

The French Spring and the crisis in Europe

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The French working class has declared Sept 15 as day of action against the hated anti-Labor Law imposed by decree of the Vals-Hollande social-liberal regime. It is a continuation of the epic struggle of March-June 2016 that shook France and all of Europe. Although it is too early to make predictions about the immediate future of the social conflict, a comprehensive historical materialist assessment is necessary and urgent, especially to counter the superficial impressions that have dominated commentary on both the right and left. From the entire political spectrum, few can contest one undeniable fact: *after the “French Spring” of 2016 nothing can be the same* in France. This core member of the European Union and indispensable partner of Germany, and consequently of the entire European Union, is in a protracted crisis.

Just as on the eve of May 1968, the bourgeois press was writing that “*nothing happens in France, everything is terribly boring*”. Now, in different conditions, the mass upsurge once more came unexpectedly and took the ruling class by surprise.

The dramatic change becomes clear if one recalls that quite recently, up till March 2016, France’s political landscape was dominated by the unpopular right wing policies of the ruling Socialist Party of Hollande, the collapse of the left and far left and the apparently “irresistible” rise of the far right Front National of Marine

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Le Pen. ISIS-inspired terrorism dominated the news while State terrorism, became institutionalized by an endlessly extended militarized “State of Emergency”, sustained by a systematic campaign of hysterical Islamophobia. It is symptomatic that, in intellectual circles, the question was raised whether the conflict between capitalism and anti-capitalism was replaced by the clash between capitalism and jihadism (see Lignes, 2015).

The El Khomri Law¹, by destroying the existing framework of labor relations, became the catalyst, focusing all the pent up grievances of the working class and other sections of society that have accumulated during the long period of crisis. The centrifugal force of the protest movement took in strata that were not directly affected by the new law. The mass mobilization of the workers by the CGT was joined by the Force Ouvrière Confederation and some smaller radical unions who took on the scabs of the CFDT and other “yellow unions”. They were also joined by militant public school and university youth, with the participation of broader strata, on March 31, at the start of spring. That date thus marked a radical break in continuity with the political life that preceded it.

Those who on that day occupied the central square of the Place de la République in Paris, and then the central squares in other cities of France, initiating the movement “*Nuit Debout*” [“Up all night”], had the great insight of channeling the old revolutionary tradition of France by stopping the chronological flow of time, as happened in the Revolution of 1830²: the next day, after March 31, has been called not April 1st but “March 32nd”; the counting of the days by *Nuit Debout* continues in this way until this moment as these lines are written.

The Vals-Hollande government and all bourgeois parties and media, from the ruling and hated Parti Socialiste to the right wing Républicains of Juppé and Sarkozy to the fascists of the Front National, first wrongly predicted the early demise of the workers movement and then demonized it. The bureaucratic and mildly reformist CGT and its leader Martinez were called “terrorists” and accused of being ‘accomplices of the so-called “black bloc” of “*casseurs*” [provocateurs]’. Marine Le Pen has described the strike movement and demonstrations as “an armed insurrection”.

For months the government and trade union bureaucracy went through various

¹The El Khomri law is a piece of national legislation in France relating to employment. The legislation was designed to revise France’s Labor Code with the aim of removing protections that workers had enjoyed. Among the changes set out in the initial draft legislation were measures making it easier for companies to lay off workers, reductions to overtime payments for hours worked beyond France’s statutory 35-hour workweek, and reductions to severance payments that workers are entitled to if their company has made them redundant. When Socialist Party members of Parliament threatened to vote against the law it was forced through by governmental decree citing a rarely used section of the French Constitution that allows the government to bypass Parliamentary approval.

² It is said that one of the first actions taken by the revolutionists of 1830 was to shoot the hands of the clocks in order to stop time!

maneuvers to control a movement that was tending to become uncontrollable and threatening the ruling class and its State as well as the European Union, and all this on the eve of the British referendum.

Amidst the militants themselves there was a lot of confusion. Many were comparing the current action to the mass mobilizations of 1995 that defeated the anti-pension law promoted by Juppé, or the mass youth mobilization of 2006 that defeated the CPE (Contract of First Employment) that Sarkozy, then a minister, tried to introduce, or the defeat of the movement in 2010, when Sarkozy was finally able to impose the anti-pension law (a Pyrrhic victory that led to his electoral defeat by Hollande in 2012). The question repeatedly asked by the militants: Would the current struggle against the El Kohmri law be a repetition of the victories of 1995 and 2006 or would it be defeated as in 2010?

But no formal analogies or comparisons are possible: the explosion and development of the world capitalist crisis in 2007-08, and its impact on the EU and France have changed all the social, economic and political parameters.

We have to analyze these changes and their implications:

1. What is the **real nature of the crisis** that drives the social conflict in France?
2. What is the *specific character of this movement and conflict*, its contradictions, limitations, and potential?
And last but not least,
3. **What are the prospects**; wither France and the post-Brexit Europe after the French Spring?

1. What kind of crisis?

a. Some indicative data

A deep, protracted, so far unresolved economic crisis, with severe, ever-sharpening social and political effects, is the material subsoil of the social upheaval of March-June 2016. Even official statistics cannot hide the bleak image of a stagnant economy with a growth rate around zero, a trade deficit of 47.1 billion Euros, an advanced deindustrialization, falling productivity, deflationary tendencies, and an insoluble banking crisis.³

Industrial production, which has contracted again by 0.1 per cent in the 2nd quarter of 2016, as in the entire Euro zone, remains *10 per cent lower than the level it had before 2008*.⁴ French capitalism loses its competitiveness. It is definitely in advanced decline, both in absolute terms as well as relative to other European countries, particularly, Germany.

The official, strongly embellished, number of unemployed is around 3 million

3 *Le Monde*, 13 August 2016

4 *Le Monde*, 15 August 2016

people. The last figures, issued by INSEE on August 18, 2016⁵ show unemployment to fall slightly from 10 per cent to 9.9 percent, a statistic that encouraged François Holland to repeat, as he has *ad nauseam* from the Spring of 2016 onwards, his ridiculous refrain “ça va mieux!” [It goes better], adding insult to injury. The same statistics show that more than a hundred thousand people were added to those who have lost all hope of ever finding a job. Thousands and thousands of people are pushed to margins of society, trying to survive without a job, a salary or a shelter.

“Austerity” imposed, for years, on the majority of the population by the government and Brussels, continuous cuts in social expenditures, health, education, wages and jobs, make life more and more difficult, spreading and sharpening a generalized discontent.

b. An “organic crisis”?

Empirical data and a description of the appearance of the crisis do not and could not reveal its depth and dynamics, its essential nature. Neither economic reductionism nor the formal application of an already given abstract formula can explain the eruption of volcanic events such as the mass upsurge against the El Khomri law.

