

Luxfer doit vivre : itw d'Axel Peronczyk, délégué syndical CGT de l'usine

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“Hi-viz vests”: Unions slow to join the dance

The below article is a translation of an article appearing in French on the Mediapart website:

(<https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/231118/gilets-jaunes-les-syndicats-hesitent-entrer-dans-la-danse>)

(Notes)

(CGT, Force Ouvrière and CFDT are the three main and separate union congresses in France, broadly-speaking divided along political lines, SUD is the common name for some more radical independent, breakaway unions. It is difficult to really know how best to translate “gilets jaunes” (yellow waistcoats), which applies to both the fuel-tax demonstrators and their “uniform”, the hi-viz safety jacket.)

“Hi-viz vests”: Unions slow to join the dance

23 November 2018: By Mathilde Goanec and Dan Israel.

If most national trade union leaders hold their noses when the

“hi-viz vests” are mentioned, activists locally are taking the plunge citing the levels of social crisis. Nevertheless, there are still raw edges, mainly because of instances of racism and some of the demands about cutting taxes.

When we called CFDT member Pierre-Gael Laveder off the cuff, he replied (hi-viz vest on his back) straight from the Magny road-block at at Montceau-les-Mines (Saone-et-Loire). Last year, this man was one of the main actors in the fight against the closure of the Allia factory at Digoin. Now “newly redundant” he is a “hi-viz vest”.

However, Laurent Berger, the national secretary of his union, has not called on his troops to join the movement. On Monday 19 November he even denounced the “totalitarian” tone of some of the meetings. Nevertheless, concerned about the movement’s increasing popularity, the leader of the CFDT on Saturday proposed to Emmanuel Macron to quickly unite unions, the employers and associations “to set up a social pact for ecological conversion”, a proposition which the government turned down flat. All this means little to Pierre-Gael Laveder, who wears no label when he goes to the “hi-viz vests” meetings, quite happy to play locally the role of go-between his national secretary hankered after.

“There’s a bit of everything on the road-blocks: tradesmen, shopkeepers, public service people ... and quite a few trade unionists”, Laveder explains. “I think it’s important to be there because what we’re fighting for here are things we stand up for in everyday union work: an increase in buying power and a wage rise. It makes sense to me”.

Like the CFDT, most union leaderships are hesitating, while on the ground many union activists have taken the plunge, even though the “hi-viz vests” always start a lot of arguments. The CGT position, for example is somewhat embarrassing. Less than a week ago Philippe Martinez was hammering out the line: “The CGT does not march alongside either people on the far right or

bosses who talk about taxes but also mean social (National Insurance) contributions.”

All the same, on 20 November the national union published a statement calling on the government to respond to the “urgent social situation” which the “hi-viz vests” emphasise. Visiting Rouen last Thursday, Philippe Martinez went further, conscious of the pressures in his own organisation: “What worries us is not the ‘hi-viz’ movement but those who try to exploit it”.

There was the same shilly-shallying at Le Havre, a town the authorities are keeping a very careful eye on because it hosts a port, docks and refineries. A general assembly of the local CGT discussed “hi-viz” on Wednesday 21 November. Activists didn’t want to “be associated with ‘hi-viz’”, but planned to carry out a series of actions in parallel, especially since some of them are already out on strike over wages, for example at Total (six of whose seven French refineries are affected this Friday). On Thursday morning a two-hour leafletting session and a partial roadblock took place at the Oceane roundabout, where “hi-viz” have been setting up off and on since Saturday.

Sandrine Gerard, the secretary of the local CGT branch, has also informed Mediapart that there will be “growing popularity” from Monday 26 November with a possible blockade of “the economy” at Le Havre, almost certainly referring to the refineries. According to our information, the Le Havre CGT docks and harbour group, which has an extremely high percentage of union membership but is very tight-lipped where the media are concerned has been even clearer and passes the line on to members calling on them “not to let the caravan of anger pass by” but mix “their red vests with the yellow vests”.

For all their concern about who might be trying to exploit the movement, the group believes “there is a place for the CGT in this movement” and calls on “all members to participate in

progressive assemblies". Their comrades in La Mède (Bouches-du-Rhone Department) have already taken the plunge: they have been blockading their Total refinery alongside "hi-viz vests" since Thursday 22 November.

Even before 17 November, the union's chemical industry group was warning that the "hi-viz vests" anger was not "illegitimate" and calling for a mobilisation a mobilisation in all the main sectors such as transport, oil, energy, ports ... and the Lavera refinery and the fuel depot at Fos-sur-Mer in Bouches-du-Rhone have been regularly blockaded by "hi-viz vests" since Saturday.

Force Ouvriere union's national leadership is undergoing a big internal crisis and has not really adopted a stance. However, their Transport section, which is the strongest union in road transport and ambulance drivers, has officially called on members to join the "hi-viz vests" and join in actions in favour of greater buying-power. "We call on them to come to the support of existing movements" General Secretary of the transport section of the union, Patrice Clos, explains, one of three candidates standing to replace Pascal Pavageau at the head of the national union.

If the unions are going forward on tip-toe, the official reason given for that is first of all the occasionally racist, sexist and homophobic tone of a very disorganised movement which is pulling in all kinds of directions. The CGT is sticking to its guns: "This period of powerful contrasts of light and shade can give birth to monsters, and citizens should not allow their anger to be diverted by those pushing xenophobic, racist and homophobic ideas", the union says, referring to instances of physical and verbal violence experienced at a certain number of assemblies since 17 November.

Specifically the CGT section covering Customs Officers responded in a very lively way to publication on social media

of a Facebook video showing “hi-viz vests” at Flixecourt (Haute-de-France department) congratulating each other on discovering migrants in the cistern of a tanker lorry and calling the police, and by the way making fun of the customs service. “Confident in their racist convictions, they preferred to call the police rather than an aid organisation which could have helped them”, the union group says in a press release. “This video shows protagonists calling for a ‘giant bonfire’ All this is reminiscent of very sad and inglorious events in our history”. The union follows up with an official complaint for slander and defamation of their service and incitement to racial hatred.

Acrobatics

CGT activist Vincent Labrousse was prominent in the struggle to save jobs at the La Souterraine factory (Creuse Department) in September. Now sacked, he too is careful in discussing the composite character of the movement. “I can’t march with people from the fascistosphere. It goes against nature”, this activist explains. “But they are not the only ones in the movement. Others simply want to denounce the society of exclusion we are being led into. I support them”. Moreover, about fifty of his comrades were present at the road blocks on Saturday. “In our CGT industrial group there is no rejection. Some of us support it but don’t go. Some do go there. Others will go”.

The sociologist Jean-Michel Denis, who specialises in trade unions and social movements, points out that most trade union bodies are in “horror of spontaneous movements”. “Most of those demonstrating here are wage-earners”, CGT member Fredo, who we met in Rouen, states simply. “What do they want? More purchasing-power. Our job is, without imposing anything, to get them to think about the question of wages. After all, that’s the heart of the matter.”

Activists also claim that the movement can also help to

restore faith a little. "I'm really struck by the conviviality, the atmosphere ... We've obviously got a lot to tell them, but a lot to learn as well", explains Manu at Rouen. "What's not to like about blockading Disney, supermarkets, petrol stations?" notes Laurent Degousse, who is a member of the independent union SUD Commerce in Paris and one of the founders of the social front "Front Social" "In any case it's very effective. 2000 people gathering together on 17 November. If it works, it's mainly because you can come as you are and its on your doorstep. These are lessons for the social movement to bear in mind".

Xenophobic, sexist and homophobic language which does occur in certain assemblies also do not discourage this "Solidaires" (independent union) activist, although he too mentions strong pressures within his organisation, which is used to sticking close to the social movement but is also involved in particular in anti-fascist and anti-sexist struggles. "Concretely, it's not enough to say 'that stinks' and 'that's infected by the far right', and in any case that's not the atmosphere on the road blocks. Even if it can crop up, since there is all sorts of everything in this movement, which has neither structure, leaders, or security stewards. But I think the determining factor is the rejection of Macron's policies and his very person". On Saturday he will put on his violet vest (union colours) to join in with the yellow crowd. "If you go there to play the red professor, it's guaranteed that it won't work, so no preachy-preachy".

"Solidaires" in any case spoke along more or less the same lines on 19 November, but without an official call to demonstrate. This trade union body firmly opposes neo-liberalism and the far right and its representatives, but it proposes to draw all forces together and to "look for what we agree on". It has also, in vain, invited the other national union bodies to meet to discuss possible mobilising strategies.

The national unions are just as much at sea as the political leaders. They are grappling with contradictions and prepared to adopt fairly acrobatic postures in the process. "Some trades unions have had such a hard time of it in recent years that they are telling themselves, for once things are moving, let's not miss the boat" notes researcher Jean-Michel Denis. "But it's still very complicated. The values expressed by the demonstrators are very mixed in character, not to say pretty reactionary." For example, what they have to say about fiscal matters, often anti-tax, doesn't go down well with activists very attached to the public services and a redistributive system.

"In other spontaneous movements like the 'nuits debout' (when protestors spent entire nights awake in crowds) or the indignados, there was a kind of left-wing consciousness, a shared culture which made a link", Denis emphasises. "Nothing like that here. The people we are dealing with don't seem to have any habit of mobilising, or to have lost it. In their yellow vests, you also see small-scale craftsmen, home helps, liberal nurses, etc. these are categories of people who don't work in big businesses with big groups of trade unionists, and where they live, work has been more and more de-structures. That doesn't help when it comes to building bridges with traditional organisations.

A few trades unionists on the ground admit to a little bitterness at seeing struggles which have for years been carried on in the shadows suddenly emerge into the light – outside of the trade union field. "We fight year-in-year-out in the workshops, in the street, for wages, pension rights, against unemployment. When we go and ask the 'hi-viz vests' to help us against the reforms of pension rights, will they then turn up?" asks Jean-Luc Bielitz, CGT delegate at Smart on the Moselle. But he won't throw everything overboard: "I think we should jump onto the movement if it keeps going. The union is there to walk with them. Who in this crowd is going to

negotiate with the government? Who is the leader today!”

