policies on the wreckage of political freedoms, including those of a bourgeois-democratic nature, and that what necessarily crowned its regime was the Great-Russian oppression of all the peoples of the USSR. It was no accident that he placed the question of national independence at the very heart of what he wrote on Ukraine.

"Nowhere did restrictions, purges, repressions, and in general all forms of bureaucratic hooliganism assume such murderous sweep as they did in the Ukraine ... (which) became an administrative division of an economic unit and a military base of the USSR." ("The Ukrainian Question" in *Writings of*

Leon Trotsky [1938-39], Pathfinder Press New York 1974, pp. 302-303.) That same year he devoted several articles to Ukraine, clearly explaining the need for a struggle for national independence as a major factor in this fundamental interdependence.

In the light of this one and only thread capable of guiding our current orientation, the positions that some have adopted, even if they fraudulently present themselves as Marxist or even Trotskyist, look dangerously simplistic and mistaken. This is true of the "World Socialist Web Site" of the American David North and Co. which, in their inveterate sectarianism, squarely refuse to recognise the authentic popular character of the independence struggle. They write that: "Washington and Berlin ... are stoking an explosion of tensions between various ethnic and religious groups...", having already declared that: "The principal responsibility for the escalation of the crisis in Ukraine rests with the United States and Germany".

(*The Crisis in Ukraine*, <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2014/03/03/pers-m03.html>)

This sectarianism in relation to national demands goes hand in hand with identifying the whole movement, including its democratic demands, with the fascist contortions acting on its surface. "Nor is there", they say, "the slightest democratic content to the fascist-dominated protest movement in Kiev and western Ukraine ..."

What chiefly characterises explanations of this sort is the almost total disappearance of the working masses, who at most appear as frail and impotent playthings of the bourgeois manipulators of Europe. On the other hand the bourgeoisie, German and American – or even Russian! – in this case, are seen as the overwhelming, ubiquitous powers able to unleash and organise this whole movement.

Sadly, Comrade Melanchon in France has also fallen victim to this confusion. In a hasty initial reaction to the Ukrainian

events in his personal blog, he found Putin's reaction to the machinations of the European Union understandable. Without defending the EU, we still have to say his opinion is wrong, especially since it brings a discordant note into party devoted to serving the interests of working people. As it goes, he later corrected this mistake inspired by a superficial impressionism, but his position remains at the level of vague, contemplative generalities that hardly go beyond the narrow limitations of the bourgeois view.

Again on national independence and how to solve it

There have been relatively few serious efforts, overall, to go beyond interpretations which steer away around the immediate surface of things. You can find such efforts in the accounts provided by some workers and/or their trade unions who are present as participants in or observers of these movements. Their testimony is unanimous: This is a general popular movement against the destructive policies of national oppression on the part of the then existing government. Onto this groundswell a variety of bourgeois programmes have been grafted which have tried to channel it into this or that direction. On the other hand, you can see the same sort of thing in commentaries by those outside Ukraine who have been through the school of Trotskyism or still lay claim this Marxism of our day, and who conceive these current upsurges, however vaguely, as class movements and struggles. An article by Comrade Philippe Alcoy of the New Anti-Capitalist Party's (NPA) Revolutionary Communist Current contains reflections of this type. But sadly his efforts also remain at the level of the superficial contemplation of simple facts, even though one should not identify him entirely with other appreciations, which can be criticised for the various imperfections, the most significant of which are closely bound up with the problems raised above.