To probe this phenomenon requires some analysis. One such attempt, by the Argentine Partido de los Trabajadores Socialistas (PTS)⁶, uses the concept of “*organic crisis*” advanced by Antonio Gramsci in the 1930s to describe the current crisis in the advanced capitalist countries of Europe (especially the current situation in France) and the US.

According to Gramsci, an organic crisis affects both the structure and the superstructure of a “*historical bloc*”, of a social formation producing a crisis of hegemony of the ruling class, manifested by the fact that people break massively from the traditional parties. In this “*interregnum*”, where “*the old is dying and the new cannot be born*”, “*a great variety of morbid symptoms appear*”.⁷ It is an era of monsters, of bourgeois “*Caesarism*”, Bonapartism, and fascism.

The use of this Gramscian concept can reveal important aspects and traits of the present crisis, but it does not permit its abuse or misuse.

Some neo-Gramscians want to raise the concept of organic crisis as a polemical argument against what they call “catastrophism”. In other words, against any analysis which stresses the catastrophic dimensions of the current world capitalist crisis and the accuracy of Marx’s emphasis in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, of

⁵ *Le Monde* 20 August 2016

⁶ See the report by Claudia Cinatti and the conclusions by Emilio Albamonte, from the leadership of the PTS in the X Conference of the Fracción Trotskista Cuarta Internacional (FTCI) in <http://www.laizquierdadiario.com/Hacia-una-nueva-etapa-de-convulsiones-politicas-y-lucha-de-clases>, 20 August 2016.

⁷ Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni dal carcere Q3*, Einaudi, in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, New York: Progress Publishers, 1971, p 276.

the internal limits (*Grenze*) and the immanent barriers (*Schranke*) of capital in which an “*inherent tendency of capital to self-dissolution*”⁸ is manifested by a “*Great Devalorization*”⁹, a massive destruction of surplus capital, as after the crash of 1929 - or with the world financial meltdown after Lehman Brothers.

Apart from this obvious abuse, there are other uncritical misuses of the Gramscian “organic crisis”, which overlook its conceptual limitations.

The strength of the Gramscian concept of organic crisis is its emphasis on the need to grasp the crisis as a whole, its rejection of mechanical and fatalistic economicism. From this standpoint it is a continuation of Gramsci’s important critique of Bukharin’s mechanical (non-dialectical, non-historical) materialism, a break with positivism that permitted the elaboration of the central Gramscian category of hegemony.

But the weakest element in Gramsci’s approach is the primacy that he gives to the “*nazionale-popolare*”, to the national over the global. This privileged focus on national specificity, together with an absolutization of the “war of attrition” against a “war of movements” (obviously connected with the experience of the trenches in the Great War) led the Italian revolutionary communist to reject Trotsky’s theory of permanent revolution, and against it defend the central dogma of Stalinism, i.e. the dogma of “socialism in a single country”.

From this false vantage point, the organic crisis, in today’s France for example, is limited to the relations between the superstructure and the structure of a national “historic bloc”, a specific society in a specific capitalist country in Europe, without grasping the unequal and *combined* development of the world capitalist crisis. Trotsky did not dismiss national peculiarities; on the contrary, against Stalin’s abstract and empty generalities, he stressed the specificities as “*the original and unique combination of the basic traits of the world process*”¹⁰ in the imperialist epoch of capitalist decline, when the modern productive forces, the division of labour and the market acquire a global character.

Thus, the global contradictions of a declining capitalism are not just external factors but *internally* interrelated and interacting within each specific social formation.

The social-economic crisis in France remains a riddle if separated from their inner connections with the EU/Euro zone crisis; the latter is a mystery if its insoluble interconnection with the world crisis that erupted in 2007 is ignored. The center of that global crisis struck in the US with the collapse of the sub-prime mortgage market and later, in 2008, with the Lehman Brothers debacle.

8 K. Marx, *Grundrisse*.

9 Norbert Trenkle and Ernest Lohoff, *La Grande Dévalorisation*, Fécamp: Post-Éditions, 2014.

10 L. Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution*.

c. France, the EU, and the global crisis

Finance capital globalization and neo-liberalism as a strategy for a way out of the world capitalist crisis of over-accumulation did not resolve the crisis of capitalism but only delayed its denouement. **That** strategy was adopted only after the post-war international economic order based on Keynesian policies and adopted in the Bretton Woods agreement of 1944 unraveled in the early 1970s. An unprecedented over-accumulation of fictitious capital compounded the structural problems, and sharpened, expanded and globalized all the inner contradictions of capital.

After a series of financial shocks (1987, 1989, 1997, 2001), the celebration and euphoria of the “final and complete victory of liberal capitalism’s globalization”, following the demise of the Soviet Union, proved premature. This exhibition of Hubris found its real Nemesis in the 2007/2008 world financial catastrophe and the “Great” or “Long Recession”, more aptly called the “Third Great Depression” that followed. This was the starting point of the worst crisis in the history of capitalism, still unresolved a decade later.

The advanced more thorough interconnection of the world economy was manifested in the rapid international expansion of the crisis from the US, first to the advancing capitalist North, hitting the vulnerable architecture of the EU/Euro zone edifice, which started to crumble. In 2009/10 the EU/Euro zone international chain was broken at its legendary “weakest link”, Greece.¹¹

Greece’s default under the crushing burden of an unsustainable foreign debt was rapidly, although confusedly, perceived by the “institutions” of global capital in Europe and America, as a “*global systemic risk*”. On the basis of this assumption, the EU Commission, the ECB and the IMF, the infamous “troika”, starting from 2010, imposed on the Greek people their three disastrous “bail out programs” tied to draconian austerity measures in the so-called “Memoranda of Understanding” (MoU) with the compliant Greek governments, led first by the “socialist” George Papandreou, then by the right winger Samaras, and finally by the “radical left” Tsipras.

It is officially admitted that more than 90 per cent of the “salvation packages” loaned to Greece were returned back to the international lenders, mainly to the French and German banks, to save them and avoid the world capitalist bankruptcy in progress.

Seven years later, Greece’s debt remains gigantic and more unsustainable than ever while Greek society is plunged into a humanitarian crisis and a social catastrophe worse than that experienced in the US during the darkest moments of the 1930s Great Depression. Even the IMF’s official experts and think tanks admit that the program imposed on Greece was a miscalculated failure. They accept, against Germany’s “*ordoliberalismus*” and the EU Commission, that the Greek debt is unsustainable and requires some form of “relief”, although the IMF

¹¹ See Savas-Michael Matsas, *Greece: The Broken Link, Critique*, Volume 43, 2015 - Issue 3-4.

itself still advocates more neoliberal measures of draconian austerity, misnamed as “structural reforms”.