Nevertheless, the period resonates as a lesson for Pascal Raffanel of the CFE-CCG at Bosch. “Trades unions have a few questions to ask themselves. If the resistance struggle is carried out solely on the basis of social networks or citizens’ movement, that could be the death of trade unionism.”. Laurent Degousse, who has long campaigned in the Front Social for a very aggressive trade unionism, is even clearer: I think that because of our repeated setbacks on the social level, we have created a monster, and the void has been filled s best it could. It is mainly the people in power who are responsible, including those we have been walking with in trade union work and politics for 15 or 20 years.

How Labour’s right wing tried to fight back: An eye-witness report

Workers International draws our readers attention to this article by a leading Trade Unionist describing the ongoing struggles inside the British Labour Party. (Unite is the largest union in Britain and Ireland with 1.42 million members, a commitment to democratic structures and is a key player in the fight to build a workers party)

*Taken from:
<https://unitedleft.org.uk/how-labours-right-wing-tried-to-fight-back-an-eye-witness-report/>*

How Labour’s right wing tried to fight back: An eye-witness

report

Originally published here: <http://labourbriefing.squarespace.com/home/2018/6/27/how-labours-right-wing-tried-to-fight-back-an-eye-witness-report?rq=mayer>

United Left Chair Martin Mayer served as a UNITE delegate on Labour's NEC – and was there during the crucial period when Jeremy Corbyn's leadership came under sustained attack from Labour's Right. See his article recently published in Labour Briefing

FOR THOSE OF US ON THE LEFT of the Labour Party disillusioned by Tony Blair's neo-liberal economics, and frustrated by the timidity of Ed Miliband's attempt to shift the party back to the centre-left, Jeremy Corbyn's election as leader in autumn 2015 was little short of a revolution. We thought we had won the party back. It soon became apparent that winning the leadership alone was not enough.

The most public show of opposition to Jeremy Corbyn's leadership came from within the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP), where right wing MPs displayed extraordinary public disloyalty and openly plotted for his removal. What is less well known is how the official Labour Party machine – a structure created and nurtured under Tony Blair – became crucial to that resistance. The party's rejection of neo-liberalism under Jeremy was greeted with ridicule and indignation in Labour HQ at Southside on Victoria Street, presided over by general secretary Iain McNicol.

While it was difficult to attack Jeremy, an early strategy was to denigrate his vast new army of supporters, many of whom had flocked into the party. They were "Trots" and "infiltrators" who were taking over "our" Labour Party. Smearing his supporters as bullies and wreckers, and later using false charges of antisemitism, became dual strategies to undermine

Jeremy's leadership. While Labour MPs voiced the public attacks, it was Labour HQ which organised and implemented what became Labour's witch-hunt.

During the 2015 leadership election, as Jeremy's support surged, right wing MPs spoke out against bullying, including online social media abuse, with the clear implication this was a brand new development and all attributable to Corbyn supporters.

There is no doubt there was some shocking abuse on social media. During that first leadership election in 2015, Labour HQ responded with unprecedented vigour to any complaint from right wing MPs. It was clear from the start that the same vigour did not apply to those insulting or attacking Jeremy or his supporters. Thousands of Labour Party members were automatically suspended and denied a vote in the election, without any real explanation or right of appeal. After the election, which Jeremy won with 60% of the vote, the vast majority had their membership restored with no action taken, in many cases several months afterwards.

The attempted coup in June 2016 after Jeremy 'lost' the EU referendum saw an organised mass resignation from the shadow cabinet and all but some 40 or so Labour MPs signing a vote of no confidence in Jeremy. In July 2016 Angela Eagle announced she would stand against Jeremy and force a re-election for leader. However, forcing a new election was pointless if Jeremy was allowed to stand as he would surely win again.

Within days, Iain McNicol called an emergency Labour NEC with 24 hours' notice to set the election timetable. But the primary purpose was to secure an interpretation of the rule that the incumbent (Jeremy) should require even more nominations – 51 – to stand, a sure way to prevent him from standing again.

McNicol had resisted all legal advice except from his

preferred choice of barrister, the only legal authority to back this interpretation of the rule.

The balance on Labour's NEC was finely balanced between Jeremy's supporters and opponents. Some of Jeremy's supporters, including myself, were away on holiday. With barely 24 hours' notice of the meeting, Unite flew me back from France. The meeting started with the most extraordinary claims from some NEC members of online abuse and demands for a secret ballot for their own protection. The NEC is a representative body and, as a union delegate, my vote is public and accountable, but we narrowly lost the vote on this proposal – a secret ballot it was to be.

After hours of gruelling debate we won the secret ballot by 18 votes to 14 to allow Jeremy to stand and not have to seek nominations. This decision was later challenged in the High Court which ruled in favour of our interpretation of the rule. The coup attempt had failed and Jeremy went on to win his second leadership election in twelve months with an increased majority.

Angela Eagle faced hostility within her Wallasey CLP for her role in this. Claims of bullying behaviour and homophobic abuse at CLP meetings and vandalism of the CLP office were taken so seriously that Labour HQ suspended the CLP for almost a year and charges were brought against a number of members. In the event the vandalism allegation was disproved. Charges were eventually dropped against all but one individual and even he – a Unite member – was exonerated on the main charge of bullying behaviour.

We first saw organised smears of antisemitism at the Labour Young Members Conference, which narrowly elected Progress-supported Jasmine Beckett – by a one vote margin – against Unite's James Elliott. Unite secured evidence of tweets from Jasmine's campaign in which the allegations of antisemitism against James Elliott were actively encouraged. Unite also

presented evidence of manipulation of the conference and ballot process by Labour officials.

These complaints were ignored by Labour HQ. Jasmine Beckett was confirmed as the elected NEC member, James Elliott was placed under formal investigation of antisemitism and Baroness Royall was appointed to investigate alleged institutional antisemitism within Oxford University Labour Club where James Elliott was a member. Royall failed to find antisemitism but did report that some Jewish Labour members of the club felt "uncomfortable" – presumably because of the club's strong support for the Palestinian cause.

Many months later, James Elliott was exonerated of the charge. At the following NEC meeting I asked that he receive an apology which was denied. I later found out about social media posts attacking me for this.

Many of us on the left were bemused by the increasing allegations. We had never witnessed antisemitism in the party and believed it to be the preserve of the extreme pro-Nazi and fascist right. It was not true that antisemitism was "rife" in our party, was it?

I read with interest an article by Asa Winstanley of the Electronic Intifada about the involvement of the Israeli Embassy and secret services in contact with right wing Labour MPs to maintain a stream of charges of antisemitism against Jeremy and his supporters. I circulated this article widely. Months later I was contacted by the Sunday Times for comment on an article they were intending to publish, attacking me for being antisemitic solely on the basis that I had circulated this article to which the Jewish Labour Movement (JLM) had objected.

Following a strong legal challenge by Unite, the paper toned down the article. Nevertheless, I did receive some abusive texts as a result, including one describing me as "Nazi scum".

The second leadership election in 2016 saw an astounding 6,000 members suspended following a scrutiny of social media posts on an unprecedented scale. The vast majority were no more than rude comments about Jeremy's opponents within the party by over-enthusiastic Corbyn supporters. Totally innocent people were caught in the net, including a Sheffield Labour branch officer who simply re-tweeted a Green Party tweet defending the NHS.

But abuse of Jeremy and his supporters went unchallenged. Peter Mandelson boasted that he tried to undermine Jeremy Corbyn every single day but no action was ever taken against him. Months later the vast majority were exonerated and had their membership restored. It seemed Labour HQ had resorted once again to a futile strategy to deny as many Corbyn supporters a vote as possible. The massive trawling and scrutiny operation carried out at Labour HQ in the end made no difference to Jeremy's 62.5% majority out of an electorate of 550,000.

Of those 6,000 members some 200 did face proper investigation and a small number of those were guilty of antisemitism. I was genuinely shocked to see some of the examples presented to the NEC. I had believed the existence of antisemitism in our party to be a fabrication. Antisemitism does exist in our party and we must not tolerate it, just as we must not tolerate any other form of racism. However, after the most extensive trawl in the party's history, the discovery of such small numbers out of 550,000 members proves that antisemitism is definitely not "rife."

Jeremy commissioned the Chakrabarti report which found no evidence of institutional or widespread antisemitism but made a number of practical proposals to deal with the issue. The second part of the comprehensive report made a number of recommendations about Labour's flawed disciplinary process. Chakrabarti criticised the lack of a right of appeal, the ease with which members can be suspended or even automatically

excluded on flimsy evidence with no right of redress and the length of time people have to wait before a hearing. The recommendations of a fairer and swifter disciplinary process were stalled by Iain McNicol's office.

I have little doubt that the witch-hunt, including many false charges of antisemitism, is part of a wider strategy to undermine Jeremy's leadership, engineered by those who firmly believe he and his supporters have no right to be in control of 'their' party. Too many members have been left waiting too long for justice, smeared by unsubstantiated allegations without any opportunity given to refute them, and denied a right to take part in party activity.

The witch-hunt has claimed a number of victims such as Marc Wadsworth, a leading Labour black activist who was recently expelled, even though the original charge of antisemitism was found unproved. Jackie Walker, a leading left black Jewish activist, is still waiting for a hearing date almost two years after her suspension.

McNicol's successor as general secretary, Jennie Formby, is fiercely loyal to Jeremy and the anti-austerity politics he represents. But be aware she has a mammoth task to change the culture in Labour's Southside. We discovered that winning the leadership of the party with Jeremy Corbyn did not mean we had won back control. So, too, changing the person at the top of Labour's HQ will not mean everything will be put right immediately. But it gives real hope that the witch-hunt will end and the party machinery will fight for, rather than against, our twice democratically elected leader.

Appeal from Ukrainian Trade Unions

Appeal for international solidarity!