Comrade Alcoy's view is that the struggle for Ukraine's national independence – even if he personally thinks that

it is a real struggle – is not worth talking about and he obviously thinks it is even something of an embarrassment. Unlike those quoted above, he does not take a hard and fast position, but sort of manoeuvres around this annoying obstacle. More exactly, he considers social problems as the only valid ones and the national problem as a useless and dangerous surrogate, and so gets it off his back. He frankly writes in the second sentence of his article that “popular discontent is a response to much deeper causes than simple “European aspirations”. Having thus set aside the disturbing question of national independence and the struggle for it, Comrade Alcoy can formulate his bookish and stereotypical demands in the third subtitle of the article: “Put economic, social and political demands of the exploited at the centre of the dispute!” Here you find the same attempt to replace Marxist analysis of a movement as it is, i.e. in its multiple and contradictory living reality , with a voluntarist construct with its demands dictated by the rigid schemas of a supposed “Marxism”, a well-known method of many cadres and leaders of the Fourth International deformed by Pablo and Mandel. In the event, he turns his back on the actual struggle being waged for national independence and thus presents the abstraction of a social demand in itself detached from its context, which confers on it a lifeless character. (And anyway he is completely unable to specify what social demands!) This fact obliges me not only to insist on the importance of this national question in general but to put it, as it is presented in reality, at the centre of this article,.

The combined and unified existence of social and national problems and the way they are entangled neither contradict nor detract from the struggle for social demands. On the contrary, their mutual embrace fertilises and strengthens each of these struggles in their respective domains. The whole of history, especially in the 20th Century, serves to illustrate and emphasise that struggles for national independence have strongly enriched social struggles, giving them greater

prominence and redoubled vigour. One can only repeat that it was not just some caprice that led the banner of Ukrainian independence to be raised anew in the struggle against the social gangrene of the bureaucracy, and integrated into the general struggle to liberate the working class.

Now, like many NPA activists, Philippe Alcoy has completely forgotten these teachings of Trotsky's, including his articles on Ukraine. It may very well be that he now rejects these conceptions which were still accepted until quite recently. In any case, the fact that he has gone over to a bourgeois position does not stop our analysis, based on Trotsky's, nor does it prevent us from affirming that if fighting for national independence spurs on the social struggle, the maturity and historical level of the latter in turn determine the character and concrete configuration of that independence. That is why Trotsky firmly stated the only road to Ukrainian national independence: "The program of independence for the Ukraine in the epoch of imperialism is directly and indissolubly bound up with the program of the proletarian revolution." (Ibid. p. 305). And he replied in advance to all those bourgeois or "socialists", or even alleged "Marxists", who seek a solution within the confines of the existing context defined by the bourgeoisie.

The way he describes this remains valid today: "... only political cadavers can continue to place hope in any one of the factions of the Ukrainian bourgeoisie as the leader of the national struggle for emancipation". (ibid. p.306).

How true this assertion is leaps to the eye when you see Ukraine being tossed around between two wings of the mafioso comprador bourgeoisie grouped around either Yanukovych or Timochenko, or, indeed, gnawed away – and threatened – by predatory mafias whose Great-Russian appetites have been whetted in Chechnya and in the Caucasus. Trotsky re-emphasised his conclusion and extended its scope: "Only hopeless pacifist blockheads are capable of thinking that the emancipation and

unification of the Ukraine can be achieved by peaceful democratic means, by referendums, by decisions of the League of Nations, etc. In no way superior to them, of course, are those 'nationalists' who propose to solve the Ukrainian question by entering the service of one imperialism against another." (Ibid p. 304.)

And so he arrived, as the logical culmination of his analysis, at the demand for an independent, soviet Ukraine, even then routing more than one schematic "Marxists" along the way. But since then there have been big historical changes which have done more even than war to change the face of the world. And in line with this concrete historical development, this same demand put forward by Trotsky, although identical at bottom, is posed somewhat differently in its form, in line with considerable alterations in the general context.

On what the collapse of the USSR means

The greatest of these changes is beyond argument the fall of the USSR, of which Ukraine was an integral part, brought about by the policies of the Stalinist bureaucracy. Now if many sincere socialist who have lost their way and even many so-called "Marxists" consider the national struggle of Ukrainians to be a futile waste of time or even dangerous, then they are completely missing out this change in the general context. In what they say about Ukraine in particular, they completely leave out the considerable phenomenon of the collapse of the USSR and what it means.