Greece was destroyed but the international banks on the edge of bankruptcy were not saved. Despite the tragedy imposed on the Greek people, not only are the “global systemic risk” of Greece’s debt and the prospect of a Grexit still on the agenda, but gigantic banks such as Deutsche Bank, Germany’s number one bank, are now considered by the IMF and others, as “*a global systemic risk*”. The entire European banking system, already in huge trouble, is crumbling after the vote for Brexit, as the sluggish economy agonizes. This grim state of affairs was publicly acknowledged following the most recent “stress tests” of the European banks. The dramatic saga of the collapsing Italian banks under the mountain of “non performing loans” illustrates the generalized desperate situation.

The Euro zone crisis brought forward the failures in the architecture of the monetary unification: the unevenness, hierarchical relations of domination, and structural imbalances dividing Northern and Southern Europe - the “core countries” of a European hegemonic “center” from a European “periphery” (or peripheries), and divisions between conflicting national capitalist and imperialist interests both in the center and the periphery.

The Euro, a single currency, but without a common fiscal policy, and the Schengen zone, a single border for the free movement of capital, commodities and persons between the member – states but without a shared asylum and border policy, were established as the two pillars and indispensable means of construction of the EU. Both failed. The Euro zone crisis revealed the unbridgeable gap between North and South, while the refugees crisis gave the kiss of death to the Schengen treaty showing the equally unbridgeable gap between Western and Central-Eastern Europe, despite the domination of the first over the second following the collapse of “actually (non) existing Socialism” in 1989.

The Euro zone crisis started with the bankruptcy of Greece - the break of the chain at its “weakest link”. But, as in Lenin’s metaphor, the most important fact is that it is not a “link” but the international “chain” itself that has been broken. The Euro and Schengen zone crises, the divisions revealed in the EU’s architecture, and now the Brexit, are moments of the disintegration of the EU “chain”. It brings under a merciless light the *impossibility of unification of the resources and productive potential of the European Continent by Europe’s capitalist classes on a capitalist basis*.

Ferdinand Mount (the head of Margaret Thatcher’s policy unit in 1982-83), in a sharp-sighted article on Brexit, recently published in *London Review of Books*, recalled the subtle thesis advanced by Alan Milward in *The European Rescue of the Nation-State* (1992): “*the underlying purpose of the drive for European union was to retrieve the nation-state from its ignominy and demoralization after two catastrophic world wars, and to anchor it in a network of institutions that would secure peace and prevent beggar-my neighbour policies of protection and*

blockade".¹²

The world crisis demonstrated the fragility and vulnerability of the European network of EU institutions, and in this way sharpened to its extreme limits the contradiction between the social productive forces, superseding national barriers, and the capitalist Nation State itself, whose salvation this internationalization/Europeanization had as a primary goal.

At the center of the EU integration project, from the start up to now, from the Accord of Steel and Carbon to the Maastricht Treaty and the introduction of the Euro currency, was and still is the French-German axis. The 'axis' was severely damaged by the crisis with a weakened French capitalism with growing deficits plunging in recession and a German export economy accumulating surpluses and remaining the sole "industrial engine" of the EU.

It does not mean that Germany became automatically and peacefully the undisputed hegemonic power of a "German Europe" that two world wars were unable to create. To be hegemonic, Germany *needs* France (particularly after the departure of Britain) **and the EU**. So far, Germany was unable to impose the discipline of its *ordoliberalismus* and of its *Stabilitätsskultur* (culture of stability) to France, Italy, Spain or Portugal, not mention Greece. But Wolfgang Schäuble's brutal efforts became a source of constant social and political instability. As Jan Werner Müller writes, Germany acts as a "*half-hegemon*", powerful enough to make the other weaker states resentful but still, without "*the means to make a system of states work as a whole*"¹³. This fact also makes problematic the implementation of alternative projects to replace the current EU of 28 member-states with either the old German plan for an EU "of different speeds", with a French-German core distancing itself but still dominating the European periphery countries, or the new Belgian proposal for a smaller "Northern Union" of Germany, France, Belgium, Netherlands, and Denmark. Jan Werner Müller is right in stressing that even a smaller version of a European Union of the richer countries would be ungovernable and stillborn.

Particularly after the turning point marked by the Brexit, the EU has entered "*the age of disintegration*" to use the sharp definition of Wolfgang Münchau. This dissolution could take different forms and tempos. It could even take the form of maintaining the EU as an empty shell as one hypothesis by Münchau suggested. It depends on the internal conflicts between different social forces and nation state interests on a world and European scales as the structural historic crisis of global capitalism is rapidly worsening on all fronts. The so-called "migrant crisis" and the recent failed coup in Erdoğan's Turkey exacerbate the chaos in the Middle East (to which the imperialism of EU countries has contributed) with the destabilization of

¹² Ferdinand Mount, *Nigels against the World - on the EU referendum*, London Review of Books, May 19, 2016, vol.38 Number 10, p. 22. (Emphasis added).

¹³ Jan Werner Müller, *Europe's Sullen Child*. London Review of Books, June 2, 2016, vol.38, number 11 p.5.

a dissolving EU.

A new stage opens in the class struggle of unprecedented dimensions in the continent where capitalism was born, Europe.

From this vantage point, the mass upsurge in France in the Spring of 2016 is not just an extension of the previous mass struggles of 2010-2012 in the periphery (Spain, Greece) to the European center this time but a quite new event, a break in historical continuity.

2. What kind of mass movement?

a. Class character

The recent mobilizations in France against the Labor Law introduced by the Valls government and its Minister El Khomri, and finally imposed through President Hollande's extra-parliamentary decree, against its overwhelming repudiation by the masses, took various forms: mass workers and popular demonstrations; direct action and clashes of student youth but also by industrial workers in battle with the forces of State repression; strikes on a local and national level; occupations of workplaces and public spaces, such as squares, starting from the Place de la République and the initiation of the movement of "*Nuit Debout*", etc.

No one can dispute the mass character of the movement despite the wild propaganda of the State and mass media. Even more important is its *class character*: although broader strata of the population, particularly of the younger generation, did participate, the hegemonic force of the movement was *the working class* of the SNCF (railways) and RATP (metro), dockers in harbors such as Havres, workers in distilleries and energy industry etc. Most of these workers are organized in the most powerful trade union Confederation, the CGT, led by Philip Martinez - a person who has been demonized by the government and all bourgeois parties and media as a "terrorist".