A major dispute is developing in the industrial city of Kryviy Rih in south east Ukraine. Trade unions from both federations, the confederation of free trade unions of Ukraine (kvpu) and also the federation of trade unions of Ukraine (fpu) have united in their demands and held a join conference to launch the campaign.

Their dispute is with the steel giant Arcelormittal, part of the Mittal steel company which is a world-wide corporation. the workers in Kryviy Rih are calling for international solidarity in their struggle. International support is important and has assisted the Ukrainian unions against the mining company Evraz and more recently to defeat the trial of 94 miners for protesting. Ukraine solidarity campaign will be publicising the campaign and calls for assistance in this campaign. We publish below a report by kvpu on the conference to launch the campaign.

Trade unions have united to protect the interests of workers of the pjsc "Arcelormittal Kryviy Rih"

On march 27, the conference of the labor collective of the pjsc "Arcelormittal Kryviy Rih" that was announced at a rally organized by nine trade-union organizations on 14 march was held in Kryviy Rih. At the conference, the representatives of the labor collective of the pjsc "Arcelormittal Kryviy Rih" made requirements to the Chairman and CEO of steel group "Arcelormittaland" Lakshmi Mittal and to the CEO of pjsc "Arcelormittal Kryviy Rih" Paramjit Kahlon.

Employees organized this Conference, despite the efforts of

the administration of the enterprise to disrupt its conduct. At the same time, the administration organized an alternative conference in the office of the enterprise. Moreover, before the Conference of labor collective delegates faced with the public disinformation campaign and pressure.

At the Conference, all primary trade unions at the PJSC "ArcelorMittal Kryviy Rih" have united to protect their members' social and labor rights. They demand to raise wages, to provide safe working conditions, to stop reducing personnel and persecuting trade unionists.

The trade unions hoped for a dialogue with the administration, but management didn't want to talk about workers' problems. Taking this into account, the labor collective conference voted for ousting from offices the Director of the Personnel Department Elena Pilipenko and her deputy Iryna Futruk.

Delegates of the conference approved the composition of the joint representative body of trade union organizations at the enterprise, which will represent employees in a collective labor dispute with the employer. It was also decided to begin preparations for a strike if the management of the "ArcelorMittal Kryviy Rih" rejects the demands of the workers and conciliation procedures doesn't bring any results.

The Chairman of the Independent Trade Union of Miners of Ukraine (NPGU) Mykhailo Volynets claimed during his speech at the Conference: "It's a significant situation when employer's action and attitude has united almost a dozen different trade unions for defending the employees' rights".

Demands of the labor collective of PJSC "ArcelorMittal Kryviy Rih":

1. To raise the average monthly salary of employees to 1000 EUR from 01.04.2018.
2. To ensure safe working conditions for all workers.

– To conduct a comprehensive examination of all buildings, structures, equipment and mechanisms of the enterprise by the state organization in accordance with the approved schedule.

– To develop a comprehensive plan of measures for the examination of all floors, roofs, and construction of the PJSC “ArcelorMittal Kryviy Rih”.

– To develop measures for elimination of standards violation with specific deadlines.

3. To carry out an expert examination of all buildings and constructions of the converter shop and to give a report on the results of the inspection to the labor collective and the trade union organizations.

– To make an overhaul of the roof overlapping of the unit No. 2 of the converter shop until 01.04.2018.

4. Stop the policy of reducing job places and outsourcing the workers.

5. To ensure the implementation the state construction in the ablution placement

6. To cease the antisocial and anti-union policies of the administration.

– To dismiss those who are responsible for conduction of such policies.

Further information from: Ukrainesolidaritycampaign.org

Situation politique en France après le premier tour des élections

[D'abord battre Le Pen, puis combattre Macron](#)

par Adriano Voslon

Why they voted leave

Mirek Vodslon, 5 July 2016

“Why we voted leave: voices from northern England” is the title of a documentary (<https://vimeo.com/172932182>) which is really worth giving some thought to. To be more exact, it is a militant message in the form of a documentary. In just under 12 minutes it also shows some of the problems with the Lexit (“left exit”) or “socialist Brexit” position. It was “filmed and edited by Sheena Sumaria, Guerrera Films”, is being advertised by the left group “Counterfire” and shows an anonymous interviewer speaking to five other persons, also unnamed, a Remain voter and four Leave voters in Doncaster.

The supposed need to “take our country back” or “make Britain Britain again” comes up early on. These concerns are first and foremost on the minds of two interviewees. The main reason (mentioned by one of these workers) is to control immigration.

Another two voted Leave “for change” and one of these states that his vote was not about immigration. But why is this change going to be a change for the better? They don’t say,

and neither does the interviewer who apparently agrees with these two. She converses with them at length and asks them about Corbyn. Their answer is that they are or were Corbyn supporters despite him adopting the Remain position or until he did. The interviewer, like the Socialist Party and Counterfire, thinks that Corbyn's Remain campaign was a terrible concession to the right wing of the Labour Party. The interviewer is ready to give him "one more chance" but not two.

One interviewee pleads, like Corbyn, for remaining in the European Union in order to change it. After 30 seconds, the interviewer takes over and "refutes" this lonely "Remainer" simply by asserting that she does not believe in social reforms of the undemocratic EU because the capitalists rule the EU and have the opposite agenda. So, yes, these are voices justifying why they voted Leave, at about 20 to 1 in terms of time, without any real debate with working-class Remainers.

There really is an unorganised working-class anti-EU "movement". The video shows that and also that it is in part "guided" by this desperate consideration: It can't get any worse (wrong!), so I vote for whatever promises a change. The presumably socialist interviewer belongs to the movement and supports this fraction of it. An even larger part of this movement voted for change and "knew" what kind of change they wanted, the one that they mistakenly believed would make British imperialism stronger. These two tendencies, desperate adventurism and nationalism, do not exclude each other.

We are not talking here about the nationalism of an oppressed nation. These workers have been falsely persuaded that their oppression is the result of the oppression of their British nation by the European Union but, no, this is the nationalism of a medium sized decadent imperialism, part of whose ruling class dreamt of becoming "great again" by abandoning the EU and especially by getting rid of EU's minimal social standards. Workers supporting this act against their own

immediate interests. The irony on top of this bitter irony is of course that the success of that project is already accelerating both the decadence of British imperialism and the demise of the EU.

The false premise of British workers' nationalism is the "austere" view that jobs, wages and social resources (NHS, schools, libraries, benefits etc.) – in fact the whole of the working and living conditions of workers – are self-evidently limited British national treasures. From that follows the necessity to guard these precious "possessions" both against foreign workers and against foreign powers like the EU.

These "austere" limits are obviously *the* issue that socialists need to take up with working-class Leave voters (and with all other workers, of course). Practical goals have to be proposed and cast as demands. Those can be only international demands to break with austerity and stop competition among workers, like demands of a European minimum wage allowing a decent living standard, and generally a European minimum of decent social standards.

The EU is able to finance large European programmes. For instance, German finance minister Schäuble has just proposed a big European programme of armament. This is an ideal occasion for Die Linke in Germany, Podemos in Spain, Front de Gauche in France, the renewed Labour Party of Britain and trade unions all over Europe to mobilise not just *against* this horror, but *for* a positive counter-proposal, a European plan of public works to improve the lives of working people and give them work, especially but not only in "deprived" regions like northern England. That is, make the transition from international "protests" to an international mobilisation for demands to make Europe a place fit for working people.

Such demands can unite European workers and so make an international mobilisation possible. British workers can and must fight for such demands together with workers on the

continent despite being now out of the EU by virtue, or rather by the vice, of a mendacious referendum. This has made their situation worse and solidarity with continental workers more difficult to organise, just as the “outsourcing” of a section of the workforce of a company makes it more difficult to organise the solidarity of the whole workforce. Both British and continental workers must now use their trade unions and political parties to intervene strongly in the Brexit negotiations in order to preserve as many of the conditions of that solidarity as possible and even develop them. This concerns especially workers’ rights specified in the European treaties and conventions, however meagre they may be. No British exception undercutting those rights! No restriction of the free movement of workers across Europe, including Britain! These rights must be included in the settlement.

Unfortunately, most working class Leave voters have apparently already made up their minds that British subjection to the EU and especially immigration imposed by the EU are the problems. Coming back to the film, its thrust is to adapt to this position instead of offering an internationalist alternative to it. The interviewer may be an internationalist herself but she refuses to consider reforms of the EU and thus any real steps along a path of an international transition to a socialist Europe. This disarms her when it comes to arguing for internationalism and this may be why she does not even try to take up the subject of internationalism with her polite interviewees. Had she tried some abstract internationalist proclamations on them (called “socialist” or “left” “argumentation for Brexit” by some ultraleft groups), she might have reaped polite disinterest or even a remark that such proclamations have no connection with their plight.

Instead, she offers the heartbreaking spectacle of a socialist confirming British nationalistic delusions with the following idea: “Austerity is coming from the EU because the EU governs governments”. I beg to differ. This is one of the lies

propagated by the class enemies who led the successful Brexit campaign. Efficient lies must be half-truths. In his case, it is just one fourth of the truth. First, the EU is a conglomerate of national states who have the last word in it, which is why the EU is currently paralysed on several questions. Second, the EU Commission does *appear* to govern governments and this appearance *has* been used to shield these governments from their responsibility for imposing austerity. This is the partial truth in the lie. The main part of the truth is that ever increasing "austerity" is an absolute necessity of contemporary capitalism which is why it is being imposed by all its political representatives, national and "European" and why the working class cannot wait much longer to get rid of capitalism. No less important is the fact that capitalism pushed back into the narrow limits of the British national state will have to impose even more severe austerity, and is already planning to do so.

The interviewer having herself adopted some irrational beliefs instilled by the bourgeois Brexit campaign, it is no wonder that she tends to gloss over the irrational or even reactionary aspects of her interlocutors' opinions in order to make these opinions *look* like expressions of some hypothetical kind of class consciousness that could do without internationalism. Except that this hypothesis is refuted not just by theory, but also by the long experience of working class movement.