It is highly characteristic that these people view the effervescence in Ukraine – if they recognise its popular character at all – as being exactly like similar movements which have animated southern Europe and then shaken the Arab countries and also appeared elsewhere. Indeed there is a link between these movements, however much they differ in form, as singular movements of a re-launch of working people's resistance to capitalism. Their outbreak is a clear sign –

of course partial and full of gaps, imperfect and contradictory, but very real – of a step forward in and growing maturity of an awakening of the movement of working people. That is the basis of their shared kinship and certainly the turmoil in Ukraine is part of that. But we all know that here it embodies a quite different reality from similar events elsewhere, i.e. the collapse of the USSR.

But all commentators without exception, including “lefts”, pseudo or ex-Marxists, also “forget” this fact, although it is heavy with meaning. The world working class lost its state, its forward bastion in its class war against capital, for all that it was in an advanced state of dilapidation, undermined as it was by the parasitical bureaucracy. This loss constituted an historic loss for the whole working class, quite apart from the differing (and often opposed) views on these matters by various currents around the world. It marked the end of an epoch and the start of a new one, the latter marked by a radical swing in the international balance of forces in favour of the bourgeoisie and thus of the triumphant advance of that class’s reactionary neo-liberal wing, based on immense losses and successive retreats by the working class.

If the commentators mentioned so obviously avert their eyes from the collapse of the USSR, the reason is that they clearly do not know what to make of it, either at an international level or as regards Ukraine in particular. And that is why they elect to remain silent on this embarrassing question, as if nothing had happened. That is why their views on Ukraine lack all perspective and depth and are reduced, apart from empty and inappropriate recipes, to a banal description of events. Having summarised the international effects of the collapse of the USSR, we should examine its consequences in the countries of which it was made up, Ukraine in particular. That is the only way to understand events and sketch a viable solution.

While the USSR has collapsed, the Stalinist bureaucracy itself

has not disappeared from the country but, like matter in nature, it has changed. In the counter-revolutionary process of dismantling the USSR, the major part of it has simply been content to mutate into the new bourgeoisie of each country in the former union. No-one has the right to ignore this significant fact, although bourgeois propagandists like to conceal it, while the whole of the more thoughtful "left" use sleight of hand to do so. This new class has completed this reactionary turn, which is bound up with its own consolidation, with a cupidity that is all the more rapacious and a brutality that is all the more determined for it having arrived as the latecomer to the world bourgeoisie's feast, stretching from Russia's Putin with his Great-Russian dreams and his unacknowledged idols including the Tsars and Stalin, to Ukraine in the hands of the Timochenko and Yanukovych clans, by way of Kazakhstan and Belarus.

This liquidation of the USSR and its counter-revolutionary social transformation took place in bitter class struggle in which the Soviet working class, initially aroused by the hope of achieving its own aims against the bureaucracy, mobilised massively. But very quickly this struggle itself turned into a series of defensive struggles lasting a whole decade to protect its social gains against the painful installation of the new bourgeoisie. Of course, bourgeois propagandists had a material interest in keeping completely silent about these struggles, and we can only sketch them in summary form here.

This movement started in July 1989 in the great Kuzbas industrial and coalmining region in western Siberia, and it immediately spread to the miners in the Donbas in Ukraine and those in Vorkuta in the high north of Russia. After this first wave of great strikes, there was a second in 1993 in Ukraine, with 1.5 million miners, electricity workers and engineering workers on strike, centred in the Donbas. As Comrade Alcoy wrote in another article, in this strike "... the Donbass miners, seeing the disastrous effects of the application of

pro-market reforms, came into conflict with the new Ukrainian authorities.” They brought down the first president of the new Ukraine, Kravchuk and, alongside their wage demands, lent support to pro-bourgeois formations.