Against the well established bourgeois myth that classes, class struggle and above all the working class are antiquities belonging to a distant past, in 2016, the *proletariat* of a major European *metropolitan-imperialist* country erupted *en masse* at the forefront of a great social struggle of broader popular strata in an uncompromising confrontation with the *capitalist class, its government, its State repressive apparatus, all its parliamentary parties, and media empires*.

The active role of the unemployed and/or student youth, of the general assemblies, demonstrations, direct action and confrontations with the riot police of the students of schools and universities do not and could not cancel the proletarian character of this mass movement. On the contrary, the confrontational stand of the youth supported by the broader population in a common battle against the police, as well as the new, imaginative movement of *Nuit Debout*, strongly sustained the workers movement. Their contribution was vital to fight back and secure the continuity of struggle during the intervals of discontinuity imposed by the trade union bureaucracy's tactical maneuvers.

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Nuit Debout was viciously misrepresented both by the Right and the Left (including by some sectors of the extra-parliamentary left) as a petty bourgeois, “neo-reformist”, movement of Parisian *bo-bos* (initial syllable of “bohemian-bourgeois”). A report from the scene provides another, very different picture: among the participants of *Nuits Debout*, in its high moments in April and May 2016: “40 per cent belong to sectors in crisis during the last 20 years (artists, journalists, students), 20 per cent are unemployed (double the figures of the official national rate), and 24 per cent are workers and employees”.¹⁴ Only classical petty bourgeois “workerism” could call “bo-bo” such a movement, even when considering as the only criteria its social composition...

Early in its short but dense history, *Nuit Debout* called for unity with the working class and its trade unions, and invited to its gatherings leaders of various unions, including Philippe Martinez, the General Secretary of the CGT. That Martinez accepted the invitation was a first for the CGT, in stark comparison to the hostile strike-breaking, anti-student attitude of the Stalinist leadership of the CGT in May-June 1968! To the horror of liberals who wanted to manipulate the movement, reactionary liberal intellectual and media star Alain Finkelkraut received a hostile reaction and rejection from the speakers’ panel. This reaction to liberal apologists for capitalism was typical of the *Nuit Debout* movement despite its confusions, and raised again the specter of the revolutionary events of May 1968, spreading fear in the hearts of the bourgeois and petty bourgeois. The mobilizations of spring 2016 took place *in open political defiance of an ever extended “State of emergency”* declared, under the pretext of jihadist terrorism, and forbidding any mass rally! What could be clearer evidence that objectively, independent of any subjective intentions, *the struggle against the Labor Law was NOT just an economic, combative trade union struggle but a POLITICAL confrontation of labor with capital’s political State power, with a bourgeois regime in crisis, in an EU in the process of disintegration? Is there any doubt that this was a turning point in the class struggle and the political situation in Europe and internationally?*

b. A “workers’ reformism”?

Contrary to this assessment, others, such as the previously mentioned Emilio Albamonte of the Argentine PTS¹⁵, define the French workers movement under the bureaucratic CGT leadership as “workers’ reformism”, of the same type as the old German Social Democracy or of the now defunct Italian (Stalinist) Communist Party. This “workers’ reformism” is counterpoised by Albamonte to the “petty bourgeois neo-reformism” of Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece. The confusion about what is really happening in Europe could not be worse.

First, leaving aside for the time being Podemos, a short comment on Syriza

14 *Qui sont les Nuit deboutistes ? Enfin une étude sérieuse ! 17 mai 2016 gazette-debout*

15 See <http://www.laizquierdadiario.com/Reformismo-centrismo-y-revolucion>, 20 August 2016

in Greece, an experience in which the EEK [Workers Revolutionary Party] and the author of these lines are directly involved. There is no such thing as a “*neo-reformism*” of Syriza, of a “petty bourgeois” or other character. The demoralized international Left saw in Syriza something “new”, different from the “old” reformism, a radicalized neo-reformism or, more often as the new, “anti-capitalist” (but not revolutionary) “radical Left”, which supersedes the “old” division between reform and revolution, leading, through an anti-austerity struggle, to a social change through the parliamentary road and the election of a “government of the Left” assisted by extra-parliamentary mass social movements.

There is nothing “new” to legitimize the prefix “*neo-*” to this charade that in any case miserably collapsed in Greece in July 2015, with the expected capitulation of Tsipras and Syriza to the orders of the troika. Syriza, quite early, from the first moment that the prospect of taking governmental power became actual in the elections of 2012, tried to dissipate the fears of the ruling class in Greece, in the EU and in the US with all kinds of proposals and acts of class collaboration, following the well-trodden footsteps used by reformists and Stalinists in the past.

It is not even “new” because it is based on the petty bourgeoisie. Syriza has its origins in a fusion of the “Euro-Communist” wing coming from an older split in the Stalinist KKE (CP of Greece) with a new split in the KKE in the 1990s, and the later addition of some smaller groups of the far left. In other words, although the leadership comes mainly from the petty bourgeois intelligentsia, Syriza historically originates from the Greek *workers* movement, dominated by Stalinism, especially in the anti-fascist people’s Resistance and civil war of the 1940s. Not by accident, for obvious symbolic although demagogic reasons, Tsipras, when he was elected as a prime minister in January 2015, went to the proletarian neighborhood of Kaisariani where he placed flowers in the cemetery, at the monument of the communist partisans executed by the Nazis. Even in electoral terms, in the parliamentary elections of May and June 2012 and in the elections of January 2015, *the majority working class vote*, which in the past went mainly to PASOK and in a smaller proportion to the KKE, turned decisively to Syriza granting it a victory, with the expectation that it would form a “government of the Left” - a first after the betrayal by Stalinism and the defeat of the socialist revolution in the civil war.

The role of the working class in the left wing turn of the popular masses in Greece in the years of struggle against the three Memoranda of austerity imposed by the troika, with the active complicity of the Greek bourgeois governments, including the last one of Tsipras, in this sense, cannot be dismissed as dominated by “petty bourgeois neo-reformism” or counter-posed to the French Spring events.

A syndicalist–economist interpretation of the later as a combative trade union struggle, involving a “new workers vanguard” but led by a supposed “workers reformism” of a weakened CGT bureaucracy distorts the reality of the event with all its revolutionary and reactionary potentialities. When any objective observer or participant sees hundreds of thousands of workers marching in the streets of

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the main cities of France with red flags, singing the “International”, clashing with the militarized police, calling, in not a few cases, for the overthrow of the Vals SP government, he or she can understand that what happens is not a routine trade union struggle, even on a mass scale, but a political earthquake.

