



# Revolutionary Marxism

THEORETICAL - POLITICAL JOURNAL



**Sungur Savran**

**Tamás Krausz**

**Ewa Groszewska**

**Savas Michael-Matsas**

**Christian Rakovsky Center**

**and RedMed**

**Burak Gürel**

**Mustafa Kemal Coşkun**

**Özgür Öztürk**

Trump, Brexit, Le Pen, Erdoğan and going

A new Horthy regime in Hungary

New Polish government

The French Spring

Statement on the world situation

Islamism: A comparative-historical overview

Islamism in Turkey

Collapse of the Soviet Union

*Without revolutionary theory  
there can be no revolutionary movement.*

V. I. Lenin, *What is to be done?*

## **Revolutionary Marxism 2017**

Special annual English edition

[www.devrincimarksizm.net](http://www.devrincimarksizm.net)  
[contact@devrincimarksizm.net](mailto:contact@devrincimarksizm.net)

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*Protesters gather in Tahrir Square on February 1, 2011.  
Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Image*

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## In this issue

*Revolutionary Marxism* is a brand new journal of theory with quite a long history. The irony derives from the fact that this journal is the English edition of a journal that has been published in Turkish for many years. The first issue of the journal *Devrimci Marksizm* was brought out exactly ten years ago. That journal is now planning to publish its issue number 30 next spring. It was really the success and resilience of the Turkish edition that gave the Editorial Board its inspiration to publish an English edition annually. Both journals are based in Istanbul, Turkey, but the English edition, as well as the Turkish one, will collaborate with writers across a broad geography.

The world has entered a very special epoch full of threats as well as revolutionary potential. We at *Revolutionary Marxism* trace the roots of this new epoch to the so-called “global financial crisis”, in other words the financial crash of 2008. That crash brought about one of the deepest and longest economic crises in the history of the capitalist mode of production, the likes of which were called by the name of “great depression” in their own day. After the Great Depression of 1873-1896 and that of the 1930s and 1940s, this is the Third Great Depression in the history of capitalism. We asserted from day one<sup>1</sup> that, as in the earlier great depressions, this crisis was not going to be confined to the economic sphere but, given its deep-going nature, would set in motion a series of socio-political and military earthquakes. In particular, a simultaneous rise of the radical right and of revolutionary upheavals

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<sup>1</sup> See in particular the statement by the Editorial Board, published in the immediate aftermath of the “global financial crisis”, in issue number 8, Winter 2008-2009, of the Turkish edition, significantly titled: “A New Epoch Is Opening Up: Financial Crash, Depression, Class Struggle”.

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was to be expected. No less remarkable would the tendency to ever greater military conflicts be, some so cataclysmic as to possibly grow over into a Third World War.

Those earthquakes are here. We face, in fact, a whole series of tremors of different kinds. All the consequences that we had foreseen back in 2008-2009 have been materialized. First, despite a 29-trillion dollar policy of Quantitative Easing and zero or even negative interest rates that have become the rule for more than eight years now, world trade and foreign direct investment and growth and productivity increase are still below their pre-depression levels, while unemployment and poverty and public debt are on the rise. The growth of the so-called “emerging economies”, in particular of the so-called BRICS countries, is slowing down, taking even more steam out of the world economy. Eight years into the crisis nothing has been achieved. We are, in fact, face to face with a veritable great depression. This depression has already started taking its toll on working populations around the world. The trials and tribulations Greece has been going through as a result of the dynamics the depression has unleashed are harbingers, in fact, of worse to come around the world.

Second, the meteoric rise of a quasi-fascist movement and related phenomena are visible as has never been seen since the 1930s. To the growing strength of openly Nazi movements in Ukraine in the aftermath of the Maidan events and the landslide victory of so-called “right-wing populism” in the European Parliament elections of May 2014 was later added the authoritarian turn of governments almost everywhere, from Hungary and Poland to Russia and from Turkey to the Philippines. 2016 has seen two major political events that have fortified the basis of this trend in world politics: Brexit and the victory of Donald Trump in the US presidential elections.

Third, a different kind of barbarism has been on the rise in the Islamic world. Most prominent is, of course, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which has gone so far as to declare its leader Caliph of all Muslims. This is a movement that displays extremely retrograde ideological and cultural practices alongside its ruthless savagery that causes many lives. However, it has been able to attract recruits from all around the world, including Western countries, where Muslim youth experience extreme poverty, daily violence, including that of the police, and humiliation. The suicide bombings carried out by ISIL and other organizations of the same kind as well as the refugee flow into Europe, the greatest wave since World War II, provoke a further consolidation of the quasi-fascist movement, which then feeds into a further strengthening of the Islamists.

Fourth, all this barbarism is nonetheless not a one-sided development. It has been accompanied by, at the other pole, the rise of revolutions and revolts and rebellions in many countries and continents, from the Arab world to the US, with its Occupy Wall Street moment, from Spain and Greece to Israel in the summer of 2011, from Turkey and Brazil in 2013 to a plethora of Balkan countries such as Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina around roughly the same time, and from the impressive workers’ struggles in France against the Labour

Law to the millions of South Koreans mobilized in 2016. There has also been a remarkable change of atmosphere in the political sphere in the more strict sense of the term in the advanced world: the rise of Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, as well as the strange phenomenon of Bernie Sanders in the US, with a similar development in the UK in the person of Jeremy Corbyn. Finally, in a category of its own, the Argentine Front of the Left and of Workers (FIT in its Spanish acronym) provides an example of the rebirth and rejuvenation of revolutionary Marxism as a hegemonic force within the working class movement and is possibly, for the moment, the movement with the highest promise around the globe.

Last but certainly not the least, wars have been ravaging many parts of the world from Ukraine to Libya, but the neuralgic centre lies of course in the Middle East, where three wars are now raging simultaneously in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, threatening to turn these into a conflagration at the scale of the entire Middle East. The war in Syria has now, for some time, been posing the prospect of a world war. Threats also exist of war breaking out in the periphery of Russia and in the South China Sea, as well as the ever present danger in Africa. The sooner the left discards its platonic love for pacifism and recollects the views of Marxism on questions of war and peace, the easier will it be to salvage the most one can from the rubble.

This first issue of *Revolutionary Marxism* provides glances at the different facets of this new epoch that we are going through, appealing in the process to the left and the international working class movement to move in directions that will spare humanity, in particular the working masses and the oppressed, from further pain and toil in the near future.

Sungur Savran stresses the systemic nature of the rise of the likes of Donald Trump and lays the blame for his victory, as well as those of the other retrograde tendencies that appear around Europe, on the callousness of the left in the face of the poverty and misery of the working population around the globe, including the richest countries. By adopting a discourse that derives from identity politics, the left has simply become oblivious to the problems and sensibilities of the working class and thereby abandoned it to the quasi-fascist movement that has been waiting in the wings.

Tamás Krausz is a Hungarian Marxist who has recently won the Isaac Deutscher award for his book on Lenin. He was a Marxist oppositionist under the so-called “socialist” period. He is now one of the editors of the most important left-wing journal of the country *Eszmélet*. Here he discusses the more and more authoritarian government of Victor Orbán in his own country in the context of the return of the practices of an earlier repressive regime in Hungary, that of Miklós Horthy from the interwar period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The present situation in Hungary and Turkey are somewhat similar, not only because parallels exist between Orbán and Erdoğan, but also because the parties in power, Fidesz and the AKP, are flanked by smaller parties that come from a more authentically fascist tradition, Jobbik and the MHP.

Ewa Groszewska is a Polish sociologist from Wrocław who is active in the



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socialist and feminist movements. In an article written for *Revolutionary Marxism*, she takes up the quite recently established Polish government of PiS. She points out that, as against the Europeanist and neoliberal orientation of the social democratic party, the PiS stands for the more particular interests of sections of the Polish bourgeoisie, which explains the new orientation this government represents in terms of a rejection of neoliberalism. However, Groszewska points out, this rejection of full support for the market and the adoption of partial initiatives to revive an almost non-existent social policy since the restoration of capitalism in Poland do not imply that PiS is pro-worker. On the contrary, the policy of the government is to strike at the left first and settle its own accounts with the Europeanist wing of the bourgeoisie later.

If the first three articles dwell more on the retrograde tendencies of our epoch, the fourth turns to the more positive element within the current situation. In a groundbreaking account of the French strike movement against the Labour Law that lasted from early spring all the way into the summer and was briefly revived in September this year, Savas Michael-Matsas, Greek Marxist and leader of the Workers Revolutionary Party (EEK), situates this French phenomenon within the Third Great Depression, the European crisis, and the series of upheavals that both European and other countries have experienced since 2011. Michael-Matsas dwells on the originalities of the *Nuit Debout* movement and rejects the facile manner in which some socialists have dismissed the potentialities of that movement. Yet what characterizes the French movement in opposition to many social movements around the world in the last five years is, in the eyes of Michael-Matsas, the fact of the hegemony of the working class.

The next piece is a document from end 2015. It is a political statement jointly written by two institutions. The Balkan Socialist Centre Christian Rakovsky was established around the Kosovo war on Yugoslavia in 1999 and has since organized many conferences, taking up questions relating specifically to the Balkans. RedMed (short for Red Mediterranean), on the other hand, is of much more recent vintage. Its roots lie in the Arab revolutions of 2011 and convulsions in other parts of the legendary *More Nostrum*. In this statement, the two centres come forth with a powerful use of the Marxist analysis to understand the situation both in Europe and in the Middle East. Having been written at the end of 2015, the text is naturally not entirely up to date, but nonetheless quite prescient in its predictions. This statement should be read as an analysis of the more structural elements of the world situation. The articles by Sungur Savran, Savas Matsas and Burak Gürel bring the situation up to date.

Islamism has been a constant in the life of the Middle East and North Africa, especially since the Iranian revolution and the sending of Soviet troops to Afghanistan, both in 1979. The topic is treated in two different articles in this issue.

Burak Gürel provides a comparative and historical analysis of the Islamist movements and regimes since the 1960s. Gürel defines Islamism as the political

expression of the Islamist bourgeoisie's quest to become the dominant class by establishing hegemony over the proletariat. Gürel demonstrates that the crisis of the secular regimes that started in the mid-1960s, and of radical leftist movements some what later, provided the background to the rise of Islamist movements of various types. While Islamists successfully established hegemony over the proletariat and took power with a revolution in Iran, they lost their hegemony and the struggle for power in Algeria in the 1990s. Islamists have recently entered into a new struggle for political power in countries like Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Syria in the wake of the Arab Spring. Gürel argues that by simultaneously adjusting to neoliberalism and establishing hegemony over the proletariat since coming to power in late 2002, the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) in Turkey has come a long way in terms of the Islamization of the state and society. Finally, Gürel draws readers' attention to a series of recent developments in the region indicating that the future prospects for the Islamist movements and governments are far from certain.