In fact, from the very start these movement were marked by a flagrant contradiction. Besides typically working class demands, and other, broader ones which seem to have come straight off the page of the programme worked out by Trotsky (which workers found out of their spontaneous class instinct), they advanced the demand for a market economy against the bureaucracy’s monstrous planning system. That was how they were duped and their movement exploited by bourgeois formations and conned by this or that clan in the nascent bourgeoisie. And so, disappointed by the Timoshenko clan’s rapacious policies, they most recently supported “regionalism”, that special form of nationalism of the clan which finds its living incarnation in Yanukovych.

This spectacular lack of any political clarity of vision is entirely due to the heritage of the Stalinist dictatorship since the end of the 1920s, which established its power on the total annihilation of the Leninist party and maintained itself by falsifying revolutionary ideas and the revolutionary past and one after another eliminating all the genuine cadres and activists of the working class, hermetically isolated from the international workers’ movement. The result of this process, this unnatural deviation of the workers’ movement can be compared with what had happened with Solidarnosc in Poland a decade previously, where the Catholic Church played the role of seducer. Since then, first the bureaucracy and then the new bourgeoisie which arose from its ranks, massively applied in these countries the tactic of the carrot and the stick in order to divide, hijack and corrupt these workers’ movement.

So it is hardly surprising that by the end of the 1990s a “certain demoralisation” had taken hold of Ukrainian workers, as comrade Alcoy says in one of his articles.

But when in his latest article the same comrade writes: "A certain basic weakness in this movement (recent events in Ukraine) is the absence the organised working class", he speaks completely in – the abstract. In particular he leaves out the *concrete* fact that this movement is not just absent, but has been conned, de-natured and weakened by a series of disappointments and defeats. So the "absence" is not just due to some sort of inattention but a from a long run of defeats, so that the Ukrainian working class on the one hand is economically and socially bled white and on the other has not yet been able to grasp , digest and overcome its serious disappointments and grave errors of judgement. So comrade Alcoy is right, but – only abstractly. But in the concrete situation of this defeat, his recommendations about "advancing social demands of the exploited" rings false, since the advice has no traction in real life. To get out of this reality of a tragic blind alley, Ukrainian workers don't need incantations of this sort, they need a lightning bolt from the international workers' movement.

Meanwhile all the evidence indicates that the situation in Ukraine and all the countries of the former USSR confirms Trotsky's sombre prognosis in the case of a possible counter-revolutionary turn by the USSR, not just on the social level but also in relation to the national independence of the various peoples. Without looking this evidence in the eye, there can only be a blind groping forward.

Since 1989 workers have been hard hit by persistent and monstrous inflation of the order of several hundreds of points along with unrestrained privatisation accompanied by massive closure of unprofitable factories and mines, late and deferred payment of wages and the unemployed living in poverty. Even bourgeois western economists recognise that these countries have experienced "the highest levels of inequality even measured" and that between 1989 and 1995 per capital incomes, despite the wealth of unscrupulous Mafioso businessmen, fell

by 62 in Ukraine and 42% in Russia, but “only” 26% in Poland. (*Le Monde*, 13 March 2014). The list goes on, leading to a natural conclusion: the only road to solving these severe problems is socialism. This is the main conclusion that Ukrainian workers could – and should – reach, as a whole, rather than some vague, neutral and uncertain “social demand”.

In general it can be established that the working class of the former USSR, and therefore also its Ukrainian fraction too, suffered a crushing defeat in 1989-1992, followed by a series of retreats and a general worsening in its situation. But for all that, it should not be said that the victorious bourgeoisie was able definitively to consolidate its power.