The CGT bureaucracy’s control over the rank and file members was indeed weakened and even at times lost completely (for example in the workers rebellion in Havre and elsewhere). The collapse of Stalinism and the loss of the PCF’s control of the CGT played an important role in this situation. Martinez himself broke with the PCF from the left quite early in a conflict with the right wing Stalinist leader Robert Hue, then its General Secretary. Despite the bureaucratic maneuvers, the attempts at a rotten compromise with the government, the delays and discontinuity in time and scale imposed on actions to undermine its impact, the Philippe Martinez leadership of the CGT and role are not the same as that of the late Georges Séguy’s during the May-June 1968 revolutionary days.

Nevertheless, what they share in common as bureaucrats formed in the Stalinist school is opposition to the *General Strike*. Although many trade unions and federations raised the demand of an indefinite General Strike to defeat the El Khomri law, not only during demonstrations but as well in the CGT Conference in April 2016 in Marseille, Martinez rejected it, with the ludicrous excuse that “*Montreuil* [the CGT’s Central headquarters in Paris] *cannot impose from above such an action*”, sending back the proposal to be discussed once more in general assemblies and workplaces, thereby sabotaging it.

As Séguy and the Stalinists in 1968, Martinez too understands very well that a combative, indefinite General Strike, supported by the broadest strata of the population, with the youth at the forefront, is not only a *political* challenge to the government but poses the ***central political question of state power itself***. Both leaders of the CGT, perhaps with different rationales, rejected precisely a political perspective beyond trade unionism or parliamentarianism, the prospect of ***a struggle for workers power***.

The battle on the El Khomri law, and the hegemonic role of the CGT appeared in *a limited trade union form hiding the most explosive political content*: it is well known, that after the 1871 Commune, the October Revolution and Lenin, that *the question of the State power is the central political issue of revolutionary and* not of economic trade union politics.

c. The vacuum on the Left

In France, the trade union form given by the CGT and other unions to the political struggle came to occupy the political vacuum left by the bankruptcy of the Left. The movement clashed not with a right wing government but with a so-called “left” government and President elected as an alternative to the Right of Sarkozy and Company - a government that has implemented even more right wing anti-working class and reactionary measures than Sarkozy ever did. From 2012,

the French Socialist Party lost 50 per cent of its membership. The people who had voted Socialist became increasingly alienated from a government acting as the enemy of the people.

The rise of the far right Front National or the real possibility that the Right will win the second round of the Presidential elections of 2017 comes from this bankruptcy of social democracy- but not only from it: *no left alternative to Hollande was or still is visible or credible*.

The left wing of the SP, the “*frondeurs*” (“rebels”, dissenters) limited their “*fronde*” (rebellion) to an unsuccessful, not so enthusiastic or convincing attempt to force a vote of no confidence in the government. Now their activity consists solely in promoting themselves as new Socialist party Presidential candidates looking to the the “*primaries*” in ...January 2017.

The PCF is tail-ending the “*frondeurs*” in the futile and reactionary perspective of trying to “change the SP policies”.

The “*Front de Gauche*” of the PCF with Mélanchon is in ruins after the unilateral, ultimatic presentation by Mélanchon of his own Presidential candidacy in 2017 as the best representative of his movement with the pompous and ridiculous, left-populist and nationalist nom de guerre “*La France rebelle, la France est belle*” (“France is rebel, France is beautiful”).

Last but not least, unfortunately, the French far left of Trotskyist origins are politically paralyzed. This includes all the factions of the NAP, from the more moderate to those adopting the most radical rhetoric, as well as Lutte Ouvrière. Undoubtedly, their militants fought and continue to fight courageously throughout the anti-Labor Law struggle, and are in the first ranks of their respective combative trade unions; but skepticism and demoralization prevail in these organizations and *no independent political alternative, particularly on the central question of political power, linked to a transitional program was boldly advanced* by them in the most important class confrontation France has seen in decades.

As in other countries like Brazil, adaptation to a practice of continuous electoralism and the narrow limits of combative syndicalism produce conditions of paralysis, disorientation and sectarian factionalism, when the moment of truth - of the political crisis of a regime arrives. This is the case, for example, with the “*Morenoite*” PSTU in Brazil, which, after intervening in the 2013 upheaval in the most narrow syndicalist manner with politically disastrous results, went through a disastrous split during the recent parliamentary-judicial coup against Vilma Rouseff.

As the zigzags of a deepening world capitalist crisis become more abrupt and unexpected, most of the revolutionary left enters the new stages of these struggles, still imprisoned in the forms of struggle of past decades, of the reflux of the movement in the “*years of winter*” that followed May 68, the decades of recuperation of the far left with the advent of Mitterrand and the PS in the 1980s and 1990s, of a generalized demoralization reaching its climax with the collapse of the Soviet Union and of the “*actually (non) existing Socialism*” in Europe and Asia.

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Although History did not end in 1991 as the capitalists celebrated, definitely a certain sense of historical perspective and orientation was lost together with the Soviet Union as a point of reference, positive or negative, by all currents of the workers movement and the Left. The necessary theoretical and political “revolution within the revolution” in terms of theory, strategy and organization - like the radical turn that Lenin took in 1914 after the collapse of the Second International - did not take place after the collapse of Stalinism. Despite some significant efforts and contributions by revolutionary minorities, nihilism prevailed.

As the eruption of the capitalist crisis in 2007 accelerated all the rhythms of history, revolutionary forces enter the new historical tempests, with recurrent gigantic, waves of struggles with fighting dedication but without a necessary compass of historical perspective for revolutionary orientation, strategy, tactics, and organization. This is the historical context within which revolutionaries approach the new political climate, whether it is in the Argentinazo in Plaza del Mayo, Puerta Del Sol in Madrid, Tahrir in Egypt, Kasbah in Tunis, Syntagma in Greece, Gezi Park in Turkey, “Occupy Wall Street” or *Nuit Debout* in the Place de la République..

In France, the land of the 1789 Revolution, of the highest moment of bourgeois modernity, this (transitional) impasse takes its purest form: *the most political nation of Europe is engulfed by a dramatic crisis of a delegitimized political State power without a visible political State power alternative...*

3. Political limits and prospects

Spring 2016 in France was not May 1968. The entire historical framework was very different. 1968 was only the starting point of the break up of the post-World War II Bretton Woods Keynesian settlement bringing to an end the so-called “Trente Glorieuses” (the ‘thirty glorious years’ of capitalist expansion). Now, we are already in the 10th year of a global crisis incorporating the historical failure both of Keynesianism and neo-liberalism as strategies of survival of a declining capitalism.

The sharpest contrasts between May 68 and the recent spring of discontent in France are manifested in the political sphere, both in the prevailing political discourse and praxis of the actors.

Examining the written record, the debates and statements by the commissions of the *Nuits Debout*, one can say that despite some important insights, you cannot find the boldness of the revolutionary visions and the wide open horizons of May 68, anticipating, in a concrete Utopia (Ernst Bloch), the future goals of the social revolution in advanced capitalism.