Mustafa Kemal Coşkun, on the other hand, contends that in Turkey Islamism is nourished more by the conception of Islam represented by fraternities and communities rather than high Islam or popular Islam. According to the author, the Islam offered by fraternities and communities wields a social base that is narrower. This social base is mostly composed of petty tradesmen, artisans, and owners of small and medium enterprises. In Turkey Islamism and Islamic movements emerge as a result of this class composition. This is so because communities and fraternities have organized together with the small and medium scale bourgeoisie through a thick web of networks. According to the author the importance of all this lies in the fact that Islamism is articulated to conservatism, nationalism, or liberalism, whenever the interests of the classes in question require this.

On 26 December 1991, after several months of gestation, the Soviet Union was no more. A quarter of a century has gone by since the mighty state established by the October revolution, the greatest socialist revolution of history, was dissolved into its constituent republics and concomitantly collapsed as a workers' state. *Revolutionary Marxism* is successor to a political-theoretical tradition that has always been critical of the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union and the other post-revolutionary societies, but has nonetheless also defended them against imperialism and capitalism, regarding them as workers' states, albeit blocked in their transition to socialism. We believe that future socialism has an immense amount to learn from this experience, both in the economic and the political spheres.

The last article in this issue addresses precisely this problem. Özgür Öztürk takes up the economic background of the collapse of socialist construction in the Soviet Union. Öztürk criticizes certain widespread fallacies, especially those that reduce the collapse to a consequence of simple mistakes on the part of the leadership or those that regard the Soviet Union as a capitalist society, albeit with its peculiarities. He then moves to explain the collapse in materialist terms, putting the blame on

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the fact that the Soviet Union was not able to establish the relations of production in a way that would make it possible to increase labour productivity sufficiently. According to Öztürk, given the nature of the society and the state, the real way out lay in internationalism and the world revolution, which never came on the agenda after the hold of the bureaucracy was established on the first workers' state.

The year 2017 is, happily, the centenary of the great October revolution, a revolution in which the working class was itself the fundamental social actor. We hope to take up different facets of this revolution and its meaning for the future of humanity in the next issue of *Revolutionary Marxism*.

# **The great challenge: winning the working class back from ideological irredentism**

## **Twenty theses on Trump, Brexit, Front National, Erdoğan and other marvels**

Sungur Savran

1. The election of Donald Trump to the most powerful political post of world capitalism was greeted with surprise by the majority of so-called pundits. These people attribute more importance to public opinion polls than the analysis of socio-economic and political forces that shape a certain epoch. Those who echo them on the socialist left are paying the price for having abandoned the method and historical insight of Marxism. I am not saying that the victory of Trump was inevitable. What I am saying is that, whatever the fleeting results of public opinion polls said before the US elections, it was really strange to think that Trump's defeat was a foregone conclusion in the epoch of Brexit and the rise of the Front National in France. The character of the phase of the history of capitalism we are going through determines

national developments in roundabout and devious ways. Although Trump is a maverick and a novice in the political world of Washington D.C., his trajectory is already locked in with the overall nature of the epoch of the world capitalist system. Trump's victory cannot be assessed on the basis of an analysis of American matters alone in isolation from the dominant tendencies displayed by world capitalism. This is the basic methodological criticism we have of all those who isolate his victory from what is happening in the rest of the world and consequently take his victory lightly, engaging in speculation whether he will, once elected, move to the centre and "normalise". Even worse is the position of those who treat Trump as just another bourgeois politician, perhaps a bit excessive in his language, but nonetheless simply another representative of the bourgeois class and of US imperialism. Whatever the fortune of the Trump presidency, his victory has brought out into the open the power of an extremely reactionary political orientation in the camp of the international bourgeoisie. **The Trump victory is not a specifically American phenomenon, but a clear sign of the barbaric tendencies of world capitalism at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.**

2. Of course, it would be unfair to claim that either bourgeois thinking or representatives of the socialist left are oblivious to the rise of a new reactionary trend in world politics. No sane person can ignore the close affinity between the victory of Trump and the role of UKIP in the Brexit affair. There is constant widespread reference to the possible sequel to the Trump victory in Europe in the course of 2017. There are elections of immense importance in France in April-May of next year and in Germany in the fall, where the power of the Front National under Marine Le Pen and the newly rising Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) will be tested. An even earlier test will be played out in the Netherlands with the Party of Freedom led by Geert Wilders billed to come in first. In Austria the namesake of the Dutch party (FPÖ) has recently seen its hope to place its candidate in the seat of president fail by a slight margin. Sister parties of these three abound all over Europe. Nigel Farage, the *eminence grise* of UKIP in Britain, is enamoured with Donald Trump. Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Belgium, Italy, Hungary, Slovakia, Greece, to mention only the more salient cases, each has its own version of this new current in European politics. The several movements in Ukraine, as well as those in Hungary and Greece, do not refrain from using openly Nazi symbols. On a different key, the governments of Vladimir Putin in Russia, Victor Orban in Hungary and the newly elected PiS government in Poland play havoc with the democratic gains of the peoples of those countries.

Europe is not the only continent to turn its face towards this kind of reaction. Asia has its rising stars. From Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey to Narendra Modi on the Indian subcontinent all the way to Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Asia has displayed a tendency to bring forth a brand of leader akin to Donald Trump in style if not in substance. The Middle East is rife with another type of barbaric

movement: the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Al Nusra Front bear certain common traits with these political currents, but the phenomenon of Islamic radicalism also bears characteristics so peculiarly tied with the historical specificities of the Muslim world that it would take us too far away from the major theme of this article to try to incorporate those movements in our discussion here. Other movements in the Middle East or in Africa that either claim allegiance or carry out actions similar to ISIL will also be left out of this discussion.

We are, then, face to face with a most important phenomenon of truly international dimensions. **Understanding this new reactionary current in world politics and the ways of fighting it is the single most important task of the socialist movement at this stage of development.**

**A rose by any other name would smell as sweet...  
but fascism stinks!**

3. The light-minded attitude of political commentators regarding these currents almost reduces the phenomenon to a banality. The appellations used are symptomatic: “populism”, “extreme right” or “far right”, “racism” or even plain “nationalism” somehow seem adequate as labels to characterise these movements, especially those in Europe. To go over these quickly, “populism” is a tired term used to denote movements extending across the entire political spectrum, bringing together sometimes movements at antipodes with each other, from very progressive to extremely reactionary. Racism is a structural characteristic of imperialist countries in particular and very relevant to the strategy of these currents. However, there are a million shades of racism. Moreover, the fact that racism plays an important part in the strategy of these movements does not mean that it is the essence of their being, their *raison d’être*, so to speak. As we shall see below, racism is in fact a strategic tool used by these movements to create a particular perception regarding the present state of things in the masses of the working population in order to dominate them all the more surely. To draw attention exclusively to the racist nature of these movements thus hides from view the real goal they pursue. If the label “racist” is too general to bring out the *differentia specifica* of these currents, the appellation “extreme right” is even more abstract and loose to pinpoint their concrete characteristics.

All of these and similar labels suppress and hide from view the historical ties of at least the European parties in question to fascism. Of course, the category “neo-fascist” is sometimes used, but it is notable that of late this label has fallen into disuse. It seems as if the closer these parties come to taking power, the less willing commentators are to indicate their historical affinity to fascism. And in a perverse kind of way, the avoidance of the epithet fascist gives rise to abusive recourse to this same concept in cases where this label obscures more than it sheds light on the relevant phenomena. Since any discussion of fascism has been shunned and its usage avoided where it may have been relevant, the concept “fascism” becomes

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vulnerable to being considered a catch-all category and extended to unjustified areas – “Islamic fascism” applied to movements such as ISIL explains nothing and reduces fascism to state repression independent both of class relations and of state forms.

It may be concluded that **all of the appellations commonly used to denote the movements under scrutiny attribute primacy to consequences rather than causes.**

4. To understand why, let us try to see what really forms the essence and the fundamental goal of these movements. For that, we need to go back to the plain language of class analysis, capitalism and its modern avatar, imperialism. At least in three instances, the connection of these movements to the plight of the working class is clear. Donald Trump’s victory was predicated on the support he received from the former industrial heartland of America, what is now called the “rustbelt”, extending from western Ohio through Michigan, Illinois and Wisconsin, all the way to eastern Iowa. Brexit was fundamentally a result of the reaction of a powerful trend within the British working class against so-called “globalisation”. And in the case of the Front National in France, the more recent stronghold of the party within the entrenched proletarian region of the north (as opposed to the old constituency of southern France) preys upon the discontent of the working class vis-a-vis establishment politics. These clear cases of working class support for anti-globalist policies provide for us the clue to the essence of the phenomenon. The miserable conditions created by the specific path of capitalist development of the recent decades within the proletariat of the advanced capitalist countries have been exploited by this new current to **divert their attention from class issues towards issues of race and culture.** The solutions proposed by the ilk of the Trumps and the Le Pens are nothing but barbaric ruling class solutions to real problems of oppression and exploitation couched in terms of a challenge to well-entrenched elitist forms of domination by the globalist establishment (represented by the likes of the Clintons in the US and the two main parties of the centre-right and the centre-left in France that Marine Le Pen constantly twins together). **The essence of the new politics is to pit oppressed against oppressed to provide imaginary solutions to one section of the oppressed,** in this case the white European and American against the rest. **Hence racism and anti-globalism are derivative of a project built around a class issue.**

5. The new current carries out this whole operation on the basis of formerly existing ideological-cultural-religious values and practices that were dominant within the mainstream working class culture in the previous “golden period” (the long boom or the “*trente glorieuses*”) before a whole period of multi-culturalism served in a progressive sauce effected a certain erosion on those values and practices. That is why the discourse of these new movements, starting with that of Trump, is thoroughly racist, Islamophobic, “populist”, male chauvinistic, homophobic etc.

For the same reason “politically correct” is out and foul-mouthed political talk is in. This is what I propose to call **ideological irredentism**. In its original usage, irredentism refers to a political programme of reclaiming territory that, for real or imaginary reasons that hark back to some distant or recent past, is supposed to belong to a certain nation or religion. By analogy, I define as ideological irredentism the attempt to resuscitate values and practices that were the basis of socio-economic, political, cultural, religious etc. life in a certain period in the past that, for real or imagined reasons, is considered to be a “golden age” when compared to the bleak and miserable present.