Throughout the former USSR, with the exception perhaps of Russia, local economies have only been able to integrate into the world economy as its most ramshackle portions, largely subordinated and exploited as colonies. Only the new Russian bourgeoisie can attempt to offset its economic weaknesses and backwardness by adopting Great-Russian aggression towards the other former soviet countries. Everywhere these bourgeoisies, feeble and rickety because, like the mafia, they are based on economic predation rather than on a rise in production, are torn apart by vicious struggles between various local clans. They are, therefore, quite incapable of furnishing a solid foundation for political authorities which are profoundly unstable and can only maintain themselves through merciless dictatorships. These are instable regimes of permanent crisis, which have been unmasked as such by recent movements in Ukraine and which render this victory of the bourgeoisie dicey and relative.

Under these circumstances it would be a mistake to think that the overall process unleashed in 1989 has been completed as a movement. On the contrary. It is experiencing a new upsurge in Ukraine whose impact on other countries is still not easy to assess. In any case, the Ukrainian (and other) working classes

may have lost a lot of battles, but no one has the right to say they have lost the war, whereas we can say already that all the anaemic bourgeois regimes established on the ruins of the USSR are interregnums, a historical accident, just an unhappy interlude in humanity's development.

Ukraine and the Question of Europe

The other big change which has altered not just the general framework of politics but also to a large extent its content and form has been the attempt at European unification and how it has evolved. This problem raises a number of questions in relation to Ukraine, too, especially since Ukrainians themselves treat it as something central and also because the issue has been pretty well muddled by the comments of both supporters and opponents of this unification.

From the outset I should emphasise how wrong it is to condemn out of hand the desire of working people in Ukraine to join Europe without examining more thoroughly the circumstances and the content of what they are asking for. After all, even organisations to the left of the socialist party are in this Europe and the only organisations agitating to get out of it are those of the – fascists.

It would be a gross error to think that the European aspirations of working people in Ukraine is somehow a desire to line up behind Barroso and his ilk. It would be a massive over-simplification, since people who have only just shaken off a clique of predators in order to achieve national independence are certainly not about to carry out the kind of "recommendations" that come out of Brussels or submit to the Troika whose cruel voracity far outstrips all the Ukrainian oligarchs and Putin's lot put together.

So, contrary to the majority of bourgeois commentators who quite a lot of working-class activists unfortunately take as good coin, the only Europe the working people of Ukraine want

to join is one that is truly free and genuinely democratic, just like their French, German or Greek sisters and brothers. There is no major difference between them, even though some Ukrainian working people do still have illusions in Brussels' Europe. The division that you can be sure exists is between Ukrainian and European workers on the one hand and the oligarchy in any and every country on the other. And we all know very well that fascists don't want Europe either, not the French ones, not the ones in any other country, and certainly not the ones in Ukraine either.

These are the basic facts of the problem, which are more decisive than any fleeting impressions or passing illusions one might have. So this is the basis on which to look for a real solution, and certainly not by turning your back on it.

The European question is not just considerable in importance, it is absolutely fundamental. Even back when there was still a USSR – and not European unification of any sort, Trotsky drew his organisation's attention to how decisive the relationship between Ukraine and Europe was:

"The Fourth International must clearly understand the importance of the Ukrainian question in the fate not only of Southeastern and Eastern Europe but also of Europe as a whole." (Ibid. p. 304).

Today, Ukraine's importance to Europe has grown even further while, in return, Europe's has grown perhaps even more for Ukraine. In fact it is obvious to all that Ukraine is in a complete blind alley if it stays where it was on the eve of the present big movements. Its opposition to one of the big clans of oligarchs has been exploited to achieve the victory of a different clan, without the workers' conditions improving, in fact just the opposite. In the same way, her struggle for national independence was perverted into an extreme bourgeois nationalism which faced it with a false

choice between the European bourgeoisie and Putin's Russia, leading to the brink of war. Cooperation between the Ukrainian and Russian working class, which is a necessary condition if the process of their respective defeats is to be turned around into a united movement against the oligarchs running these countries, has been severely compromised by the out-and-out nationalisms on both sides of the border.