These contortions are required to try to underpin the main thesis of the film, which is: the Leave vote of workers was a class vote. What the film really shows is that the vote of the five "Leavers", including the interviewer, was not about the *struggle* of their own class. It was desperate and in part it was about slogans adopted by a fraction of the enemy class: "national independence" of Britain, mostly in order to curb immigration. If these five voices did cast a class vote, then it was the vote of a class that despairs of herself and has

given up being a subject with a goal in life. So, by what it really shows, the film warns us of the possibility that *this sort* of working-class consciousness might prevail. If it does prevail, it will pave the way for barbarism to engulf humanity. Instead of glorifying it, socialists need to think hard how to rebuild real, organised, socialist class consciousness, even if it begins – as it obviously does – as that of a class which must first regain confidence and test seriously if it can defend or recover decent working and living conditions without overthrowing the capitalist class and its state.

To wrap it up, the interviewer spends time reminiscing on the defeat of the miners' strike of 1984-1985, the following deindustrialisation, and the fall of thousands into unemployment and despair. The lesson is that class struggle, in this case a defeat decades ago and subsequent defeats on top of that, are among the deep causes that created the contemporary conditions in which parts of the working class arrive at such utterly wrong conclusions as those expressed by four of the interviewees and the interviewer herself. No less important a cause has been the prolonged absence of a socialist alternative, but the film does not even touch on that. Whatever the causes, wrong conclusions from past struggles remain wrong.

The interviewer wished to correct the view that working-class Brexiters are all racists. She succeeded in that. Even one of the two working-class British nationalists interviewed is no racist, i.e., he does not derive his identity or that of his enemies from skin colour, skull metrics or pedigree. The other British nationalist is a waste collector, was interviewed at work on the road and had no time to explain himself. Both are certainly afraid of their "foreign" class brothers and sisters and want to keep them out. They are xenophobes.

The strange insistence that most working-class Leave voters are no racists draws attention away from the terrible fact

that working-class xenophobia has become a mass phenomenon. Not just in Britain, all over Europe. Trying to sweep that fact under the rug is plainly irresponsible and self-delusional. Nationalism and xenophobia will not go away simply because workers are now being taught a lesson about the negative effects of Brexit which are already setting in. On the contrary, further negative experiences threaten to make xenophobia fester and become fascism.

The question is, how to prevent that? British-nationalistic and xenophobic workers are not likely to be among the first who will be won to a socialist programme. They have some serious rethinking to do because there can be no programme of the working class which is both socialist and nationalist, or both for workers' solidarity and for excluding foreigners from it. It will take time, fresh positive experience of struggle and above all help from other sections of the working class.

There are now two ways to deny them that help. One is to blame them for the living conditions to which capitalism condemns them and which engender despair and backwardness, and treat them all as enemies. Most are not, most have not yet joined fascist squads, it is still possible for socialists to talk to them, as the film suggests. The other way to fail them is to treat their convictions as a minor difference. Pat them on the shoulders and say: "Well done, you voted for change. You also voted against immigration but you meant no offence, did you? Cheers, mate."

Socialists, revolutionaries, especially Marxists who supported the "socialist Brexit" or Lexit adventure, need to do no less rethinking than these workers: about their negative role and about how on earth they could make such an enormous mistake. What is wrong with their "Marxism", their organisations and their respected "Marxist" leaders who led them into this impasse? I do hope that this reflection starts now. Simply proceeding with whatever each group thinks is next on the agenda is not an option. Or if it is, it is the option of

ultimate degeneration and demise.

Issue 16 of the Journal April 2016 out now!

Inside [this issue](#):

Europe:

Who can solve the 'Refugee Crisis' by Mirek Vodslon

How can we build a workers' Europe? by Bronwen Handyside

Draft Programme: A Europe fit for working people (for discussion)

Namibia:

Director of Elections, a letter and a communiqué

Committee of Parents / Truth & Justice Commission demands

Continued Human Rights Abuses

Report of a book launch

MUN Regional Committee supports Marikana inquiry call

Namibian Road authority's reckless roads

Religious ideology:

Discussion Article by Allen Rasek

South Africa:

UF march call

Freedom for the Peoples of

Africa! No to intervention!

By **Balazs Nagy** February 2013 (First published in *Workers International Journal* No. 1)

It would be very wrong to judge France's military intervention in Mali on the basis of the deafening and unanimous press and television chorus. They think this act of war was inevitable and celebrate it. It galvanised them unhesitatingly and pompously to laud President Hollande as a great leader – the very same politician they used to dismiss as flabby.

But it would be even worse to put any trust in this "leader's" own pronouncements, or those of his aides and their allies in Europe and across the world.

And yet ... you cannot actually blame Hollande and co. directly for the long-drawn-out deterioration in Mali and the region, culminating in the present utter decay. But nor can you exonerate them either, since as loyal inheritors of the whole mess they took it on entirely and without a second thought. And in that specific sense the intervention was indeed as inevitable as the – joyful but perhaps over-optimistic – claims of "victory" and a job well done.

Despite the – to say the least – simplistic presentation of the situation in the Sahara and the Sahel as goodies vs. baddies, reality turns out to be incomparably more complex. Understanding it requires a brief review of the more outstanding aspects of the historical development which prepared, shaped and conditioned the political and social scene – and the actors – which led to the current situation.

A glance at history

For a start, the immense revolutionary wave which swept across Europe in the second half and aftermath of World War II generally speaking hit the African continent a dozen or so

years later. Within Europe, the leaderships of working class parties did everything they could to channel revolutionary movements into shoring up the bourgeoisie through conventional democracies. In contrast, French (and other) imperialisms had been deeply shaken and weakened by the war and were unable to withstand the colonial peoples' irresistible independence movement. After a shaky early start, first Tunisia and Morocco (in 1956) and then the Algerian people won independence in 1962 after eight years of gruelling armed struggle. The revolutionary shock wave travelled south, and De Gaulle, more clear-sighted than other leaders of an exhausted possessing class, was forced to accept the obvious need to re-vamp old-style imperialism and grant independence to a series of countries in the region – almost all of them by 1960 (Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina-Faso, formerly Upper Volta, Niger, Chad, Ivory Coast – Guinea from 1958).

Hopes of a promising new start roused and inspired these countries. Borrowing from Algeria and even Tunisia in their search for a path towards a system leading to socialism, Guinea, Senegal and Mali all chose more or less the same route. After Bourguiba in Tunisia and Ben Bella in Algeria, Sekou Toure in Guinea and Modibo Keita in Mali and their governments carried out a series of nationalisations of property of the colonial power and its nationals. On this basis they initiated a policy of taking charge of their respective countries. Distrustful of the continually obstructive colonial power, they turned squarely towards the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe for desperately needed support and assistance. Senegal, too, worked towards a kind of socialism, but its president L. Senghor, whose attachment to the republican bourgeoisie in France was well-known, rejected the orientation towards the USSR, preferring a kind of panafricanism and so-called "third worldism". The national struggle, first for independence and then for this take-over by a kind of "anti-feudal" socialism by Modibo Keita in Mali was particularly powerfully nourished by young people, who had

previously languished in the kind of semi-slavery affecting a quarter of the population of the Sahel.

But these initial hopes and efforts and fruitful initiatives quickly came to grief on obstacles born of these countries' extreme poverty and the cruel shortages of resources imposed on them by the former colonial power. On the other hand, the inadequacies and material shortages in the so-called "socialist" countries, trapped in the impoverishing constraints of "socialism in one country" and hampered by an oppressive Stalinism increasingly in debt to its capitalist creditors, meant that they could not provide the necessary assistance even if they had wanted to. Far from it. And so, disappointed and discouraged, most of these Arab and African "socialist reformers" turned back to the former coloniser and towards a policy of oppression. This was all the easier since their origins and education separated them from the working masses, and in any case they could model themselves on how it was done in Eastern Europe. Not everybody can boast the strength of character or consistency of view of a Keita, a Lumumba or a Sangare. Nor is it a co-incidence that these three were all assassinated.

As for the leaders of the powerful workers' movement of the day in Europe, they did everything they could to bog these movements down in the swamp of deepening degradation, particularly since they everywhere resolutely drew this entire workers movement into the false and fatal path of "parliamentary cretinism" and collaboration with the bourgeoisie.

But from the outset, this bourgeoisie went in completely the opposite direction, determined to maintain and even reinforce its prerogatives and arrangements as a class. Forced to abandon the colonial methods of its imperial system, it adapted to the new situation through the bonapartist rule of De Gaulle. Run in secrecy by his secretary, Jacques Foccart, the General's shadow organisations worked feverishly to re-

organise France's political, administrative and military networks and adapt them to the new political configuration. And so the wild beast of colonial imperialism clothed itself in the post-colonial lamb's skin of "co-operation". And that is how a whole system was forged, the sadly famous "Françafrique" which (under all Presidents!) continued the old imperialist practices under the cover of close collaboration with the African countries and lightly disguised within the forms required by the "independence" of the respective states.

A whole series of military coups very quickly expressed and made manifest the limits of "independence" in most of the African countries concerned. Even in countries which had been better prepared by a long struggle, the dissident colonels Ben Ali and Boumediene resolutely put an end to the democratic scruples of Bourguiba and Ben Bella. Everywhere the military putschists installed a dictatorship resting on an oversized army and a single party, African regimes corresponding to the "Françafrique" system and symmetrically replicating it. Almost everywhere, independent regimes of the older generation of more radical bourgeois fighters gave way to corrupt regimes of dictators. Where the old guard did stay in power, their degeneration became inevitable.

This series of African countries was independent but had been impoverished and systematically, mercilessly, plundered in the course of the long preceding period of colonial rule. In the way of things, "co-operation" between them and a highly-developed great power like France simply maintained and exacerbated the monstrous economic and social inequality between such "partners". A hungry wolf in a sheep-fold comes to mind. It is very characteristic that from the end of World War II onwards the straitjacket that was the Franc zone tied the African countries to close dependence on France. On 25 December 1945, a special Franc of the African Financial Community (CFA) was created for use in these countries (including some further south) and its value was set

outrageously low by the French government: 1 CFA Franc was only worth 0.02 metropolitan Francs. (N.B. following Sekou Touré of Guinea, Keita of Mali also took his country out of this Franc zone system in 1963. But faced with economic difficulties, he had to re-join it, shortly before he was overthrown).