6. As in all ideological programmes that are supposed to form the cement that ties disparate classes and strata together under a certain leadership, **the ideological irredentism of the new period is rid with contradictions both domestically in the case of each single leadership and internationally between the adherents to this overall movement**. These contradictions are variegated and need to be explored in depth, if only to attack the weaknesses of this reactionary movement. Here I will limit my remarks to some selected instances in order to give the reader an idea. Take male-chauvinism for instance. It is on the basis of the observation of Trump’s discourse that I have included this in the list above of values and practices that come to the fore in the programme of the new current. Things are not so simple, however, at least in Europe. There, the needs of the wholesale attack on Muslim refugees as alien to European culture requires, at least to a certain extent, owning up some values of the modern women’s movement. The storm that erupted in Germany around New Year’s festivities, when youngsters suspiciously looking foreign harassed or raped young German women, is emblematic. Even Trump is faced with the same predicament when he characterises Mexicans as “rapists”, among other things. That is only one instance of the contradictions that exist at the domestic level. Internationally, the explosive potential of the conflict is even clearer. Both the mullahs of Iran and the spokesmen of Tayyip Erdoğan’s AKP speak for Islam, but their sectarian self-centredness pits Shia against Sunni, thereby threatening to do more harm to Islam than to others. While the Erdoğan regime in Turkey is bending social mores increasingly towards compliance with Islam, thus suppressing for instance the consumption of alcoholic drinks in a thinly disguised manner, Narendra Modi’s India does the same according to Hindu creeds. The Turkish Islamist zealot will “punish” anyone in the provincial backwaters of Anatolia who does not fast during Ramadan, but will revolt in anger if told that Hindus kill Muslims in Modi’s India because they consume beef! All of this brings us face to face with one aspect of the reactionary, even barbaric, nature of this new current: even independent of its impact on class relations, ideological irredentism divides and pits nation against nation, ethnic group against ethnic group, gender against gender, and worker against worker.



**7. The new current shares many characteristics with classical fascism or Nazism.** Racism, homophobia, the eulogising of a certain nation or religious community (yesterday the Aryan race, today the *umma*, for instance), the idea that white people or Muslims or Hindus are superior to others, so far implicit in many cases but becoming more explicit by the day, the unpronounced but very real assumption that some races or nations are inferior by their very nature are characteristics that are hallmarks of all kinds of fascism. So is the articulation of questions of class, on the one hand, and race/nation/religion, on the other, which lies at the very heart of this whole project: classical fascism or Nazism was precisely a ruling class project that set out to harness the revolt within the masses against the conditions created by a senile capitalism that promised nearly nothing to the poorer strata of society to a barbaric cause. The anti-intellectualism that is shared by many of these movements (from Trump to Erdoğan) is also a very salient trait, especially in the Nazi variant if not in Italian fascism. However, some decisive properties that are to be found in classical fascism are absent in these new movements. **The most important political difference between these movements and classical fascism is the absence of paramilitary forces**, which played such a prominent role in the rise to power of both Mussolini (the *squadristi*) and Hitler (the SS and the SA). To some readers, this may seem to be a minor difference. If, it might be argued, the party in question is able to rise to power through purely political channels, what importance should be attributed to the absence or otherwise of carefully organised paramilitary bands or hordes of thugs? There are several reasons why a paramilitary wing is of the essence of fascism and not only any other instrument in the taking of power.

First of all, fascism, at least in its classical variant, is not an ordinary bourgeois or petty-bourgeois political movement that takes power without any serious upheaval and maintains its rule without solution of continuity. Like communism that looks to revolution in order to take power, fascism also relies on a rupture, a break in the political system. It is a special type of counterrevolution. Paramilitary troops act as the battering ram of this counterrevolution. Secondly, if a fascist movement were to take power without a paramilitary force of its own, it would have to rely totally on the armed forces and the police of the existing state apparatus. This would curtail the power of the fascist party or movement since a parallel armed structure of its own would endow a fascist government with a source of strength that would counterbalance or even overpower the weight of the traditional repressive forces of the state. Thirdly, and most importantly, paramilitary troops are but the incarnation of a class relationship that fascism represents. Fascism in its classical variant is the destruction of all the centres of resistance on the part of the working class through the counter-mobilisation of the petty bourgeoisie, the lumpen proletariat, and sections of the unemployed in the service of the ailing capitalist system. The petty bourgeoisie being the class that is in a certain sense atomised, fragmented,

*parcellaire* to use the French term, with little proclivity towards organising, the paramilitary wing of the movement is also the locus of organisation of petty bourgeois reaction to the struggle of the proletariat. All in all, paramilitary activity is much more than a simple military ploy and acts to change the balance of forces between other social and political forces and the fascist camp.

**So there are adequate reasons to refrain from labelling the present movements as fascist.** However, this certainly is not true for some of the European movements, including Golden Dawn in Greece, *Jobbik* in Hungary, and the *Privat Sektor* in Ukraine, to cite but the most salient instances. These are fascist movements through and through, with a paramilitary base for power, using Nazi salutes and symbols, explicitly referring to classical fascism as their forbears.

8. This does not mean that mainstream commentators and a wide spectrum of socialists are right in their insipid terminology of “populism” or “racism” or “far right”. This attitude simply refuses to recognise the fundamental objective of these movements: what is at stake here is an alternative to class struggle as the solution to the problems faced by the working class, an alternative that takes the form of a reactionary ideology based on racism and the rest. Ideological irredentism has as its goal the suppression of workers’ struggles against capital by substituting for it a struggle between the different components of those same working masses. This is precisely the strategy of classical fascism when faced with the dire situation born of the Great Depression of the 1930s. Hence the extremely reactionary movements in question are bearers of a potential fascism. They are movements that may readily turn into full-fledged fascist current when necessary and possible. They are prefigurations of a 21<sup>st</sup> century fascism. For this reason, **the most apt label for these movements, in our opinion, is “proto-fascist”.**

### **The root cause of the rise of proto-fascism: the Third Great Depression**

9. The deep economic crisis that set in as a result of the so-called “global financial crisis” of 2008 (2007 in the United States) has been taken up in the most demagogic form possible by the international financial establishment and the most unsatisfactory way by the left. The expression “Great Recession” coined by the then head of the IMF, Dominique Strauss-Kahn had the express goal of ruling out any use of the concept “depression” by conceding on the unimportant part of the expression “great depression”, i.e. the adjective “great”! “Great Recession” is manifestly nonsensical. The term “recession” has been used for decades now to denote a fall in GDP (for at least two quarters, as the convention goes). However, the phenomenon described by the so-called “Great Recession” in no way implies a continuous contraction of GDP over a long period of time. The question (no longer relevant) of whether there would have been a “double dip”, very commonly discussed during the first few years after crisis set in, itself is elegant testimony that we are really not

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talking “recession”, for in order to be able to talk about a “double dip”, recovery from recession must be assumed! In short, the terminology “Great Recession” was intended to bar the way to the D-word! This is precisely the character of the period we have been going through since 2008. This is the Third Great Depression in the history of capitalism.

The concept “Great Depression” does not refer to a specific set of macroeconomic indicators, but to a general state of capitalist accumulation. This is a situation where due to the tendential fall in the general rate of profit, there comes into being a situation of the overaccumulation of capital, with the urge to invest on the part of the capitalist class having been reduced infinitely when compared with the preceding boom. Great depressions are long and extremely painful. The hallmark of great depressions is that accumulation is unable to recover through the readjustment of market signals and processes. The situation is such that a radically new balance of class forces and a deep-going re-ordering of state intervention are needed. Hence depressions immediately set in motion, at the domestic level, a radical questioning of both the class relation of forces and the political and ideological currents pertaining to these relations and, in the inter-state sphere, a struggle over the shrinking world economy including aggravation of tensions and possibility of war.

The First Great Depression was overcome through the restructuring of the whole economy and the state in advanced capitalism to pass over into what was later called “imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism”. The Second Great Depression was superseded through the rise of fascism and Japanese militarism and a new world war. The Third Great Depression also requires tremendous upheaval and restructuring. **Proto-fascism and other barbaric/reactionary movements are products of these pressures engendered by the Third Great Depression.** So is the war in Syria bordering on the Third World War.

This is no coincidence. **These barbaric tendencies are but the expression of the historic limits of the capitalist mode of production.** These limits do not express themselves in linear and uninterrupted decline but in the aggravations of periodic crises, themselves a structural characteristic of the capitalist mode of production.

**10.** As in the previous great depression of the 1930s, the Third Great Depression has also given rise to contradictory tendencies. The collapse of political stability, an upheaval in the political order, and the growth of political movements at the two extremes of the political spectrum are the typical results of a great depression. **The Third Great Depression has given way not only to the rising trend of ideological irredentism and the proto-fascist movements, but has also whipped up mass social unrest that ranges from powerful strike movements through popular rebellions to revolutions.** Even if one does not count the 2008 December uprising in Greece as a specific product of the depression, the list of cases of mass

unrest and of countries that have acted as host to these is long. The Arab revolutions between 2011 and 2013 were of course the cutting edge of this tendency, leading to political revolutions that were initially successful in Tunisia and Egypt, involved extended struggles in Bahrain, Yemen, and Syria (strictly speaking, in this latter country only during the initial period that extends from 15 March 2011 to the end of that year, the process then degenerating under foreign intervention into sectarian war, the only exception being the birth of Rojava, an autonomous Kurdish entity in northern Syria, in summer 2012), and had repercussions in Morocco, Jordan, and even Saudi Arabia.

These then had echoes on other shores of the Mediterranean, first and foremost in Spain (the *indignados* movement) and Greece, where the struggle against the infamous Troika went through several stages, involving close to a score general strikes, the occupation of Syntagma square in Athens in response to what was happening in Spain and the spectacular “Oxi” in the referendum during the summer of 2015. One should not neglect the camp in Tel Aviv in the same summer of 2011, which focused on the social question. What completed the picture in turning the Mediterranean region into what we have called Red Mediterranean was the popular rebellion in Turkey that started in early June 2013 in the wake of the Gezi events, a revolt that extended across practically the whole country and lasted throughout the summer. There were also important struggles going on in the Balkans during this period, in Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia etc., with its peak in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2014, which clearly stood out as a workers’ revolt exclusively focused on the social question in a country burdened with ugly struggles between its component nations.