Nevertheless, behind the contrast with today, the tensest areas of debates in the last period cover some of the most crucial strategic questions of the coming European socialist revolution, particularly in the assemblies in *Nuit Debout* and other combat sectors of the movement.

We will focus briefly on two of the most important, passionately debated and

internally related: a. the question of *national-popular sovereignty versus EU*, and b. the question of the *Republic*.

a. National Sovereignty versus EU - or a combative internationalism?

The obvious failures of the EU in an insoluble crisis provoked a violent backlash, misnamed as “Euro-skepticism”, and reclaiming national sovereignty. This applies to discussions of the deepening recession and growing unemployment, the enormous social sufferings caused by the harsh neo-liberal measures of austerity imposed by the EU directives without any of the promised results, the economic rule of non-elected technocrats of Brussels over elected national parliaments, Greece under the troika’s iron heel being the extreme but not unique example.

There is throughout Europe, a threatening rise of nationalism, economic and political, right and “left”. Parties, groups, movements, tendencies, either openly Nazi or fascist or far right thinly disguised as “patriotic beyond the right/left divide”, or even self-situated on the left demanding a return to “popular-national sovereignty”, destroyed by “Europeanism”, “anti-national cosmopolitanism” and a “transnational” EU ruling dictatorially from Brussels. All these political formations, mixed together and covered under the confused and confusing term of “populism”, acquire a growing influential role in European political life.

It looks like an apparent return to the 1930s: a global financial crash followed by depression, the rise of nationalism, fascism, imperialist antagonisms, and last but not least - a war drive. But a fatalistic Eternal Return of the same is only “*the myth of all myths*” (Walter Benjamin) in a historical, ever-changing world in an epoch of transition, and particularly now.

The huge differences between the present and the 1930s need re-examination. Initially, four basic remarks have to be made (each needing a further detailed analysis):

1. The 2007 world economic volcanic eruption has its own unique historical specificities and dynamics. It is not a mechanical repetition of the 1929 Crash and the 1930s Great Depression. It is recognized as the worst crisis in the history of capitalism, as many bourgeois “mainstream” economists, “think tanks” and global financial institutions have admitted.
2. Economic and political nationalism re-appears but in a globalized economy of a far deeper international interconnectedness than that before World War II making any nationalist economic agenda even more short lived and hopeless than in the 1930s.
3. There is a totally different strategic field of power relations between social, political and geopolitical forces than in the past.
4. Above all, there is no crashing defeat of the fighting capacity of the working class in the metropolitan centers of global capitalism as in Germany

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in 1933. Social and political polarization produces the Trump monstrosity but also the much stronger Bernie Sanders phenomenon in the US; an unexpected massive left wing turn in Britain propelling the “marginal” Jeremy Corbyn to the leadership of the Labour Party and the hysteria of the right wing Labourites, the Tories and the bourgeois mass media seeing the specter of Trotsky (!) hovering over the United Kingdom; and last but not least, the recent mass upsurge in France against the Labor Law, when, during the months of struggle, the fascists, the far right Front National and Marine Le Pen viciously attacking the workers were, temporarily, eclipsed from the political scene.

The explosive contradiction between, from the one side, the world character of modern productive forces, of economy, politics, and culture, and from the other the persistence of a historically exhausted Nation State that is polarized between defenders and opponents of globalization in general and the EU in particular. The “defenders” promote “regulation” of “globalization and financialization” and wish to advance to a “more integrated Europe”, to promote “reforms” and/or “democratization” of the EU as an indispensable structure in effectively confronting the globalized crisis.

Most of the “opponents” preach - as the ravages of the implosion of finance capital globalization keep accumulating and Brussels (and Berlin) stubbornly continue the imposition of disastrous austerity policies - that the only road to salvation lies in a retreat back to a strengthened, protectionist Nation State, to a national currency, and “national-popular sovereignty”.

This divide was made very clear in the recent social conflicts and political debates in France.

The savage “deregulation” of the labor market is an essential component of the bankrupt and inefficient neoliberal strategy of both the Hollande-Vals government as well as the EU.

The neoliberal strategy in the name of globalization which is identified today with the EU, particularly in its dominant German “ordoliberal” variety, demands draconian austerity and massive destruction of jobs, living standards and social rights. In other words, it imposes policies meant to force workers and the lower middle classes to pay for the capitalist system’s crisis and bankruptcy. But, at the last instance, it represents a futile attempt to reverse what Karl Polanyi had called the “*Great Transformation*”: the historical destruction of economic liberalism, established in the 19th century, during the crisis years of 1930-1945. It attempts to impose a regressive “anti-Great Transformation.” Neo-liberalism is a neo-archaism, the reactionary Utopia of a return to the laissez-faire liberal capitalism of the 19th century.

Against such a barbaric strategy, whose failure was irrevocably proven in the 2007/08 debacle - but which continues exacerbating the crisis - the return to a

sovereign Nation State is promoted both in the far right and far left as the only counter-strategy. In France, in the far right, Marine Le Pen preaches an exit from the EU and the euro, an “independent, sovereign” (and always imperialist-capitalist) France within “a Europe of Nations”. But also on the left of the pseudo-left ruling Socialist Party, the “souverainisme de gauche” is quite strong, with the most popular and demagogic representative being the anti-immigrant Jean Luc Mélançon of the Parti de Gauche and now self-appointed candidate to the Presidential elections of 2017 under the flag of “*France Rebelle France la Belle*”. More on the left of the “left of the left” we find another influential representative of left “souverainisme” in the person of a serious radical intellectual like Frédéric Lordon.

The defenders of the primacy of national sovereignty in the imperialist epoch promote their own reactionary Utopia: a return to the century of the triumph of bourgeois nationalism and of national States - the same idealized 19th century so cherished by the neoliberal “globalists”.

The abstract concept of “Europe” (or of the “West”) - and consequently of “European (or Western) universal values”- hiding imperial, colonial exploitative ambitions of domination, was from the beginning, as Michel Foucault rightly pointed out, a *particularism* in break from universalism.¹⁶ The illusions of a “European constitutionalism” (Jürgen Habermas) and/or a “European citizenship” (Etienne Balibar) are collapsing under the combined offensive of the social cannibalism measures of the EU and the sinister rise of reactionary nationalisms and conflicting national imperialist interests.

As was mentioned previously, Ferdinand Mount, the chief of the political staff of Margaret Thatcher in 1982-83, reminds us, quoting Alan Milward in *The European Rescue of the Nation-State*, that the entire EU project, from its foundation up to its present, probably terminal crisis, has as a goal *the rescue of the Nation State* in Europe from a repetition of the previous disasters of the 20th century, by embedding it in an international network of interdependent European institutions.