These decisions to leave were fully justified, since the CFA Franc embodied the crying inequality between these economies – often kept excessively backward – and bourgeois France, one of the most highly-developed countries. Trade imposed by this “benevolent” France provided the latter with agricultural products and raw materials of all kinds at derisory prices, even below world prices which themselves are traditionally low. Conversely, her own industrial products were sold off virtually risk-free at guaranteed high prices on these markets. So this system not only maintained flagrant inequality, but intensified it intolerably. Need we add that this imposed and legalised inequality has continued right up to the present? To be more accurate, it was pushed by the Balladur government (under President Mitterrand in 1994) to the point of an explosion when the CFA Franc was devalued by 50%! The French bourgeoisie carefully retained this shamefully super-exploitative rate when the euro was introduced: in 2011, 1 euro equalled 655.957 Francs CFA. And they insult our ears with fairly stories about the end of imperialism!

In this re-vamped framework of imperialism, these countries were put under pressure – both directly and through successive dictatorships – to abandon dreams of progress. But worse was to come. Within the modified political configuration of the imperialist system, they still had to maintain their traditional role as providers of very cheap agricultural products and raw materials. Open, violent force had been replaced with sly economic constraint. In this sense, these countries objectively contributed, kicking and screaming, to the ability of a thus reinvigorated world bourgeoisie to take

on and sustain its “thirty glorious years”. And so the relative “social peace” that prevailed in the course of that expansion secured by that same bourgeoisie’s pact with powerful (reformist and Stalinist) bureaucracies, which kept the workers movement under lock and key, was largely paid for by super-exploitation of the former colonies. It led inevitably to colossal indebtedness on the part of these poor “independent” countries, over which even the bourgeoisie’s various nerve centres shed copious crocodile tears.

Economic, social and political deterioration

The situation got even worse when the bourgeoisie set its neo-liberal agents to work to reduce these debts overall. Starting in the early 1980s, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank forced all the countries concerned to adopt massive “structural adjustments” in the form of drastic budget and expenditure cuts and extensive privatisations in return for “aid” in reducing these debt levels. French (and other) firms bought up a great number of local enterprises for peanuts, while huge companies like Total, Areva and a multitude of others made themselves at home. Catastrophic results quickly followed. (It is a remarkable fact that what is going on in Europe at present is not some novelty arising out of the crisis; the Latin Americans had painful experience of it even before the Africans).

In Africa, too, the first victims were the education and health systems, whose often remarkable initial achievements had been a source of legitimate pride to these young nations. Ever tighter budgetary constraints laid waste to these promising beginnings.

Merciless cuts in expenditure also deprived agriculture – bankrupt state farms as much as independent farmers ruined by lack of access to credit – of all aid. Across Africa, already low rural wages saw a general fall of 30% in those years. Mali’s agriculture, for example, which at the end of the 1980s

contributed 67% of the country's exports through cotton production, saw the latter smashed up and the peasantry crushed. Moreover, from the 1960s onwards a series of terrible droughts hit the whole region, resulting in a regular desert encroachments. The funds needed for big irrigation networks and effective water supplies were cruelly lacking, as were the cheap credits essential for small farmers.

These calamities led on the one hand to the terrible famines which periodically descend on the region and on the other to the massive rural exodus which drives tens and hundreds of thousands of people into the terribly overpopulated slums in the cities. The inhabitants of Nouakchott in Mauretania, extremely poor as they are, describe the slums in "their" shanty-town as "rubbish dumps". As for famines, the hypocrisy of successive food-aid campaigns launched and supported by the bourgeoisie and beloved of right-thinking petit-bourgeois barely masks neither the formers' direct responsibility for these disasters and their organic inability to do much about them, nor the latters' deferential complicity. Having said that, no one would want to prevent good souls from helping the starving, but reality puts us on guard against this rather unreliable substitute which in no way attacks the root of the problem.

Chronic unemployment also affects the whole population, which has undergone geometrical growth in the period in question. By 1989 it exceeded 22% of the active population, including more than half of young people in Algeria, for all that this country is better off than Mali or other countries in the Sahara or the Sahel. A significant proportion of the population has persistently sought a way out of this social catastrophe in emigration. This explains the very high number of Malians (2 million) living in France around 1990, as many as a quarter of the whole population of the country! But vigilant France kept a close watch on the situation, and Charles Pasqua – a worthy successor to "Françafrique's"

organiser Foccart – started forcibly repatriating hundreds of thousands of Africans. His successors, also under all Presidents, have virtually institutionalised this into a regular procedure. Following the regular expulsions organised by Guéant, Manuel Valls has most recently filled an aeroplane with several dozen immigrants. A veil is drawn over how they carry this out. Be that as it may, journalists estimate that there are currently still 120,000 Malians living in France. But who knows exactly how many of these working class pariahs there are who have escaped utter poverty over there only to be hounded and persecuted here for the lack of an all-important piece of paper?

While the people – especially the young – are fleeing the country, businesses large and small, French and other, are settling in there as a kind of Eldorado to exploit the natural wealth of the country and its cheap labour. Apart from the odd kick-back, these businesses *repatriate the whole of their profits* and operate above the law. According to studies by comrades at *Survie* (a French NGO founded in 1984 to fight hunger and corruption in the “third world”), France’s trade surplus with Mali was over 300 million euros in 2010-2012, five times more than the derisory public “aid” she grants to that country!

Alongside these destructive activities went a long drawn-out process of reducing these states to subservience, adapting them more and more to the needs of capitalists in the French “protector”. Metropolitan agents of “Françafrique” carefully guided this convulsive change by remote-control. Enriched local cliques devoured each other in order to establish, in an endless series of coups, which one would seize control of a state which itself was reduced little by little to its repressive apparatus. Having laid its hands on the manna from the “co-operation” community and other so-called “development” loans, the winning group would set out to fulfil its role as a substitute for the former colonial power. As poverty grew in

these states, their role was more and more reduced to one essential: securing, preserving and reinforcing power in order to consolidate France's economic and political position and influence while maintaining a repressive regime against working people. Those currently holding power, such as the puppets Deby (Chad), Compoaré (Burkina Faso) and Touré (Mali) have nothing in common with the independent figures of the first generation of leaders. They are even the opposite of someone like Keita, for example. The most important, if not the only, means they use to achieve their objectives has been and is the army. Now, the rapid overall worsening of the situation has provoked a series of coups in which the impoverished masses' role of detonator has become increasingly visible, reflecting the economic and social deterioration that has been eating away.

Unpicking the tangled politics of North Africa

Above all we must reject the simplistic way the interventionist power presents the context and conditions in this part of Africa. Even if – and this goes without saying – it is so constantly and noisily parroted in the media that certain political tendencies and individuals, while uttering reservations about “neo-colonial ulterior motives”, nevertheless give this military action guarded support as a necessary “pre-requisite”. These include the French Communist Party parliamentary deputy François Asensi (*L'Humanité* newspaper 18 January 2013) who swallows the intervention whole but hastens to add: “...France must state clearly her aim to rebuild a democratic state”. He actually seems to think that is possible on the basis of this intervention!

Despite all the resounding statements and those who are taken in by them, there is no way that trends and programmes in this region of Africa, or the political formations and groupings to which they give rise, can be reduced to isolated groups of Islamic fanatics on the one hand and loyal government supporters on the other. Reality is much richer and more

complicated. Before even attempting to sketch a few lines, with no claim at all to presenting the whole picture, it is enough to describe the interventionists and their accomplices as the famous bull in a china shop, especially given the brutal military aggression and lack of concern for "details" that are innate and natural characteristics of so-called "neo-colonial" imperialism.

As described above, after a very short period of national awakening in the aftermath of World War II, successive economic setbacks in the newly independent countries turned into a sustained social regression. The vast majority of the popular classes (workers, farmers, stock-breeders, pastoralists, etc.) have become considerably poorer, particularly the many peoples and ethnic groups at the bottom of society. Their degradation provided the ground for the astonishing explosion of a whole series of programmes and the most varied social and national movements. It is impossible to list them all here, but in general they rested on previous currents and movements, some of them going back to the nineteenth century. Several great traditions of thought and social movements have remained alive to this very day. In the majority of cases, social and national demands have overlapped inextricably. The roots of some movements are to be found in the distant past.

The European workers' movement of the twentieth century in particular inspired by example a powerful trade-unionism among workers in these countries, as well as the appearance of labour and communist parties. The present-day UGTT union confederation in Tunisia, which opposes the Salafists, is one of the fruits of this co-operation whose powerful resurgence can be considered as an important opposition factor to the government of religious people, but also of a positive political change. We also know that Sekou Touré of Guinea (secretary of the CGT federation of black Africa in 1948!) rested on the Guinean trade unions for support in the national

independence movement and spiced up his conceptions with socialism of a kind. The Algerian independence movement was also in large part influenced by the French workers' movement.

It would therefore be unforgivable to look down on the movements for the social and national liberation of these countries from the heights of some imagined European supremacy. Often centuries-old traditions and a wealth of ancient experience also nourish the struggles of workers and people in Africa and its northern part. These movements exist, despite the extremely difficult situation they are in because they pay the price of the backwardness imposed upon their countries, suffering from isolation and repression which are bound to mark the immediate future of the region.

This social and national situation was essentially what we had in mind when we published the press release from the comrades at "Survie" in issue no. 1 of our journal, expressing the desire to "look at certain important aspects of the rebellion in a different light". Of course the comrades from "Survie" not only bravely condemn the intervention, but are also well-known for having brought together a mass of precious facts in relation to this part of Africa. But in the indignation which informs their timely and correct condemnation of the intervention, we believe they erred in losing sight, behind the inflated bubble of religious fanatics, of precisely these movements and their national and social base. But that is precisely the direction in which to look for the key to the situation, and a way out, and not at all the "armies" of corrupt regimes or their UN protectors. The "Survie" comrades talk about French intervention as "significant pressure on the Malian authorities" as if the latter actually existed independently of the former. They also say France "must respect UN resolutions as soon as possible".