Parallel to this fermentation on the three shores of the Mediterranean, great movements erupted in other countries of the world. The two notable examples came from the Americas. The Occupy Wall Street movement erupted in the fall of that magnificent 2011 and spread to around 50 localities in the United States. Although the movement was not massive, it nonetheless achieved the remarkable feat of putting the question of class on the agenda in a country long infatuated with questions of identity politics and provided ammunition for the protest movements of other countries by its rhetoric of 1 per cent enriching itself at the expense of the 99 per cent. The other explosion came in Brazil in the summer of 2013 in reaction to the rise in municipal bus fares and with demands for an increase in social spending in lieu of the prestige projects of the football world cup in 2014 and the Olympic games of 2016. 700 cities joined the movement. The summer of 2013 was in a certain sense the pinnacle of the mass uprisings that had been rocking the world since the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions in 2011. Egypt, Turkey and Brazil simultaneously witnessed gigantic mass movements in the month of June. It is true that in all three cases the end result was total disappointment. Egypt quickly fell prey to the Bonapartist rule of its military leader al Sisi. Turkey went through

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a convoluted process during which its strongman Tayyip Erdoğan came close to being ousted four times only to be saved by his erstwhile opponents at the last moment. The country now pays the price of such choices by a painful process of rising repression. Brazil later changed tack, whereby it was not the mass of the people but their enemies that brought the PT government down.

The revolutionary élan that started in 2011 was gradually replaced by a rise of the left in parliamentary politics. One after another Syriza (which betrayed its mandate from the people immediately after it came to power), Jeremy Corbyn, the new Labour leader in Britain, Bernie Sanders in the US presidential primaries, Podemos, a direct product of the *indignados* movement of 2011, and the electoral rise of the United Left in Portugal and Sinn Féin in Ireland expressed this tendency of increasing protest by the electorate in advanced countries. A similar, but fundamentally different experience was that which emerged in Argentina with the formation of the Left Front (the FIT) in Argentina, a coalition of three revolutionary Marxist parties that was successful not only in the polls but also in leading day to day struggles of the working class.

Hence one should shun a one-sided alarmist view of the state of things in the world at this moment. It is true that ideological irredentism and proto-fascism momentarily have the upper hand, but there is no telling whether the masses will opt, in this country or continent or that, for rebellion or revolution in the not too distant future.

## Specificity of the Third Great Depression

11. The trajectory of this two-edged upheaval has been shaped in its more peculiar details by the specificities of the Third Great Depression and the historical environment into which it was born. Two specificities of the present depression stand out.

Previous great depressions opened with financial crashes, those of 1873 and 1929. In fact, it was these financial crashes that triggered the depression in those two cases. This meant, at the same time, that the first two great depressions were immediately preceded by long booms each. In other words, these were cases of boom and bust without an intermediary period. **The Third Great Depression, on the other hand, was preceded not by a long boom, but by a three-decade long period of sluggish growth.** In other words, between the long boom of 1945-1975 and the financial crash of 2008 that triggered the Third Great Depression, there lies a period of a long-drawn out span of slow growth, a thirty-year crisis, which did not turn into a great depression for a long while. Now, in response to this long period of sluggish growth, the international capitalist class staged an assault on the international working class and other labouring strata. This is the notorious period of neoliberalism and globalism. The most significant consequence of this

for the purposes of the present discussion has been the following: **working masses entered the period of the great depression under dire economic conditions resulting from three decades of impoverishment and precarisation. Hence the contradictions that were inevitable under conditions of great depression were raised to a power.**

This in fact is what explains the specific trajectory of the proto-fascist current over the decades. Earlier, before the thirty-year crisis set in, the existence of such movements was confined to one or two countries. France stood out by the success of its Front National under the leadership of Jean-Marie Le Pen, the father of today's Marine Le Pen, as early as the 1980s, when the impact of neoliberalism and globalism had not yet been felt by the French masses. But as the effects of the neoliberal strategy of the capitalist class made themselves felt, the Front National gained in strength and finally Le Pen qualified for the second tour of the presidential election of 2002 (but lost). It was in the course of these thirty years of creeping precarisation and impoverishment that the different countries of Europe saw their own home-bred fascist or proto-fascist movement rise. However, nothing makes the cause and effect relationship between the great depression and the rise of proto-fascism clearer than the spread of the movement all over Europe like wildfire over the last several years and the increasing success at the polls of many of these movements. The European Parliament elections in May 2014 were a turning point in that the movement succeeded to obtain impressive results simultaneously in all the countries where it was present within the European Union.

Thus Europe and America entered the Third Great Depression already saddled with strong tensions accumulated over the three previous decades.

12. The second specificity of the Third Great Depression was the uneven development between the imperialist countries and “emerging markets”. Even after the so-called “global financial crisis” set in, emerging markets, first and foremost but not exclusively the BRICS, grew at what may even be considered to be galloping rates even though stagnation reigned in the advanced countries. This was what led to the famous “decoupling” thesis. It is true that in the Great Depression of the 1930s as well, developing countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Turkey, Egypt etc. had respectable rates of growth, mostly thanks to the *dirigiste* economic policies pursued by their nationalist-oriented governments, ranging across the political spectrum from Vargas in Brazil to Cárdenas in Mexico and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Turkey. However, despite this deceptive similarity, it should not be forgotten that the share of these developing countries was then miniscule in the overall world economy. By contrast, “emerging markets” have now surpassed the share of the imperialist countries in world production. When this is coupled with high rates of growth for these countries with extremely weak figures for the advanced economies, their contribution to world growth is even greater. Hence in a certain sense, the world economy has been buoyed by the successful performance of “emerging



markets”. This had the result of giving the present Great Depression an **extremely protracted form**. Of late, though, there have been clear signs of exhaustion in the growth rate of “emerging markets” as well, including in the powerhouse of the last several decades, China. **Thus the Third Great Depression promises to deepen. This will only whip up the conflicting tendencies of rebellion and revolution, on the one hand, and of barbaric reaction, on the other.**

### **Specificity of the historic climate: collapse of the workers’ states**

13. The last several decades has seen obsessive concentration by Marxists and socialists in general on new forms of the development of capitalism: “post-Fordism”, “globalisation”, “financialisation”, flexibilisation, mass customisation, “the end of capitalism as we knew it” etc. took front stage. A much more decisive development languished in total neglect by the great majority on the left: the collapse of the experience of socialist construction, or, in other words, **the demise of the bureaucratically degenerated workers’ states in Eastern and Central Europe and in the Soviet Union and the transformation from within in China, bringing about the restoration of capitalism**. Under Raúl Castro Cuba is waiting to join the same route. It is these developments that are of **world-historical, veritably epoch-making importance**.

We cannot enter here into a discussion on the process that finally ended in this downfall. But discuss the consequences we must. The collapse of these degenerated workers’ states has led to a variety of consequences, all with a bearing on our present topic:

1) It has opened hundreds of millions of workers in these territories, on the whole a very well-educated workforce, to the exploitation of both international and newly-formed domestic capital, with the concomitant increase in **competition among workers of these countries and those of the capitalist countries**, contributing to the success of the neoliberal-cum-globalist assault of the international bourgeoisie.

2) It has led to a loss of confidence in collectivist solutions within the ranks of the international working class, left-wing movements, trade unions etc. as a result of the historic defeat of the gains of the October revolution and other revolutions that occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The period since the collapse of the workers’ states has been **a historic trough for Marxism** and its programme. Never since the publication of the Communist Manifesto has Marxism undergone such an erosion of its fundamental ideas within the left and the mass movement. Obviously this has dealt a further blow to the international political left, already somewhat in crisis since the ebb of the high tide of the 1968 period.

3) It has opened up **a full-fledged crisis of the so-called “communist” movement**, formed in the wake of the foundation of the Communist International in 1919, but mutated into an outgrowth of the Soviet bureaucracy over time to finally

enter a stage of senility and metamorphosis into a new kind of social democracy under so-called Euro-communism. The crisis that struck this powerful network of working class parties around the world acted as a double-edged sword. On one hand, the movement is finally freeing itself, through what has turned out to be an immensely painful and protracted process, of the dogmas and reactionary politics of Stalinism. On other hand, mass working class parties have been losing all appeal for the working class and undergoing a greenish and sheepish process of transformation into toothless extensions of the established order.

### Post-Leninism

14. All these factors have concurred to produce a turn to liberalism and identity politics on the international left. **In the imperialist countries, there has been an increasing adaptation to the liberal agenda. Class politics has been abandoned in favour of an insistence on identities**, themselves divided into further subcategories in a process of *reductio ad absurdum*. The major political platform has been geared towards feminism, gay politics (of course pulverised into LGBTi and going), environmentalism, anti-war activity with pacifist overtones. The only common trait between the different trends has been the denial of the importance of class and class struggle. Concomitantly, working class organising has been abandoned. The question of duties with respect to countries oppressed by imperialism has been reduced to defence of human rights and solidarity with refugees. I am definitely not saying that all this is without value. On the contrary, the struggle for the rights of all the oppressed groups is indispensable. What I am saying is that whereas even the worst Stalinist party (and the same could be said of social democratic parties up to a certain stage of their assimilation into bourgeois society, the date varying from country to country) had a central orientation to the working class and tried to tie in the entire gamut of its policies with that class, the last quarter of a century has seen these formerly working class parties fleeing from that class like the devil.

Furthermore, in Europe, sequels to the parties of the former “communist” movement have become appendages of the EU, covering from the left the neoliberal policies of the social democratic parties when they do not take centre stage themselves to implement such policies (cf. Syriza).

This whole “escape from class”, to use an apt phrase coined by the late Ellen Meiksins Wood, was all the more ironic since the quarter of century that has extended from the dissolution and collapse of the Soviet state to our day has also been a period in which the most protracted assault on the gains and rights of the working class in the history of capitalism was being acted out! The classical fascism of the 1930s was of course a more brutal and violent assault on the working class than neoliberalism. But with the notable exception of Italy, its supremacy lasted no longer than a decade, spanning from the rise to power of Hitler in 1933 to the



Stalingrad debacle of the Reichswehr in 1943. Neoliberalism, on the other hand, has used much more “democratic” methods to attack the working class, but has been supreme in the Anglo-Saxon universe for close to three decades and the rest of the world for a quarter of a century. One cannot but think of the legendary fable of Jean de la Fontaine, where, in opposition to the ant who works the summer long, the grasshopper bides its time away singing and making merry throughout the summer to find itself helpless when autumn hits!