“Europeanists” and national-“sovereignists” are the negative image of each other with opposite strategies for the same goal: to save the modern bourgeois national state and capitalism.”

Both strategies have failed miserably. The deepest demands of historical development - the unification of the modern productive forces clashing with national barriers in Europe- could be fulfilled only on a new international socialist basis, and that necessitates a decisive break with all strategies to save the imperialist EU, nationalism, and capitalism.

The only alternative to stop the catastrophe for the exploited and oppressed of France, Germany, Greece, or of any other European country, North and South, East and West, is an internationalist one. What is required is an international, coordinated revolutionary upsurge of the working class leading all subaltern classes

¹⁶ See Michel Foucault, *Sécurité Territoire Population* Gallimard/Seuil 2004

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and oppressed, including all national, ethnic and other minorities, immigrants and refugees, for the overthrow of capitalism and the EU. The goal is to establish a new emancipated community of peoples and minorities free from all forms of oppression, exploitation and humiliation: a *United Socialist States of Europe*, as it was formulated by the old and always actual call of the Communist International in its first -revolutionary- period.

b. The Republic - or the Commune?

As the social political crisis in France escalates, it is noteworthy that as it reaches its climax we hear obsessive rhetoric about the “Republic” and the so called “republican values”, values such as “la citoyenneté” (citizenship) or, especially, “la laïcité” (secularism).

Inherited from the French Revolution, “Republicanism” became the battle cry of nearly all conflicting forces encompassing the entire political spectrum, from the far left and the left to the right and far right, including the Front National, the traditional home of the enemies of the French Revolution, of the monarchists and other belated followers of Maurras and the “Action Française”.

Marine Le Pen makes fiery speeches in defense of the Republic and republican values, a French monopoly of the “French nation”. She sees France as threatened by EU “cosmopolitans”, “communists” and other “leftists”, the marginalized citizens in the “*banlieu*” with origins from Arab and African ex-colonies of France, especially the millions of the Muslim population in France, all foreigners in general and finally the immigrants and refugees from the Middle East, Asia and Africa, now sequestered in camps like the “jungle” of Calais.

Secularism, “la laïcité”, becomes the cover for Islamophobia, racism, in some cases disguised anti-Semitism, and generally the instrument of a politics of fear, the cultivation of an “anti-terrorist security” hysteria against Muslims (and migrants), seen everywhere as probable accomplices of Daesh (the “Islamic State”) assassins). The summer police harassment campaign against the burkini, the bath dress of some Muslim women, considered as a “provocation” and even as an “act of war by Islamists”, although ridiculous, is nevertheless a dangerous symptom of a generalized, witch-hunt atmosphere organized from above, by the State power in crisis and the “State within the State”.

This reactionary stand of a French identity politics, in the name of the Republic and of “secular republican values”, falsely targeting a “fundamentalist Muslim communitarian politics”, is not at all exclusive to supporters of the Front National. It is shared and put into practice by the Socialist Party government itself, by its official opposition, the parliamentary Right of Juppé and Sarkozy renamed “Les Républicains”, even by some sectarian “ultra-secularists” in the extra-parliamentary left.

This generalized cult of a Republic, emptied of its historical-class content and reduced to a fetish, is a caricature and negation of the revolutionary Republic of the

Jacobins, its reversion covering the existing senile Bonapartism of the exhausted Fifth Republic.

Marx had already, in the middle of the 19th century, showed that the 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte was the repetition as a farce of the tragedy of Napoleon Bonaparte in post-revolutionary France. Trotsky in the 1930s compared and showed the essential difference between Bonapartism in the epoch of bourgeois ascent and Bonapartism in the epoch of capitalist decline.

In today's France and more and more all over Europe, against the backdrop of fierce class antagonisms and the death agony of bourgeois parliamentary democracy there has been risen a late Bonapartism of bourgeois senility. Hollande is a caricature of the caricature of *Napoleon III Le Petit* while Sarkozy embodies a farcical ambition to become a *Pétain bis*, as Alain Badiou has presciently showed.¹⁷

It is not an accident that all mainstream Presidential candidates for the 2017 elections compete for the mantle of the best Bonaparte, the most efficient arbiter/guarantor of civil peace, of security, law and order in the Republic.

Even in the camp of working class opponents of the ruling senile Bonapartism there prevails a left Republicanism, as made clear in debates and assemblies during the months of struggle against the Labor Law.

The demand of a "Sixth Republic" established by the election of a Constituent Assembly, raised by Mélançon, finds a relative echo among some sectors of the opposition to the Labor Laws.

A more radical version of the demand for a Constituent Assembly expressing the "Constituent Power" of the mobilized citizens was elaborated by Frédéric Lordon¹⁸ and it was presented and found a positive response in an assembly of *Nuit Debout* in the Place de la République in April 2016.

The concept of "constituent power of the multitude", first advanced by Toni Negri, or its reversion, the "destituent power" proposed by Giorgio Agamben as an alternative politics of emancipation were discussed again, during the French Spring by militant autonomists.

But none of these alternatives goes beyond the horizon of radical democracy or of a radicalized anti-authoritarian version of *res publica*.

The solutions proposed are part of the problem- the crisis of the bourgeois Republic in our epoch. A renewed, non-schematic, non-dogmatic theoretical study of the State and of all power relations today is urgently needed to develop a revolutionary politics of "universal human emancipation" as Marx had defined communism in his critique, precisely, of the republican "*Declaration of the Rights of the Citizen and the Man*" of 1793.¹⁹

Michel Foucault was right that we have to go beyond the primacy given to the

17 Alain Badiou, *De quoi Sarkozy est-il le nom?* Lignes 2007 passim.

18 Frédéric Lordon, *Imperium: Structures et affects des corps politiques*, Paris: La Fabrique, 2015.

19 Karl Marx, *On the Jewish Question*.

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political-juridical order in the Republic by Rousseau, and that we need to “*de-Rousseauiser Marx*”²⁰. Foucault had in mind, principally but not exclusively, the fatal distortion of the Marxian theory of the State introduced by Stalinism and the PCF, in the 1930s, and especially after the turn to the policies of “an antifascist Popular Front” - of class collaboration with the democratic-republican wing of the bourgeoisie”.

In the same spirit of defense of the Republic, as recently as 2002, in the second round of the Presidential elections in France, the Left (including the LCR) supported the right wing republican Chirac against the fascist Jean Marie Le Pen. The same tactic is being proposed again for next year, if in the second round of the Presidential Elections of 2017, as it looks now very likely, Marine Le Pen could confront the right wing candidate of “Les Républicains”, Juppé or Sarkozy...