But in the first place, rather than acting as "pressure", French intervention is **necessary to save** these "authorities". And not only the Malian authorities, but all the rest in the

region, too! The comrades should not just see French (state) authorities, but also those of these countries, these African states, as the agents and representatives of a quite definite social class – the bourgeoisie. With the significant difference that the latter do not exist and act on behalf of their own bourgeoisie, since even the feeble shreds of that native class are merely a subaltern appendix of the metropolitan (and world) bourgeoisie. These states, therefore, exist and act as the local organ of the latter, even though they are endowed with the fig-leaf of independence.

From the 1980s onwards, when the capitalist-imperialist system started moving over to so-called ultra-liberalism, this remarkably intensified the exploitation of these countries and revived all the traditions of struggle, and their direct and indirect heirs started moving. The great liberating risings of 2011 which journalists called “Arab revolutions” are also manifestations of these struggles, at the same time acting as a significant precursor to the European and world revolution that is gestating. The outstanding role of the UGTT union in the Tunisian revolution and the overthrow of the regime – even though it was itself contaminated by the latter – is well known. Less well known, perhaps, is the decisive action the Egyptian working class developed in its revolution, organising strikes and renewing its unions. Today its sporadic but incessant struggles constitute a significant element in defending and advancing that revolution. As for the UGTT, we can all see its decisive participation in the current mobilisation.

While the “Arab spring” is an integral component of the European revolution currently gestating and undeniably contributed to the still stuttering awakening of young people in Europe, it also lived on in the convulsive but still disorganised movements of the despoiled and deracinated masses of that region, of which islamist movements form a large but unfortunately distorted and adulterated part. Be that as it

may, certain ancient and modern political movements and organisations have raised their heads again, often inspired by the European workers' movement of former days, but also by their own old traditions, and – closer to home – by the revolutionary overturns of 2011.

“A people which oppresses another cannot emancipate itself” (Engels)

For centuries the immense Sahara and the Sahel regions of north and west Africa have constantly been disturbed by movements and rebellions of this or that nation or ethnic group living there. Its artificial division into separate countries by colonial powers only served, in the majority of cases, to reinforce national oppression by devastating and wrenching apart ethnic or national units. During independence, some of these peoples, like the Kabyles in Algeria and their Berber relatives, the Touareg in Mali (and more or less everywhere) hoped to achieve national recognition in return for their participation in the anti-colonial struggle. But right from the outset, all of the newly independent states, based on the primacy of the dominant ethnic group (or tribe), refused to allow any concessions at all, still less any form of autonomy, to ethnic or national minorities. This serious defect left a profound scar on the democratic awakening of the bourgeois revolutions which shook these countries, even those who ventured furthest into a kind of proto-socialism. We do not have the space here to examine all these national movements in detail. Nevertheless the most important ones must be mentioned.

Categorically turned down by the new Algerian government, the Kabyle people started a prolonged struggle for autonomy. Not only was this refused from the very start, but the Kabyle people suffered repeated bloody repressions and a national oppression which continues to this very day.

Far away from there, in another region steeped in prolonged

national-ethnic struggle, Casamance in Senegal has battled against oppression. The region has been demanding autonomy ever since Senegal achieved independence. However, despite L.Senghor's evasive promises, it has not been forthcoming. The region went into open armed struggle in the early 1980s, when Senegal was trying to ward off a massive debt crisis (almost 2 million dollars). The cultivation of ground nuts appeared to offer a way out, but when the government assigned land to colonists from the north for this, the inhabitants of Casamance, traditionally rice-growers, revolted. Ever since, cease-fires have alternated with fresh confrontations and the conflict has persisted, particularly since the Senegalese state, exactly like all the others also in its constantly growing poverty, has shown itself less and less able to resolve the situation and has even imposed further burdens on the region.

When one considers the vast Sahara and Sahel territory from the point of view of the many different peoples inhabiting it, what becomes evident is a profound interweaving of the social degradation of the peoples – often linked to sudden changes in their mode of life also imposed by the neglect of nature – and the subordinate or even oppressed character of their ethnic or national lives. History teaches us that those who try to separate them from social difficulties, or with more reason to oppose them, have paid a high price.

For a long time now the nomadic Saharoui of the western Sahara have undergone a veritable calvary. While they struggled for autonomy, Franco's Spain would not allow them any rights. In 1975, following a call by King Hassan of Morocco, hundreds of thousands joined a "green march" to invade what they thought was "Moroccan Sahara". In reaction to this the Polisario Front, founded in 1973 by young Saharoui students, proclaimed the "Democratic Arab Saharoui Republic" under Algerian protection. The Algerian and Moroccan armies have confronted each other in a rivalry that has nothing to do with the

interests of any peoples whatsoever. Algeria has protected the new Saharoui republic since Spain left in 1976, whereas she has never allowed Kabylia or the Touareg movement the slightest degree of autonomy.

Following a cease-fire in 1991, Morocco has controlled 80% of this territory, leaving 20% to the Polisario Front. But despotic King Hassan has installed a 2,500km (!) security belt called the "Moroccan Wall". (This is the nth "wall" built to contain some people to disfigure the world and bring the powerful into disrepute!) As for the new Saharoui Republic, what with recognition by a few countries and rejection by the majority of others – including the UN! – it has no legal existence at all.

The Touregs' problem is even more complex. Because of the arbitrary and fantastic division of this great region by the great colonial powers, the almost 2 million Touareg find themselves artificially split up between five different countries. They are just one of many peoples who, carved up between several countries, have no right to a legal existence and are often persecuted. When discussing them, one inevitably thinks of the Kurds or the Palestinians in the Middle East. If you want a shameful image of imperialist reality dragged down to the level of simple banality, then look no further. The Basques divided up between the north of Spain and the south of France might have a thing or two to say about this, or the Irish, with the north of their country still under the iron heel of Britain.

On the other hand, the break-up of several multi-national countries and the revival of virulent national feelings also testify to the growing contradiction between capitalism-imperialism and the facts of national existence. (To say nothing of the inability of the Stalinist bureaucracy to solve this problem in the former USSR and its criminal role in the break-up of several multi-national states it used to govern, like Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia).

Be that as it may, the Touareg people were among the losers in the post-war anti-imperialist wave of liberation. In a way, their fate contains just about all the problems of the national question in this part of the world in compressed form: – the capitalist nature of the states in which they live and the role played in this by religion, particularly Islam.

It is really remarkable that even the leaders of the first wave of bourgeois-democratic revolution just could not grasp this problem at all. And so as early as 1963 Modibo Keita severely repressed and Touareg revolt in Mali. He was helped by his Algerian colleague Ben Bella, who handed over to him the Touareg leaders who had fled to Algeria. One Touareg author wrote: “The thousands of deaths caused by repression were met with general indifference”.

But we lack the space here to tell the full story of the many rebellions by this people, their lengthy negotiations with this or that state in the region, and the massacres and flights of thousands of their members which punctuate the life of these states which have degenerated into vassals of imperialism.

As a result of general economic decline and collapse and the consequent successive setbacks to the Touaregs' national struggles, they toughened up their behaviour and adopted a more radical attitude. All states in the area felt the effects of imperialist super-exploitation, but the Touareg people suffered it twice over (and they were not alone in that). Besides the dismantlement of services, there was no investment to assuage sufferings which were made greater by massive unemployment exacerbated as the introduction of lorries and the severity and frequency of drought put an end to caravans. Hundreds of thousands of them fled Mali and lived under extremely precarious conditions in Niger, Mauretania, Algeria, Burkin-Faso, etc.

As we know, after the overthrow of Ghadaffi, who enlisted many

of them among his “protectors”, a significant number of these armed men returned to Mali. But this detachment did not start the armed struggle of the already strongly-radicalised Touregs. All they did was to contribute a considerable force to a movement which had been present for a long time but, hardened by serial disappointments, was only waiting for the right opportunity. The extreme fragility of the Malian state, made worse army Captain Sanogo’s attempted coup fell apart, furnished the signal and the opportunity for attack. The “Azawad Liberation Movement”, formed some months previously, allied itself with armed islamist groups to bulk out its numbers. And so they were able quite rapidly to pulverise the Malian army and occupy the north of the country as far as the River Niger.

Of course this was a mistake, but a very understandable one, as the Touareg movement was very contaminated by its own islamist faction. Mistake though it is, this movement as a whole should not be confused with its islamist faction “Ansar Eddine”, even if the latter has undoubtedly pushed the movement a long way in a radical direction. But it should never under any circumstances be identified with it, as French imperialism and its lackeys strive to do.

Contrary to all the claims of the propaganda machine, political islam – even the most radical kind – is not a recent foreign import to Africa. Even in the nineteenth century, locally-based islamists inspired great anti-colonial struggles. Exploited peoples sought refuge and consolation against all kinds of oppression in religion. Since Engels wrote *The Peasant War in Germany* we have known that religion serves to encourage and stimulate the resistance and struggle of oppressed classes when they are still insufficiently developed or – we may add – when their elder sister, the world working class, is on the back foot constantly.

If Islamism has in recent years – sometimes aggressively–taken the place of secular leaderships of social and national

movements, it is a consequence of the considerable weakening and retreat of the international workers' movement. Over the last fifty years or so, the emphatic way social democratic parties have gone over from being supporters of the bourgeoisie to being its direct and settled political representatives has been one of the most outstanding features of this historic collapse. The other is the destruction of the Soviet Union and the dominant role played by the Stalinist bureaucracy played within it, followed by workers massively deserting communist parties and their inevitable retreat. A whole series of communist and non-communist parties and groups which used to lead social and national struggles have been marginalised across the world as a result. In their place, religious islamist movements have emerged from Afghanistan to Morocco, by way of Palestine, Egypt, Tunisia, etc.