**15. In countries dominated and oppressed by imperialism, the left has been characterised, since the early 1980s by a “modernising” ideology of market reforms, an obsessive fixation on human rights, a full-scale integration with imperialist structures, and, in the case of the countries of the Mediterranean and Africa, on the one hand, and of the so-called “transitional” countries of central and eastern Europe, including the former Soviet republics of the Black Sea region and Transcaucasia, an unadulterated adulation of the EU as a model of democracy, peace and fraternity among nations.**

**Anti-imperialism is definitely out of fashion.** It is immediately identified with nationalism and rejected in the name of an abstract cosmopolitanism that is totally divorced from proletarian internationalism, whose days, *dixit* Hardt and Negri, are deemed to be over. Since the advent of democracy is expected from so-called globalisation (an area where many a theoretical head has been broken!), opposition to imperialist countries is regarded as anathema. The investment of the hopes of the left in at first the European Court of Human Rights and later the European Parliament, have now been extended to the European Commission itself and finally ended up in the left bowing to, of all forces in the world, NATO! There are many instances of large sections of the international socialist left siding with NATO, starting from the onslaught on Yugoslavia in the Kosovo war of 1999 and extending all the way to the pitiful support given to the Ukraine darling of the EU and NATO since the coup d’Etat that followed the Maidan events.

**16. I propose to call this whole family of movements extending from the former “communist” parties all the way to some that find their origin in the Trotskyist movement “post-Leninist”,** for reasons I cannot go into here. Suffice it to say that for the “respectable” left dominated by the petty-bourgeois intelligentsia and what I would call the professoriat, in Europe in particular, an intelligentsia that has to make a living at universities or the art world of biennales and galleries and museums and advertising companies, Marx can still be romanticised as a critic of soulless capitalism and commodity fetishism and the theoretician of “all that is solid melts into thin air”, but Lenin is a no-go zone! Because, you see, Leninism cannot be romanticised and packaged into dreams or fantasies. It is foul-mouthed and uses words such as “imperialism” (does not sound very scientific, does it?) or “smashing the state” or “the dictatorship of the proletariat” (how outrageous!). Leninism is strategy and party-building, and what a party! All this is anathema

to the Western left-wing intellectual and his or her carbon copy in the oppressed countries. Never mind the fact that the whole corpus of Leninist theory and practice is firmly grounded in a correct reading of Marx. Rethinking Marxism is the way out. The Marx of the Frankfurt School or the “joy of being a communist” *à la* Hardt and Negri give our petty-bourgeois intellectual the clues of what is to be done!

### **Exit class politics from left stage, enter class politics from right stage**

**17. We thus come to the gist of the matter.** As a result of this long-drawn out process, the international left, in its overwhelming majority, has abdicated the duty of defending the working class and the toiling masses against the onslaught of capitalism, whatever the cost may be. With certain notable exceptions, the left to the left of social democracy (the famous “*gauche de la gauche*”) has abandoned all serious, methodical and intransigent opposition to neoliberalism and globalism to the proto-fascist movements. **All serious opposition to globalism, neoliberalism, and increasing inequality and misery is now seemingly the *chasse gardée*, the hunting ground of the proto-fascist or fascist movements.** It is no longer the socialist or communist left that speaks the plain language of the ordinary toiling people as it did one hundred years ago. It is now the proto-fascist movements around the world who address their worries and needs and hence exercise a pretty serious hegemonic influence over the working class. This is what explains Brexit and Trump and Marine Le Pen and Erdoğan.

We know that this is sheer demagoguery. These are all capitalist movements run mostly by capitalist figureheads (see the class background of the Trumps and the Farages and the Erdoğan). In due time, the proto-fascists will attack all the organisations of the working class, with the express purpose of atomising the class. The appointment of Steven Mnuchin as Secretary of the Treasury by Trump, just to take a single example, speaks volumes as to the nature of the new administration. Mnuchin is heir to a bankers’ family, himself a former partner of Goldman Sachs, the emblematic institution of Wall Street investment banking, before going on to establish his own hedge fund and to finally buy up, together with George Soros and Paul Hankson, Secretary of the Treasury of George W. Bush, a bank that is specialised, of all things, in mortgage lending, IndyMac, whose name Mnuchin and Co. changed into OneWest. This OneWest is notorious for its “questionable foreclosures”, to use the euphemism of the New York Times. It is the peak of irony and a perfectly telling incident that Donald Trump, a president elected on a platform that supposedly defends the victims of the “internationalist” wing of the US bourgeoisie, should appoint someone so involved up to his neck in preying on the woes of American working class families who are expropriated and kicked out of their homes by the very vultures of Wall Street.

**18.** The international left seems not to hear the deafening bells that toll for it.

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Although it is crystal clear that Brexit is due to the collapse of the living standards of the white majority of the British working class, although it can be proved with mathematical precision that it is the passing over to the Trump side of the traditionally Democratic white working class families of the so-called rustbelt that led Trump to victory, the left still continues to dabble in cultural identity politics. A strategy that relies on defending the rights of women and LGBTi and immigrants and Muslims is being floated. What this means is clearly the acceptance of waging the battle on the grounds that the Trumps and the Farages and the Le Pens and the Erdoğan have moulded, i.e. the battle ground of the races and the genders. The left is adamant in refusing the evident fact that **class politics has come back in the most devious and sinister way possible**. Trump has rejected and assaulted multiculturalism and “politically correct” language and won. The post-Leninist left now regurgitates the old script. “More of the same!” is all they can come up with. **The post-Leninist left perceives the negation of multiculturalism leading to negative identity politics in the very terms of identity politics itself**. In actual fact, the moment of truth has come. **We need to win those workers back, white and racist and macho as they may be!** We have to find the way to do this. Only if we win them over on the basis of class politics will they stop being white supremacist and racist and macho! Only will the **negation of the negation** lead us out of this impasse. The strategy of the multi-culturalist left is self-defeating.

**19. We need Leninist parties based politically on the revolutionary programme of Marxism and sociologically on the class-conscious vanguard of the working class in each country.** The historical destruction of revolutionary Marxist parties of the initial period of the Communist International, first by Stalinism and later by liberalism, has led to revolution losing out in the first round of skirmishes around the world in the period 2011-2013. We need to rebuild the vanguard of the working class in each country armed with Marxism, enriched by the contributions of Lenin, Trotsky and others.

**20. We need a revolutionary International, a world party of the revolutionary proletariat in order to fight against capitalism as a world system.** The destruction of proletarian internationalism by Stalinism has left the working class movement without the true agent of emancipation for the oppressed of the world from the yoke of class society. **We need to bring together all the fighting forces around the world to rebuild a communist International.**

# An updated, 2nd edition of the Horthy regime in Hungary<sup>1</sup>

Tamás Krausz

## Five theses

1. Between the two world wars in certain regions of Eastern Europe – each nation in a specific form - there were authoritarian regimes in existence. Since then historical experience has confirmed several times that the ordinary/normal way for capitalism to function in the region is authoritarian system. When in 1989 state socialism collapsed, liberal ideologists widely propagated with the slogans of liberalism and nationalism the idea that time had come to introduce and consolidate Western type democracies in Eastern Europe and they stated this process would help to achieve Western living standards in the region; what is more, people took the promise for granted! By now the age of illusions has come to an end. Soon after winning the general elections in 2010 with a two-thirds majority, Fidesz, a nationalist- populist party introduced a kind of authoritarian administration that in

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<sup>1</sup> The interwar period dominated by Horthy's government is known in Hungarian as the *Horthy-kor* ("Horthy age") or *Horthy-rendszer* ("Horthy system"). In reality, Horthy's alliance with Germany was foolhardy, and a positive view of Horthy serves a revisionist historical agenda, pointing to Horthy's passage of various anti-Jewish laws -the earliest in Europe, in 1920- as a sign of his anti-Semitism and willing collaboration in the Holocaust.

many aspects is a reminiscent of the authoritarian regime between the two world wars, when Miklós Horthy, the regent of Hungary was an ally of Hitler's. By now the Hungarian liberal parties have ceased to be a political power, the "moderate left" has become peripheric while a radical, system-critical left only exists on the pages of the journal *Eszmélet*.

As a consequence of the system change in 1989 there was a radical break in the field of ownership and distribution, in the nature of the state and political power structure: capitalist private property, the restoration of capitalism, the re-integration of the country into the global market – all have resulted in a new social structure. In Hungary, as in other countries of the region, the (almost) unrestricted opening up of markets, liberalization of prices and the unbounded privatization took place in accordance with the neoliberal project. These changes led to the destruction of the lives of the former workers and peasants who lost their jobs and self-esteem (while those who were unemployed for a long time also lost their health, family and home).<sup>2</sup> Some sociologists estimate the number of those living below the poverty line in today's Hungary about four million.<sup>3</sup> They constitute the new class of precariat that did not exist in the Kadar<sup>4</sup> era (i.e. the socialist period). Most of the precariat come from uprooted peasants, former workers whose workplaces have been destroyed and hundreds of thousands of pensioners and Roma. Those on the top are recruited from a small group of new big businessmen and a thin layer of the new upper middle class closely connected to the former strata. Between the two extremes we can find a multitude of small entrepreneurs, those employed in public institutions – in general they are salaried workers. This social structure with signs of a process of castes returning shows deep relationship with social characteristics of the Horthy regime, and this way – let me repeat it – marks a radical break with the Kadar regime; constant threat of unemployment, everyday insecurity and social descent are destabilizing factors not only for the individuals but also for the social structure. If we want to understand the essence and character of the "authoritarian system of 2010" we should not miss a historical viewpoint.

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2 Bartha Eszter: *Magányos harcosok: Munkások a rendszerváltás utáni Kelet-Németországban és Magyarországon* (Lonely fighters: Workers in postsocialist East Germany and Hungary). Budapest: L'Harmattan Publishers - ELTE BTK Kelet-Európa Története Tanszék (Series: Eastern European Monographs, 2), 2011.; Uő.: *A munkások útja a szocializmusból a kapitalizmusba Kelet-Európában, 1968-1989*. (Workers on the Road from Socialism to Capitalism in East Germany and Hungary, 1968-1989). Budapest: L'Harmattan Publishers - ELTE BTK Kelet-Európa Története Tanszék (Series: Eastern European Monographs, 1), 2009.

3 Ferge Zsuzsa számításait vö.: : *Népszabadság*, 2012. május 25., Ladányi János: *Leselejtettek. A kirekesztettek társadalom- és térszerkezeti elhelyezkedésének átalakulása Magyarországon a piacgazdasági átmenet időszakában*. Budapest, L'Harmattan, 2012.;

4 János Kádár (1912 – 1989) was a Hungarian communist leader and the General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, presiding over the country from 1956 until his retirement in 1988. In Hungary and elsewhere, Kádár was generally known as one of the more moderate Eastern European Communist leaders.