The only way to break the deadlock is to overcome the national frameworks which prevent a satisfactory solution. That can only be done at a European level. Not in a bourgeois Europe which we know and which, by the way, so far from being united faces dislocation under the pressure of its contradictions. It requires all those organisations which speak on behalf of working people to go beyond the stage of mere opposition to this bourgeois Europe, a stage which does not amount to a policy but merely paralyses all these organisations within an outmoded national framework. Only the struggle for a working people's Europe can bring a solution not just to the problems faced by working people in the west but also that of Ukrainian national independence. It is also the only way to overcome the defeat inflicted by and in the liquidation of the USSR by raising united working people, including Ukrainians and Russians, against all oligarchs in Europe East and West.[/threecolumns]

Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine Statement

To the International trade union movement

Originally posted here 11.03.2014

[threecolumns]The People of Ukraine took to the Maidan in Kiev and other Ukrainian cities, struggling peacefully for a civilized, European future. Protesters sought democracy and decent social protections for working people in the face of the corruption and lawlessness of Yanukovich regime and they were victorious. The Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine and its member organizations took an active part in this struggle from the first days. Unfortunately there were victims. As a result of armed violence against Ukrainian people more than a hundred killed and nearly 300 missing. More than 2000 people were wounded.

Having understood that people cannot be defeated even by force, Viktor Yanukovich together with his associates fled, leaving the country devastated. This staggeringly corrupt clique emptied the state treasury and bankrupted the country.

During this difficult time for the state and the people, Ukraine was subjected to aggressive interventions by the Russian Federation, which, having abused all International and inter-governmental treaties, invaded the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and actively destabilized the situation across the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine.

Naked aggression of the armed forces of another country against the peaceful citizens of Ukraine has led to profound political, economic and social crisis. Unemployment and decreasing in living standards, already a reality under Yanukovych, have worsened in the current emergency.

That is why our country now more than ever needs international

support and attention to social and economic problems as well as financial assistance. Unfortunately, we are confronted here with another tragedy, that of economic austerity. The failed policies of austerity are inexplicably still supported by some parts of the international community and international financial institutions. Recent experience in Europe shows that International Financial institutions (IFI) continue to demand a type of austerity that disproportionately impacts lower income workers and their families. This targeting of average people is unacceptable and counter productive, all the more so in a country with extreme inequalities of wealth. Ukraine's wages, pensions and other social payments are the lowest in Europe. Combined with a high unemployment rate, an effort to push austerity cuts in social benefits for the poor risks further destabilizing the country. Social insecurity was one of the major reasons pushing the Ukrainian people to Maidan.

Threats of western supported austerity were also heavily used by the Yanukovych regime, and now by Russian propaganda, to intimidate average Ukrainians against their European sympathies. Austerity cuts to pensions, wages, fuel or utility subsidies that disproportionately impact workers and the poor will fan the flames of conflict in Ukraine. Further, we believe that aid proposals from the IFIs that do not address wealth inequality as root cause of economic malaise and decline in Ukraine are doomed to failure. Wealth inequality is not just the result of corruption and undemocratic governance; it is a core cause of these problems.

We call on the international trade union movement to support the efforts of the KVPU and its member organizations in the struggle for peace for our country, its independence, integrity and the inviolability of its borders. We call for trade union solidarity support for democratic values, decent work, and a decent level of life for Ukrainian workers. The current conflict as well threatens peace and progress across Europe.

We address the International Trade Union Confederation and global trade unions asking for clear statements of support for the Ukrainian trade unions in their assertion of fundamental rights and freedoms of working people. We ask the international trade union movement to strongly condemn armed incursions into the territory of Ukraine. We ask the international trade union movement to further strongly condemn austerity conditions that target poor and working Ukrainians, as a part of any foreign aid.

Mikhailo Volynets

Chairman of the KVPU[/threecolumns]

South Africa's youth unemployment crisis

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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 Africans¹ 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 employment².

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)