Obviously this "opium of the people" works like any other drug. While bringing temporary consolation and relief, it cannot cure the ailment but poisons the organism even further. The muslim religion (like any other) brings no improvements but on the contrary preserves the backward and desperate situation working people are in, as we see very clearly in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Tunisia, too. Moreover, this religion contain within itself, as the cloud carries the thunderstorm, its radical Salafist wing with its medieval customs. The people of Tunisia have recently started to struggle even more powerfully against this "opium", as have the people of Egypt. We should also note that there has recently been a significant internal split in the Touareg salafist group "Ansar Eddine".

The situation is bound to get worse

Only recently forced to accept cuts in its material resources, the French army has become trapped in an inextricable tangle of intertwined difficulties which it cannot overcome. It is no coincidence that Hollande's European and American allies have very parsimoniously calibrated their own symbolic rather than real "contributions". They obviously have a better grasp of

the implications and extent of their devastating setbacks in Iraq and Afghanistan. They are more than happy to let the French bourgeoisie and its puppet Hollande have the more than dubious glory of pulling their shared chestnuts out of the fire. In fact the French "Socialist" Party has suddenly revealed itself to be the advance-guard not just of its "own" bourgeoisie but of world imperialism as a whole. Only recently the US vice-president conferred a metaphorical knighthood on Hollande, confirming him in this role with a lordly "well done!"

Obviously the forward patrols of world imperialism didn't have a clue what they were getting into. Incredible but true: neither the army nor its political bosses had any idea of what a simmering cauldron they were involving themselves in. Hollande kept saying they only wanted to stay in Mali a few days, then various unpleasant experiences made them change that to "... an indefinite period". It was brought home to these ardent interventionists that they would have to re-make the state and army, not just in Mali, but more or less across the whole region – a massive task far beyond the capacity of the French state.

The colossal expenditure such an undertaking entails massively exceeds the meagre resources of a French bourgeoisie mired in persistent crisis. There will be a growing contradiction between the no-doubt long-term financial cost of these involvements and their categorical refusal to allow even the slightest relief of the ever-increasing burdens placed on working people. Obviously, the latter will not tolerate the government making them bear not just the cost of the crisis, but also of the considerable expense of patching up the system oppressing their African brothers. If you believe the French Ministry of Defense (and their figures are almost certainly an under-estimate) the cost of the army alone up to 5 February 2013 is 60 million euros.

This will hardly scratch the monumental cost required by a

situation of total breakdown. Everything has had to be re-created: all the machinery of administration, not to mention the health and education systems – all far beyond the reach of a French exchequer swamped and riddled by debt.

As for the army itself, it is quite unable to tackle even such priorities as safeguarding the civilian population. Journalists report several massive lynchings perpetrated by the depraved Malian army, protected by its French army “big brother”.

These facts demonstrate not only the hatred and lust for revenge the country’s ruling strata cherish for all Arabo-Berber peoples, but also the appalling values and moral standards of the French army, which must have looked demurely away while these lynchings were being committed, as it did a few years earlier in Rwanda, so as not to notice the massacre of the Tutsi people. And as the Dutch UN Battalion did in former Yugoslavia, which let General Mladic’s soldiers execute 7000 Bosnians in the town of Srebrenica without lifting a finger. Such are the execrable political and ethical standards of both these armies and the UN, swathed in hypocritical high-flown phrases.

There is not the slightest doubt that this intervention will get even more catastrophically bogged down than that in Afghanistan. The inevitable consequence will be that the situation in Europe and internationally will get even worse, with the recrudescence of an even fiercer international class struggle. For what is happening in and around Mali and concretely also in the mobilisation of working people in Tunisia and Egypt prefigures not only a considerable deterioration in their conditions of life but also, and above all, the mobilisation and emergence on the scene of masses of working people, broadening their activity and toughening up their struggle.

But when one reads the statements of those groups and parties

which oppose French intervention, one is struck by their purely declamatory character. Of course given the massive number of dupes, the very fact that they condemn it at all is commendable, and we stand with them. But even when they resolutely condemn the military intervention, they confine themselves to verbal protest. To put it another way, almost all of these organisations (Communist Party, Left Party, Left Front, New Anti-Capitalist Party, etc.) adopt a position more or less clearly *opposed* to military intervention but steer well clear of stating the orientation or outcome they are *for*. I.e., these political formations adopt the profoundly negative attitude of rejection. At most, these comrades add a generalisation devoid of meaning, i.e. that what is needed is to solve the (economic, social, national) problems these countries face. This great general truth is hardly brilliant in its originality, so much so that even the government has given up repeating it.

We need a clear orientation!

To tell the truth, most of these organisations and groups do point to what they think is a way forward. They say – indeed, often demand – that military intervention must be left to African states – Mali and her neighbours, under UN patronage. It is quite obvious that they think this would be a suitable solution since (and this is how shallow their thinking is) it would be a better fit with the African ethnic image and the sacrosanct authority of the UN. They are completely unperturbed by the fact that Hollande and his government have spent long months trying to achieve precisely that arrangement.

Such a “solution” amounts more or less to re-establishing the status-quo, i.e. the situation preceding the debacle of the Malian state and army. But trying to apply it without the French army is simply a bad joke, since the preceding state of affairs was precisely what brought about that debacle and ended up with the present disastrous situation. The French

army intervened precisely in order to save the apparatus of the Malian state from complete collapse. Despite appearances, it was not directed against those Islamic terrorists. That pretext was blown up by propaganda to keep everybody happy. In truth they did it to shore up a native administrative apparatus in mortal danger – as it happened, from the islamist attack. The delight the population of Mali showed and which was obligingly filmed by French TV was less at the arrival of a foreign French army than at getting rid of a cruel medieval dictatorship. To present it as enthusiasm for the arrival of a foreign army is to indulge in the same degree of mystification as the attempt to interpret the vote *against* Sarkozy as support *for* the plans of the Socialist Party.

So the French army stands there nakedly exposed as the only cement that can hold this feeble state together, or any of the others that share the same congenital weaknesses. In that sense it is not only the chief factor in that African Union, but also the only one that can put up any opposition and organise any resistance to its ineluctable decomposition. It is high time for the parties and groups and their leaders who speak in the name of the working class to break with the backward and grotesque way of thinking which takes African states as if they were an emanation of their peoples and formed a group by its nature independent of imperialism. Whereas in reality they form a quite specific – subaltern but essential – part of the mechanism of imperialism's world system, officially run by the omni-substitute, the UN.

The clear regression in these states in relation to fundamental problems of African society is the logical consequence and obvious indication of the manifest setback to the attempt by the bourgeoisie – even what were at first its most radical elements – to solve elementary tasks of the bourgeois revolution. The way these regimes are currently decomposing is a striking proof from the negative side of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution; specifically, that

in our imperialist epoch the bourgeoisie of any country at all – even a backward one – is organically incapable of solving the tasks posed by such a revolution. Every orientation towards a so-called popular front, every policy of alliance with a wing of the bourgeoisie, has led to setbacks. That is the cruel lesson of events.

Thus, in the absence of a clear orientation towards the theory of permanent revolution and its application in order to mobilise the workers of the whole region, a catastrophic situation has got even worse even quicker. Indeed the choice put forward in the past by Rosa Luxemburg and taken up later by Trotsky: Either the working class succeeds in overthrowing capitalism and opening the road to socialism, or humanity will fall back into barbarism – is today an immediate practical question.

In this respect, this part of Africa at least (like the Middle East) is a little ahead of Europe. That continent, too, is from now on confronted with the same direct choice. It is only the many and various reserves at her disposal which still retard the explosive maturing of the same historical dilemma, as well as the general lack of preparedness on the part of the workers' movement.

The working class in the region of Africa under discussion already has several political organisations, even if they are still weak and enjoy only minority support. But that can change quickly, not to mention the unions which, like the UGTT in Tunisia and in the big cities in the region, are sometimes powerful.

Without going into detail, there are a fair number and variety of organisations which described themselves as Marxist and/or working-class, and they have the capacity to work together for a united struggle in the region. The first pre-condition for such a struggle and for their own development is undoubtedly their ability to take fully into account the orientation

offered by the permanent revolution and on that basis work out and apply democratic slogans for revolutionary change.

Revolutionary and working class organisations in Europe can and should do everything they can to help clarify this essential issue. That way they will be able to find their way back to their proper role, making the link with their history and tradition of supporting brothers and sisters in Africa. A precious contribution to this would be to adapt and develop the Fourth International's Transitional Programme, the only one to express concretely the orientation of permanent revolution. Although it needs changing in places, as a whole it remains valid. It is the one and only path to solving weighty problems which can at the same time correct wrong orientations and go beyond passive contemplation of events when African activists need clear and active support.

What next for Greece (and Europe)?

THE SYRIZA-led Greek government made a bid to reverse the appalling and humiliating conditions laid upon the country by the Troika (European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund).

The fiasco that followed deserves careful consideration by all trade unionists, socialists and working people more broadly.

SYRIZA is a coalition built around forces coming from the Euro-Communist sector which several decades ago split from the old KKE (Greek Communist Party). They promised a new kind of "left" politics, breaking the mould of sectarian wrangling over ideological shibboleths. (In the process they junked a

number of political principles also, in particular the understanding of the basic conflict in society between capital and labour).

With the shock of the country's bankruptcy and the fateful "Memoranda" reverberating around Greek society, with masses of people going, in real confusion, into semi-permanent occupation of the city squares, it was the coalition which became SYRIZA which captured the popular mood.

They drew from the intellectual tool-kit of Keynesian theory the idea that the economy could be launched into a new period of growth by the correct policies on the part of governments and the EU.

They presented the matter as an intellectual debate with an "elite" seduced by neo-liberal dogmas which had somehow reached political power pretty well everywhere, whether in the hands of formerly "socialist" or frankly conservative politicians.

Enough popular support mobilised for a "better" capitalist policy, in the SYRIZA view, could reverse the situation and kick-start growth and protect living standards.