Liberal criticism mainly focuses on certain characteristics of actions, populist attitude, the strong limitation of political rights and the growing role of the state in economic matters that are typical of the way the anticommunist Fidesz party (coquetting with the extreme right) makes policy; from all these symptoms liberal critics have drawn the conclusion that Fidesz is a party showing “Kadarian” and “communist” features. This opinion also reveals that in fighting with the left, liberals have not yet reconsidered their highly ideological uncritical commitment to capitalist system. It is this effort of theirs that effaces the Horthyist roots of today’s regime, the specific features in the 2nd edition, semi-peripheric form of capitalism. Liberals write about a “mafia state” but forget about its neoliberal background and basis, and also keep back the above mentioned historical specificities of Eastern Europe which open up their real importance in the context of (semi)periphery.

## **2. On the roots of the Horthyist “tradition”**

The Horthyist tradition of the old gentry ruling class has come to the surface in many ways (among other old rubbish) and has always lived with us in many ways, though we know it very well that the imminent source of its legal “revival” that took place under the banner of democracy is: 1989. At the same time it cannot be denied that the politics in the 1950s of reckoning with the Horthy regime was soon followed by the politics of integrating significant groups of the old gentry and (even) the aristocracy into the system what was followed by their returning to certain stages of power and to cultural life as early as the 1960s. The integration of the old extreme right, a considerable group of arrow-cross thugs basically took place already in the Rakosi era (in the 1950s). It is not at all by chance that today’s liberal analysis accuses the state socialism for the recent revival of the arrow-cross tradition. The stratification of different periods makes separating systems even more difficult. The new system consists mainly of the debris of these fallen regimes, but their proportion in today’s Hungarian society is highly unequal. From a methodological point of view it is important to see that certain elements of the Kadar regime – above all its paternalistic-bureaucratic character – only lend colour to the neo-Horthyist restoration and help the authoritarian- dependent element in today’s regime while these similarly returning elements lack the specific social and cultural context of the socialist era.

Authocracy and the “tree” of misery with its extreme social inequalities take their roots in the Horthy regime, or rather in the age of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

## **3. International background and the new national bourgeoisie**

On the other hand, international conditions in 2010 played a specifically important role in the formation of the new authoritarian regime. Both the EU and the USA have constantly and paternalistically criticized the Fidesz governments for

its antidemocratic political steps, its concentration of power, its open antisemitism and anti-Roma sentiments but in reality they have never attacked the legitimacy of the Orbán regime, since by squeezing taxpayers the government can maintain low budgetary deficit. True, at the birth of the new capitalist system (with the necessary inner contribution) there were Western “midwives” to assist the process of the so-called debt crisis treatment. It is also understood or rather a commonplace by now that the Eastern European (and also the Soviet) change of regime was inseparable from the so-termed neoliberal restructuring of the global capitalist system and from the new forms and challenges of the multinational capitalist power; while the “socialist world system” and above all the Soviet Union were unable to find the way to survival and they did not wish to work out a socialist alternative to the capitalist restoration. Since they had lost the economic and military competition against the West, the former “communist reformers” reached the conclusion that the solution for the state socialist crisis was an “integration” to the successful Western capitalism with the help of the Western core countries; the process was also called as “the reintegration into the world market”, “real convergence”, “catching up”, “democratization” etc. The result is well-known: the Orbán regime that is the product and “outlet” of this aborted project. The main aims of the state in the socialist period were just the opposite: the elimination of national bourgeoisie and the abolishment of private property, also, it was illegal to sell or buy state property. The new regime acts the other way round: the government nationalizes everything in favour of the new bourgeoisie (that the government itself has created from above), in order to be able to re-privatize factories, land and every other type of property. This freshly introduced bourgeoisie has flourished in the Fidesz era since it has got capital from public funds. This fact clearly shows the specially parasite character of the Hungarian national bourgeoisie. Under a nationalist banner and with the help of the upper layers of society, certain groups of the old-new power elites are trying to turn their privileges inheritable – this way out-facing both the foreign capital and the Hungarian society. As a result, they have restructured the system of distribution, that is they have deepened and widened the social-cultural inequalities of the society. After the internationally supported system change had taken place, the ongoing process of dog-fight for property can come to the restoration of a seemingly new authoritarian regime (and it happens not only in Hungary, but also in the other countries of the region: in the Ukraine, in Latvia, Bulgaria, Belarus or Romania). The political weakness and cultural deficiency of the new Hungarian ruling class have hindered it from stabilizing the new capitalist system and the problem remained unsolved even after Hungary joined the EU.

The new basic groups of the ruling class<sup>5</sup> put all their hope in Orbán’s “Christian-

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<sup>5</sup> Basic cultural-ideological rift lies between the “ex-communists” (neophyte liberals, “Kadarist-managers etc) and the “Christian-national neo-Horthyists” (the offspring of the old Horthyist elite and “ex-communist” careerists joining them, and a part of the “ideology-free” new capitalists), the



national” government since it expresses/represents their values, financial interests, poor culture and their privileges in gaining budget resources. These layers of the new ruling class specifically fell back on government support because they did not know how to “treat” the constantly growing masses of impoverished workers and the unemployed and how to keep their reluctance in check. In other words: how can an impoverished society, huge unemployed masses, millions of humiliated and underprivileged employees be restrained and disciplined under the conditions of the returning economic crises? The former, social-liberal coalition had no idea about the answer, they only hesitated between the old “routine” neoliberal economic policy and propaganda based on the EU gobbledegook. That is why their political representation lost its social background so the coalition fell apart and got shrunk to a group of unimportant, “survival” politicians. Even the extreme right managed to gain strength during the 8 years of social-liberal governance. The succeeding newly developing “Christian-national” power that won more than 80% of the parliamentary seats in 2010 have managed to find the “solution” to the above mentioned problem. In Hungary and in some other Eastern European countries the people in power soon understood that introducing a new authoritarian regime was imperative. The new concentration of power in Hungary according to the historical “logics of necessity” has emptied out the parliamentary forms and parties. The new regime promises that it will bring about the working of undisturbed mechanisms to both the European leaders and the Hungarian public and in return they expect the European legitimation of the “system of national cooperation” – as they call their regime. By now, everyone who cannot fit in or does not want to fit in the framework of the regime are considered the enemies of the nation: communists, atheists, liberals, Jews, gypsies, foreigners or “patronizers” of all these...

#### **4. The regime and the parties**

The fate of the parties is determined as well<sup>6</sup>: in the 2nd edition of the Horthy regime “other parties” (communists in all party formations were banned by law and institutionally criminalized) are needed in order to revolve around the Sun - i.e. the “wise leader” and around his party, Fidesz - like small planets until they finally fall into the Solar system. In other words, though Fidesz party formally and legally could be displaced, in reality they want to secure “eternal” power for a segment of the ruling elite, for the Christian-national (the term comes also from the Horthy era) wing. According to this aim, the other parties that the power elites consider to be small and unimportant, are systematically crushed in material, political and moral sense with various means and tricks of power. The ruling elite even makes use of open oppression, bare lies, and operates with a system of all different kinds

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latter are in strong competition with the multinational companies.

<sup>6</sup> See Szigeti Péter: A magyar választási rendszer átalakítása. Political Capital – Social Development Institute 2013. október, <http://www.valasztasirendszer.hu/?cat=4>;



of institutions and committees that effectively produce the institutionalized world of fraud and falsified history by criminalizing the (state)socialist past – and they do it on a national scale. The ultimate political meaning of these actions is quite apparent: a complete closure of political alternatives in the left; for this they can get incessant help from the liberal right (in spite of its half-hearted, fruitless political opposition) with its enduring anticommunist propaganda. A necessary part and condition of these processes was a systematic hebetation of huge masses in society – neo-Horthyist restoration cannot be understood or explained in its depth if we forget about this factor. There was no serious social opposition against the return and subsistence of the Horthy cult. It is in light of this fact can the phenomenon be understood. The lack of social resistance partly derives from the experiences gained in the Kádár regime: with its bureaucratic nature “welfare state”, “caring state” – in spite of its progressive social achievements – hindered the majority of the population from rising above the paternalistic relations. Massive lack of autonomous individuals provides advantageous “human material” for the new, 2nd edition of the authoritarian regime. Like the Polish developments where political right and extreme right are represented above 80% in the parliament, the left is almost completely unorganizable since no system critical social (mass) movement could take root in Hungary. This is the ultimate cause of the political combination in the left being fragmented and the proliferation of secretarianism, narcissistic wannabe “leaders” and “messiahs” and the “immigration syndrom”. All elements of the working class are dispersed and impoverished in material-economic and also in intellectual-cultural-mental sense. True, the new social structure that had grown out of the regime change in 1989, is obliged to discredit the Kádár regime at all costs and falsify its history in order to manipulate and indoctrinate the young generation. Since the new regime, no matter how we judge the historical role of state socialism, has not been able to overcome the economic and social achievements of the old, Kadarist system within the last 25 years. It was in this ground that the stinking flower of neo-Horthyist restoration has shot up.

### **5. New class, new culture**

Kitsch from the global market mingles with traditional national kitsch and creates the mainstream, decisive culture of the period. The phenomenon is only an offshot of the development when the 2nd edition of the Horthy regime came into being as the specific combination of two elements: the most updated global capital power and the most outdated reactionary social relations inherited from the period between the two world wars.

If the new capitalism cannot stabilize the Eastern European counties with the bourgeois-democratic institutions and measures applied in the West, then there must be serious social problems that I have mentioned above, but in order to clearly understand the ideological motives it is necessary to name these crucial problems more concretely. The reasons are numerous. I will only mention the most important

ones: massive pauperization, keeping salaries permanently low, maintaining a high rate of unemployment, sacrificing the lives of millions for the sake of new capitalism and the creation of a new ruling class from above. In other words, it is the basic, *in statu nascendi* characteristic of the regime to economically revitalize the weak national bourgeoisie tied to each other with cousinship and amenably serving the political power and the layer of great landowners. Conservative Fidesz power is going to accomplish the process. It is for this purpose that goods and assets, economic and political structures (allotment of tobacco and cigarette and pharmaceutical markets, distribution of land, parking companies or anything else, permanent nationalization and privatization etc) are monopolized and allotted on a party basis for the sake of individuals and groups politically chosen from above. This forms a relatively solid background for the new authoritarian regime that exists within the framework of the dirtiest cultural and ideological compulsivenesses (contempt for the poor, racist exclusion, cult of power and violence, homophobia, submission of women etc). Neo-Horthyist restoration naturally bears all the important marks of today's capitalist world, it is a strange "postmodern" creature that borrows its patterns and solutions from the neoconservative American governing: its criminalization of poverty, the principle of zero tolerance, the criminal politics of the three strikes, one tax rate for personal income tax, the moral cult of religion in parallel with the deployment of inequalities and absolute individualism.