In his courses in the Collège de France, in the last creative years of his life, Foucault developed some insights on the Republic, the modern State and their crisis that are very topical and thought provoking and could shed light on the crisis in France and in Europe today.

The Republic is not the embodiment of “national or popular sovereignty” or of a “people’s will” expressed every few years by elections. It constitutes not the rule based on *citizenship*, a civil society of citizens with equal rights in relation to the laws of the State, but primarily it is rule over a heterogeneous *population*. The Republic cannot maintain itself without going beyond sovereignty into what Foucault calls *gouvernementalité*, “governmentality”. The modern State in its limits cannot survive without it.

It is a broader “*strategic field of power relations*”²¹, much broader than the famous Gramscian “hegemony” as “coercion + consensus”. Governmentality was described, first, by Foucault in 1978²², as being constituted first, by *all the means, institutions, procedures etc by which power is exercised on a population*, second, by raising *political economy* to the highest form of knowledge of society, and third, by the development of *security* apparatuses (where we could include, all power technologies of surveillance and punishment, the penal system, prisons, the police, and all the “armed bodies” of the bourgeois State).

The French critical thinker also posed the crucial question of the *crisis of governmentality* - which today, not only in the periphery but in all advanced capitalist countries (particularly in France) takes the most acute form, involving all three, interrelated and interacting, components mentioned above:

a) Not only is there a generalized crisis of all governing institutions, procedures etc, but *overall control over vast, impoverished, marginalized populations* becomes

20 See Savvas Michael-Matsas, *Marx beyond Rousseau* (in *Musica ex nihilo*, Agra 2014, in Greek. A version of the article in English can be found in www.theseis.com .

21 Michel Foucault, *L’Herméneutique du Sujet*, Gallimard/Seuil 2001, p.241.

22 Michel Foucault, *Sécurité, Territoire, Population*, Gallimard/Seuil 2004, p.111.

problematic and very often lost. Some examples are Greece in the December 2008 youth revolt, in the rebellions in the suburbs in Paris and all over France in 2005, and now during the 2016 French Spring, the riots of summer 2013 in London, the ongoing rebellion today of the Afro-American population and of the movement *Black Lives Matter* against a brutal militarized police in the US etc.

b) Mainstream economics, into which *political economy* has degenerated, proved its bankruptcy irrevocably in the 2007 world crisis. It was totally unable to foresee the crisis or to find a way out. Both strategies developed by capitalism in the 20th century to confront its decline while avoiding a repetition of the 1929 world Crash and the Great Depression, namely Keynesianism and neo-liberalism, have turned into a debacle. There is a strategic impasse of the ruling class, of its political economy, and on a deeper level, the exhaustion of the value form as a regulative principle of the economy.

c) There is a monstrous growth, internationalization, modernization, and technological sophistication of *security* apparatuses, especially after 9/11 in New York, the terrorist imperialist “war on terror” and the imposition in all capitalist countries of a repressive “State of exception”, which has become a rule, re-confirming the famous thesis of Walter Benjamin.²³

No revolutionary politics of emancipation can ignore these three crucial components of the present regime crisis of political power as a “crisis of governmentality” in France or in most other countries in Europe and internationally.

1) The vast, rapidly impoverished *population* should not be seen as an “*imaginary concrete*”²⁴, an abstraction as bourgeois political economy sees it, but as a concrete universality, a unity of the diverse internally divided on class, “race” ethnic or religious or communitarian, and gender lines.

As in the recent French upheaval, the attempt by the government of capital to de-regulate all labor relations has polarized society and centralized all grievances of the population hit by the crisis around the battle of the working class organized mainly around the CGT. The working class should act as a “*universal class*”: superseding the syndicalist limits of a trade union struggle, uniting all oppressed and exploited, all “humiliated and offended” to use Dostoyevsky’s words, on the basis of a program of transitional demands for class political power, against the government, its laws, the Fifth Republic and the EU.

2) This class war needs to be guided by a revolutionary strategy based on a development of the Marxian critique of *political economy*, grasping the current crisis of governmentality as a crisis of the historical domination of the value form, and thus as a transition beyond capitalism towards world communism.

3) Direct mass action is on the order of the day. This will take the form of clashes

23 Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Concept of History*

24 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*

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with the *security* repressive State, non-State, and supra-State apparatuses (including the fascist gangs), the organization of an indefinite, political, General Strike with all its confrontational implications. This will require both the self-organization of the masses in their own organs of struggle for power, beyond the separation of political and “economic”, trade union struggle as well as, in connection with the mass movement, an organization of the most combative, uncompromising, vanguard fighters in a new revolutionary, anti-bureaucratic, internationalist, combat *Party* - and in a new *International*. As there is no “socialism in a single country”, there cannot be a revolutionary communist politics of universal human emancipation in a single country.

We have called the mobilizations in France in March-June 2016 a “French Spring” not just as an echo of the revolutionary process in the Middle East named “Arab Spring” that many opponents and supporters of it, prematurely, consider as ended in a crashing defeat. The Arab Spring and Tahrir as its emblematic battlefield, were a high point of the *first* wave of major confrontations produced by the post 2007 world capitalist crisis. Now the recent French events mark the beginning of a second wave of battles, a “spring of the peoples” in Europe and the entire capitalist world.

The fighters that participated in the French Spring have an insight that what follows goes beyond France itself, beyond capitalist domination and beyond the fetishized “citizens Republic”. Not by accident, those who occupied the Place de la République and initiated *Nuit Debout* have, following the revolutionary traditions of France, changed both the calendar counting the course of time as well as the name of the space, of this central Parisian square: it is no longer called the “Place de la République” but *Place de la Commune!*

The 1871 Paris Commune, despite all its errors and its tragic defeat, was, as Marx pointed out, an offensive against the State in *all* its forms. Marx saw that the workers of Paris had themselves discovered in the *Commune* the form of workers power, the dictatorship of the proletariat, a semi-state in a process of withering away and in transition to the Stateless, classless society of a social humanity emancipated from all chains.

Despite its crushing defeat, the year 1871 of the Paris Commune became, as Andre Breton wrote, the *Arcane 17*: the reversal of the defeat of '71 was the victory of '17- the October 1917 Revolution, considered by the Bolsheviks and all revolutionaries as the first act of the world socialist revolution.

Although the overwhelming predominance of bourgeois “public opinion” considers the world revolution and any reference to it as an antiquated misconception, dead and buried long ago, its specter - their nightmare - returns.

Approaching the centenary of the 1917 October Revolution, the legendary “*song of the Gaulish cockerel*”, as Marx predicted, “*announces the world revolution*”.

Paris, September 3, 2016, or, March 18, 2016