There are also attractive sides to what SYRIZA was offering: an attempt to find what united people instead of what divided them, a listening ear to what people were saying rather than the sectarian propagandist broadsides, a very practical approach to dealing with the mass poverty and collapse of welfare structures which followed government acceptance of the Memoranda.

The Solidarity Clinics and cost-price farmers' markets and food and toy banks in working class districts were both very much needed and started to generate a cadre of party activists. The Solidarity For All welfare network at the same time created a framework for an international solidarity movement with the people of Greece.

From a ramshackle coalition of left groups, SYRIZA became an organised political party with a political programme of socially progressive measures and the aim to reverse the Troika-imposed economic destruction of the country (The Thessaloniki Programme).

On this basis the party provoked a general election in February of this year in which they won enough seats, together with a small conservative anti-austerity grouping, ANEL, to form a government. (Certainly not a single one of the groups claiming to be Marxist revolutionaries could have come even close to dislodging the vile bunch of puppets masquerading as a Greek government up to that point).

The problem is, the leaders of the European Union are not simply an accidental grouping with this or that ideological outlook. They are the political representatives of a particular social class – the bourgeoisie. In capitalist society, this is the class which owns (and actually personifies) the big concentrations of capital.

“You might as well have sung the Swedish national anthem”

It is their position as the public spokespersons and administrators of capitalist society which gives these monsters their utter conviction that they are right and that the biggest popular majority vote in the world is wrong. How do these masters of the work know they are right? The money tells them. They put into words and action what finance capital actually means.

In the current issue of the British Labourite magazine New Statesman, the main Greek negotiator trying to persuade in the bourgeoisie to make some concessions, Varoufakis, describes:

“... the complete lack of any democratic scruples, on behalf of the supposed defenders of Europe’s democracy. The quite clear understanding on the other side that we are on the same page analytically – of course it will never come out at present.

[And yet] To have very powerful figures look at you in the eye and say 'You're right in what you're saying, but we're going to crunch you anyway' ... there was point blank refusal to engage in economic arguments. Point blank. ... You put forward an argument that you've really worked on – to make sure it's logically coherent – and you're just faced with blank stares. It is as if you haven't spoken. What you say is independent of what they say. You might as well have sung the Swedish national anthem – you'd have got the same reply. And that's startling, for somebody who's used to academic debate. ... The other side always engages. Well there was no engagement at all. It was not even annoyance, it was as if one had not spoken."

To try to “make the other side engage”, the SYRIZA government sought popular support in a referendum. Already repayment deadlines had been missed without any new agreements being reached, and the supply of liquidity to Greek banks was switched off. The referendum was held under conditions of a fiscal blockade which threatened to gradually strangle the country as effectively as any naval blockade in history. Nevertheless a 61% vote to reject the Troika's exactions represented a high-water-mark in SYRIZA's popular support.

But it only made the EU “institutions” more intransigent. Prime Minister Tsipras himself now went to the EU with a set of proposals which represented abject surrender.

He promised to reform the tax system, accept increases in Value Added Tax (VAT), increase the pension age, increase employee pension contributions, cut back on early retirement and do away with benefits for the very poorest pensioners, sell off remaining state assets, cut state spending and take steps to destroy trade union rights.

But it now was not enough for the European bourgeois leaders. They were furious that the Greeks had had the gall to elect a

government which rejected their measures for Greece; they resented the fact that the SYRIZA government cracked open a chink in the curtain of capitalist “austerity” and gave working people even the hope of something different. This had to be stamped out completely.

They insisted on a much clearer set of commitments on all these issues, spelled out in chapter and verse, and the right to have their creatures sit in on the drafting of the legislation to be rushed through the Greek parliament (using the votes of opposition parties, who of course had always supported these measures).

Why do the bourgeois leaders of the world who pull the strings which move the EU institutions – including Europe’s national governments and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) insist on nothing less than abject surrender?

Why would they risk the possible repercussions, which could include Greece defaulting on her debts and even the break-up of the euro currency bloc? We know this from the fact that the IMF (no doubt egged on by the US government) warns that Greece’s debt burden is devastating and beyond recovery.

It is their own crisis of the capitalist system which urges them on regardless of the consequences. The upheavals in the world of finance which surfaced after 2007 were a huge systemic shock, but they were a real expression of the underlying crisis of imperialism.

By some estimates, the total amounts lost in, around and following the crash were truly massive.

On October 1 2012, the Wall Street Journal summarised the assessment of the former chief credit officer of Standard and Poor’s rating agency Mark Adelson:

“An attempt at sizing up the economic impact produced varied and sobering results, with losses attributed to decline in

world gross domestic product and household wealth, and other measures focused on the financial sector including bank write-downs and the increase in government support.

“The \$10 trillion to \$12 trillion drop in value of world stock markets and the \$5.7 trillion to \$12.8 trillion plunge in US output in the decade to 2018 give the best overall look at the costs, however, he said. “These numbers suggest total costs likely to run \$5 trillion to \$15 trillion ...” (<http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2012/10/01/total-global-losses-from-financial-crisis-15-trillion/>)

The only solution which the capitalist masters of the world can find is to turn on the masses of working people and strip them of all the progress they have gained in the past.

By the way, the “bailout money” from the institutions mainly does not end up in Greece. As economics correspondent Philip Inman wrote in the UK Guardian newspaper on 29 June 2015:

“Only a small fraction of the 240 billion euros (£170 billion) total bailout money Greece received in 2010 and 2013 found its way into the government’s coffers to soften the blow of the 2008 financial crash and fund reform programmes. Most of the money went to the banks that lent Greece funds before the crash. Unlike most of Europe, which ran up large budget deficits to protect pensioners and welfare recipients, Athens was then forced to dramatically reduce its deficit by squeezing pensions and cutting the minimum wage”.

Capitalist society works through the creation of surplus value by labour and the “valorisation” of that surplus value, its conversion into new capital re-invested into new ventures for yet more profits.

This social formation – capital – which historically played a progressive role in the development of the productive forces,

has now for a century been at the heart of the economic crisis as a barrier to their further development. That crisis rumbles on; it has not been overcome. In the attempt to solve it, the bourgeoisie must try to increase the portion of surplus value which it pockets at the expense of the portion which is claimed by the working class and working people more broadly.

Working class struggle has wrested significant concessions from the ruling class in terms of wages, welfare and pension rights, and normal expectations that the state will provide health, education and legal rights and facilities and the chance of a decent home in a reasonably healthy environment.

All these things were enshrined in political and legal arrangements through which workers and others could assert their needs.

So in order to be able to strip working people of the share of surplus value which they have been able to take previously, either in the individual wage packet or as a "social wage", the bourgeoisie has to attack, undermine and de-nature all these arrangements, which include socialist (or Labour) political parties and, where they can, trade unions.

And this has been the basis for the degeneration of reformist socialist parties across Europe. Greece's PASOK, the German SPD, the Parti socialiste in France, Labour in the UK and all their like have been politically hollowed out and de-fanged over decades.

But the decline of reformist parties has not been matched by a collapse in the illusions and expectations of masses of people in Europe.

Despite nearly forty years of continuous attack, despite the massive and savage increase in productivity and the closure of many industries relocated overseas, in many respects the assault of capital is only beginning.

One has to envision the depth of what the new Conservative government is planning in the UK to have any grasp of the scale of social conflict the bourgeoisie is proposing across Europe: savagely stripping away the vestiges of a welfare system; systematically re-engineering the health and education services to turn them into objects of profit for business; massively depriving people of access to a decent home; ongoing destruction of the whole legal system which provided some sort of safeguard for the poor and the weak; an onslaught on human rights legislation.

“Austerity” is a word often bandied about, but it hardly covers what is actually proposed. The way working class life and communities have been under-mined and the decay and collapse of social-democratic and “Communist” political parties has led to a tendency to accept that “there is no alternative” and often a backward scapegoating of claimants, the unemployed and migrants.

Individualism has made progress among working people who a generation ago would have stood (and did stand) firm in defence of class rights. Old working class areas of the UK have shown an appetite for voting along nationalist lines. Social fragmentation weakens the possibility of resistance and undermines traditionally powerful methods of struggle.

In the economic and social witches’ brew that is Europe, the initial steps in the political recovery of the masses has been marked by these factors.

Loudly denouncing the sell-out on the part of social democracy, the leaders of the new formations such as SYRIZA, the section of the French Communist Party which re-engineered itself as the Parti de Gauche, PODEMOS, Die Linke and the rest demand very little that is not – traditional social democracy, pure and simple!

As (generally) followers of the late John Maynard Keynes, they

do not call for a socialist revolution, but capitalism with its contradictions contained, smoothed over, managed and regulated by state intervention.

Their critique is not of capitalism as such – they are indeed not at all interested in abolishing it – but of “neo-liberal ideologues” who have allegedly inspired all the problems we face for some subjective reason.

Nevertheless, precisely because of this actually very moderate outlook, these parties are the vehicles through which the working people of Europe have started their political revival.

People are obliged to enter the path of struggle, but their first steps are hampered by profound illusions on the one hand and a profound disillusionment caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union and of hopes of a socialist future on the other.

They will have to overcome both handicaps, but that will only be achieved along the road of resistance they are increasingly adopting.

The challenge for Marxists is to identify and put forward proposals for action which lead the way to a confrontation with the system as a whole.

The future revolutionary leadership of the masses will be built in the unity and mutual struggle of the Marxists and the forces who come forward to conduct the present fight which is focussed most sharply on Greece.

This leadership will have to free itself from illusions that working people “share” any “values” with a bourgeoisie whose true values are exposed every minute in their relentless drive to impoverish, disarm and disempower us.

Bob Archer – July 2015

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Inside [this Issue](#):

Namibia:

WRP(N) fights for its constitutional rights
Namibian miners demand “end evictions!”

Programme of the Fourth International:

[The Theses of Pulacayo \(1946\)](#)

Europe:

[What next for Greece – and Europe?](#)

Bosnia solidarity appeal

UK elections