The crisis of today's capitalism reveals its inherent contradictions in an extreme way. Above all, enforcement of (human) rights is controlled, there are irresolvable conflict in the the relations between the state and the society. Since governments all over the world give way to the policy of restrictions they are unable to guarantee basic rights against the market forces. These developments issue a challenge to social reproduction: Hungarian governments also made steps to protect the rights of the banks against the people, public sale of houses, apartments, cars and dislodgement happen every day. In order to set measures to labour rights, right to strike and the right to fair jobs the government introduces "counter-reforms". Similar heavily restricting trends can be experienced in the fields of welfare rights, rights for education, right for healthy drinking water or democratic rights – the consequences of the latter are very painful, since they contain the right for protest and the right for access publicity. Here ecological dimensions bear huge importance with special emphasis on making nature a business, the expropriation of common goods, the green economy as new hegemonic projects. Unlike in other countries, in Hungary protest movements and civil organizations do not question the right to private ownership and do not demand collective social-economic and human rights. In academic circles debates on rights are confined to the boundaries of liberal political philosophy. Political power has already completely absorbed the majority of the Hungarian intellectuals – with money, positions, privileges and threats. It is not by chance that we live in a period of intellectual hoax, a shocking decline of social scientific research and thinking.

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In all the process we described above the churches are not simply partners but rather parts of the power. The Orban regime exceeds in this field the “achievements” of Lukashenko, the Belarus leader: with his government and parliament Orbán have transformed the official churches – above all the Calvinist and Catholic churches – into electioneering structures, a part of “Christian-national” political power. Churches are enlisted in the service of the Orban regime by giving them public finance as gifts and support; also, government ideologists have thought it necessary to re-define Christianity in order to extort respect from the society. They set the wealthy churches against the small ones and the churches are fighting with each other for the favour of the power. And the government wants to “consecrate” these processes by making religion and ethics obligatory subjects in schools as it was in the Horthy regime. True, Horthy, the regent did not want to manage it himself but left it to the churches. In Hungary today it is Viktor Orbán – who has no knowledge of whatever about Christianity - who bears “light”, brings brightness, labels European Christianity, gives lessons on Christian traditions, talks about revival and tells sin from “belief.”<sup>7</sup>

He has transformed education, schools into similarly important elements of the “suprasocial” political (party)power: teachers are forced to join “professional corporations.”<sup>8</sup> The ideological binder of the new authoritarian regime is obviously nationalism and an officially defined neo-Horthyist Christianity that penetrates everyday life: in changing old street names and also principles and structure of the education and so on. The new constitution was also conceived in the so-called Christian national spirit, so in its preamble it excludes the majority of society who are not Christian, not religious or downright atheists. National populism goes as far as to make heroes of the Hungarian soldiers who actively took part in the Nazi genocide between 1941-1944 on the territory of the Soviet Union. Fascism, nazism are officially – also in the school textbooks – considered equivalent to “communism” and by doing so the complete history of socialism is criminalized for the sake of the regime’s exclusive ideological power. Intellectual life, culture in general are transformed into their image. A separate institutional state apparatus has been established for accomplishing this task, some of these are The House of Terror, Veritas Institute which was founded in order to find “the truth” in historical problems and intensify the neo-Horthyist restoration among the intellectuals.

All this ideological nonsense immerses in an anti-Western nationalist freedom fighter’s rethorics which can simultaneously exist with the precise execution and fulfilment of the Western financial rules – actually they serve as a screen for hiding the systems’s real intentions. Only few can understand the hypocritical and manipulative character of the regime since many can only hear what they wish to hear about the “exploitation of the Hungarian nation by the Western multitis”.

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<sup>7</sup> Jakab Attila: [http://ideaintezet.blog.hu/2013/06/23/az\\_orban-rezsim\\_es\\_a\\_keresztenyseg](http://ideaintezet.blog.hu/2013/06/23/az_orban-rezsim_es_a_keresztenyseg).

<sup>8</sup> Ágnes Huszár: *Templom és iskola*. Galamus, 19 December, 2013.

Fidesz party first built in its ranks the extreme right, fascism – with the agreement of the former socialist-liberal coalition – then in order to show itself presentable in Europe finally pushed the Jobbik (the party of the extreme right) out of their circles (as a kind of “militia”); while at the same time the Fidesz is trying to lure the neo-fascist voters to their ranks with an uncontrolled anticommunist campaign (after all, scapegoats are needed!). (It is not by chance that both the Horthy regime and today’s neo-horthyist regime are impregnated with fascism.) As a consequence – in the framework of a permanent “fight of culture” – ethnic, “racist” nationalism, kitch of the “Great-Hungary” type have pervaded society and at the same time, social problems have been pushed aside: the process signed the ideological victory of the authoritarian system like it did after 1919, in the Horthy era. The “new”, neo-Horthyist “culture” every day takes revenge on antifascist tradition; the hero of our time is no longer Marx, Engels, Lenin, György Lukács but the gendarme who killed Ságvári; the cultural model is Horthy, Teleki, Prohászka; the favourite writers of the regime are not Tibor Déry, Andor Endre Gelléri or Lajos Nagy but the fierce antisemitic Albert Wass, József Nyírő or Cecile Tormay.

And this way the most important historical mission of the regime change has been fulfilled on behalf of the ruling classes.

*Translated by Katalin Baráth*

**The Mediterranean: new basin of world revolution!**



**RedMed**

**www.RedMed.org**

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RedMed is a web site that is run by three political parties that are all sections of a revolutionary Marxist international organisation, the Coordination for the Refoundation of the Fourth International (CRFI). The three parties are: the Partito Comunista dei Lavoratori (PCL) of Italy, the Ergatiko Epanastatiko Komma (EEK-Workers Revolutionary Party) of Greece, and the Devrimci İşçi Partisi (DIP-Revolutionary Workers' Party) of Turkey.

Its aim is to link up with revolutionary organisations and militants in the countries of the Mediterranean basin, which has been turned into the epicentre of world revolution thanks to the Arab revolution and the class struggles that are taking place in response to the havoc wrought by the capitalist economic crisis in the southern periphery of Europe.

To this end we will provide our analysis of the events in southern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. We will try to understand the forces, in particular the class forces, that have gone to shape the different upheavals in the Arab world, in Palestine, in Iran, in Turkey, in Kurdistan and in southern Europe, so as to be able to draw the correct conclusions regarding the way to move forward in establishing workers' power in the whole region.

We welcome letters, comments, news about struggles, debates and material in different languages. We would appreciate very much if people would volunteer translating the different articles and declarations that we publish in the web site into their native tongue.

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# **New Polish government: Anti-neoliberal but Anti-left profile first**

Ewa Groszewska

The Western world sees the danger for democracy in the proceedings of government towards Constitutional Court. The last government (made mainly by Platform of Citizens: (Platforma Obywatelska (PO)) chose its judges which were not accepted by the new one created entirely by one party: Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS)) after the election in October 2015. Moreover, new government chose its own judges which are not accepted by recent Court. This dispute looks like the fight between coteries even PiS broke the rules. But there were not situations when Judges of this Court decided or said anything in social cases which were treated in unconstitutional way as expulsions, breaking the workers rights. Neoliberal opposition “defending constitution and democracy” on the streets (Committee of defending Democracy: Komitet Obrony Demokracji (KOD)) is completely far away from ordinary people problems. The real danger exists according new government but in the sphere which is totally invisible for neoliberal “opposition”

10 years ago in 2006 PiS made the government in coalition with Samoobrona and Liga Polskich Rodzin (LPR). Leaders of PiS (twin brothers Kaczyński) succeeded

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creating the image of opposition to neoliberal environment and parties in Poland (PO and SLD- Social Democratic Party based on members of ex “communist” party -PZPR- Polish United Workers Party). The main slogan which resulted in winning the election then sounded: *Polish Solidarity*. This phrase referred to the ethos of Solidarity (Solidarność) movement in 1980 and built alleged opposition to the Darwinist social relation after 1989. PiS gained the electorate of “popular people”, all not satisfied of economic transformation in Poland. It used the religious and national identity of poor workers and peasants building this way the strategy of intensify the false consciousness. It was propagated the idea of coteries and bad people from liberal ( or neo-liberal) parties who are guilty of collapse of rule of law and scams which caused the poverty in Poland. PiS propagating *Polish Solidarity* touched the subject of public health service , of social security etc but dominating thread was based on hunting for “cheaters and thieves”. In the context of the lack of alternatives to neo-liberalism (SLD realized policy for rich and for business and USA imperialism, anti-capitalist left was very weak and divided) PiS could count on the support of working class even good organized in trade unions miners.

In 2010 PiS lost the election because people were discouraged tracing PiS enemies among political elites. One of the Kaczynski brothers won the presidential election. The catastrophe of presidential flight to Katyn at the anniversary of crime on Polish officers committed by Stalin gave PiS new development potential. The conspiracy theory about killing Lech Kaczyński by Putin was the sublimation of social fears of poor people. This theory suggested later that prime minister from PO -Donald Tusk- was responsible for bad preparation of the flight what made him responsible for this disaster. This accusation was publicized in the context of attacks on liberal elites.

Creating the conspiracy theory and the myth of dead president is done thanks of support of radio-station “Radio Maryja” founded by the rich priest Tadeusz Rydzyk. This radio- station with explicit anti-communist and anti-Semitic character is a platform for religious and old socially excluded people but it finds younger listeners in Eastern Europe as well. The phenomenon of this radio is related with empowerment of poor people who find understanding and possibility of discussion on the wave. All issues raised by journalists such as globalization, poverty, international conflicts are analyzed in similar way to left, anti-capitalist perspective but conclusion is always one: all those who are guilty of injustice are Jews (not Zionists) and communists. Using low cultural competences, national complexes this religious radio-station perpetuates convictions that anti-Poles elites are responsible for injustice, not capital as a social class.

PiS with the Catholic church managed to create the believes so typical for nationalistic right in Europe that so called national egoism is the only one adequate reaction for the social fear and capitalist globalization. This social atmosphere is conducive to interest in far right organizations more and more popular in Poland.

But it must be underlined that so spectacular victory of PiS in last elections



was possible thanks to so-called “moving voters” who chose PiS not because of ideological reasons but against last government based on PO- neo-liberals which sinking in propaganda of success completely marginalized voice of more and more angry and frustrated low middle- class, educated precarious youth and unemployed. In the absence of left alternatives among official mainstream parties and lack of social movements people rejected neo-liberal concept to conservative-nationalistic one. Neo- liberals did not do anything and did not pay attention to the fact that the half of employees earn the minimum salary (about 300 euro net income), that about 30 % of young workers are employed on the contracts which do not belong to labor code: without insurance the right to vacation etc. Lots of young people live under the pressure of credits for flats or just consumption. In European social research on poverty the Eastern region of Poland take the highest positions. Polish neoliberal government being deaf and blind to these facts created the vision of Poland which is not involved in international crises. PiS used the social anger in national electoral campaign showing the poverty in Poland proposing the new social solution of profits for each second child in the family (Program 500 Plus). PiS proposes also taxations hypermarkets and banks. Program 500 Plus has been implemented already and we can criticize its conservative character excluding a big number of single mothers but it is the first one social transfer from national budget since 1989. The opponents of this solution are based on neoliberal parties and environments constituting the current opposition KOD. The arguments raised by the members of KOD are related with contempt for the poor. Propagating the opinions that the majority of beneficiaries of Program 500 Plus spends money for alcohol causes that the organizations of anti-capitalist left must be distanced to demonstrations of KOD. Moreover, one of the leader of KOD -Ryszard Petru- is the collaborator of Leszek Balcerowicz – the author of Polish “Shock Therapy”.

Since the first days when PiS created government Polish radical left found itself in ambivalent situation. It has to defend the so called social proposals of PiS as Program 500 Plus and financing the health service from national budget being aware at the same time that this party has the nationalistic and a bit chauvinistic character. The fear of the last features started to prevail.

The Support of extreme right organizations is not official but visible. What is the origin of these environments in Poland? The anti-fascist associations try to make the investigation concerning the financing and way of the recruitment to extreme right organizations. They are certainly based on football fans with the business infrastructure and ideological training. But what must be emphasized is the right atmosphere in Poland which is the result of official neoliberal discourse in media, schools, universities. Narration based on market ideology produced Darwinian vision of social relations. These are the neoliberals who are responsible for this inhuman climate. There is hidden the aspect of being born as “worse” human being in the neoliberal concept in which “the best” wins everything. The profile of school program specially the lessons of civil society and entrepreneurship created the



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philosophy of admiration for “strong” and contempt for economically “weak”. But this philosophy is also based on the need of search for someone worse than him/herself. The best candidate for this is someone different culturally or “racially”. And it was found during so called refugee crises.

This neoliberal education has been supported by nationalistic and religious interpretation of history led by IPN (Institute of National Memory) which is an ideologically anti-communist institution. This kind of education has been accepted by each government since 1989: neoliberals, social-democrats etc. The main theses in humanistic education is Brzeziński theory about totalitarianism and alleged convergence between communism and fascism. Students are taught this way that all heritage of left and Marxist or progressive theory and practice is related with Stalin’s crimes. Schools order worship only right-nationalistic heroes and condemn all left organization from the past before and after the World War II. There are no information about colonialism and exploitation in teaching programs. Additionally the media show Arab or Muslim world in the context of terrorism without any explanation who is who. It is dominating the idea of Eurocentrism or even Western-centrism which orders to despise all people living out of Europe and to treat not European countries like holiday resorts for “white” people.

This education through schools and media caused disgusting racism towards Muslims in the moment when prime minister of last government (before PiS) announced that Poland must accept about 2000 refugees. It started the racist hysteria in social media with very shocking declarations in the country so experienced by fascism. The average hater from social media was not typical PiS voter but then during the election campaign the chairman of PiS - Jarosław Kaczyński. started using anti-refugee rhetoric. Criticizing the neoliberal government of PO he declared not accepting refugees in Poland at all using horribly racist arguments as diseases spread by immigrants and alleged Swedish problems with Muslims who order sharia law.

This education created also very right young voters elected PiS or another right and chauvinistic parties -one of them entered some MPs- openly fascists.

The political situation in Poland started being very difficult for the left. So called KOD - neoliberal opposition does not use nor social slogans and requires neither anything against anti-communist ideology and practice. The winning of PiS encouraged extreme right organization to demonstrate their opinions and organize racist demonstrations. Full of hatred slogans during many manifestations in Polish cities including burning the Jew puppet in Wrocław (during anti-Muslim manifestation) did not cause any reaction of authorities. Moreover, the Minister Ziobro pardoned far right militants accused of attacking police. At the same time two weeks ago police made strange action during the manifestation in solidarity with left militant who is prisoned after blocking the expulsion of sick old woman. After the manifestation policemen dressed civilian provoked some militants and arrested 4 of those who leaded the event. They were liberated but the whole action

looked as specially prepared.

At the end of March the members of legally acting party -Communist Party of Poland (KPP)- were sentenced for several months of arrest. The judgement says that members of KPP are guilty of “propagating totalitarian theory of Marxism”.

On May 16<sup>th</sup> the secret police raided the party “Zmiana” (Change) headquarters. The officers pulled out the equipment and arrested the leader of the party Mateusz Piskorski. He has been ordered 3 months sanctions of arrest on suspicion of spying. What is spectacular the accusation was changing from being spy of Russia to being spy of China or Iraq (!). The party is known of pro- Russian and pro-Putin sympathy. The thread behind gives this case new aspect. When PiS was in coalition (in 2006) with party Samoobrona- Mateusz Piskorski was the spokesperson then of Samoobrona. The leader of this party -Andrzej Lepper- committed suicide in strange and unexplained circumstances. Piskorski and his new party (Zmiana) have just been publishing the book about this issue. There are theories that Lepper’s “suicide” was related with the revenge of PiS.

The first law established by new government was “decommunization” which means that local governments must change all names of streets related with communism (most of them were already change in the past to names of neoliberals like Ronald Reagan) and it forbids propagating dates and events linked with the communist period.

The prime minister Beata Szydło and prominent MPs of PiS want to introduce a law that totally bans abortion. This idea was confronted with huge manifestations gathering liberals and leftists.

Preparing the NATO summit in Warsaw in July this year the government wants to establish the so-called “anti-terrorist law” giving the right to invigilate all citizens who organize “dangerous events” and the right to arrest foreigners who are not Polish citizens if they “arouse suspicion”.

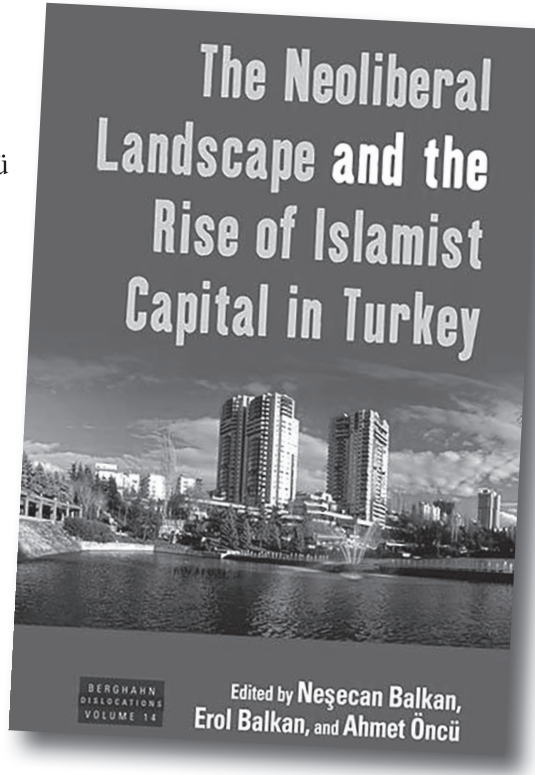
It is difficult to decide if government actions are motivated by ideological craziness or are done on request of capital, NATO etc. It is obvious that extreme right movement is stronger and stronger and that anti-communist conservatives from government and neoliberal opposition do not want to allow for any development of anti-capitalist left. Anti-neoliberal profile of PiS will be ruined soon. Acceptance and consent of government towards TTIP exposes the hypocrisy of its *Polish Solidarity*.

# ***The Neoliberal Landscape and the Rise of Islamist Capital in Turkey***

Berghahn Books,  
New York, 2015

Edited by Neşecan Balkan,  
Erol Balkan and Ahmet Öncü

Chapters by Burak Gürel,  
Sungur Savran,  
Kurtar Tanyılmaz,  
Özgür Öztürk,  
Evren Hoşgör and others



Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey and the party he leads, the AKP, have been analyzed in many different ways. What was lacking was a materialist analysis using the methodology of Marxism. This is what this book does: it provides the reader the complex class dynamics that lie behind the rise and resilience of this leader and his party.

The hardback edition was published in February 2015 and the paperback edition is coming out now, in January 2017. The book has already been published in Turkish translation. It is also being prepared for a Farsi edition.

# The French Spring and the crisis in Europe

Savas Michael-Matsas

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

## Revolutionary Marxism 2017

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 Law<sup>1</sup>, 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 1830<sup>2</sup>: the next day, after March 31, has been called not April 1<sup>st</sup> but “March 32<sup>nd</sup>”; 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

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<sup>1</sup>The 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

Industrial production, which has contracted again by 0.1 per cent in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2016, as in the entire Euro zone, remains *10 per cent lower than the level it had before 2008*.<sup>4</sup> 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

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3 *Le Monde*, 13 August 2016

4 *Le Monde*, 15 August 2016

people. The last figures, issued by INSEE on August 18, 2016<sup>5</sup> 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)<sup>6</sup>, 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*”.<sup>7</sup> 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

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<sup>5</sup> *Le Monde* 20 August 2016

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> 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*”<sup>8</sup> is manifested by a “*Great Devalorization*”<sup>9</sup>, 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*”<sup>10</sup> 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.

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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.<sup>11</sup>

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

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<sup>11</sup> 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*".<sup>12</sup>

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*"<sup>13</sup>. 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

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<sup>12</sup> 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).

<sup>13</sup> 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”.<sup>14</sup> 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 PTS<sup>15</sup>, 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

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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 10<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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

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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 19<sup>th</sup> century, showed that the 18<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup>

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 Lordon<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup>

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

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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*”<sup>20</sup>. 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*”<sup>21</sup>, much broader than the famous Gramscian “hegemony” as “coercion + consensus”. Governmentality was described, first, by Foucault in 1978<sup>22</sup>, 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

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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](http://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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup>

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*”<sup>24</sup>, 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

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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

# **Against austerity, fascism, war, environmental catastrophe, and barbarism, fight for international socialism!**

Balkan Socialist Centre “Christian Rakovsky”  
& RedMed

The world has entered 2016 full of concern and horror. World capitalism, eight years after the Lehman Brothers collapse, is sinking further in its still unresolved, rapidly deepening crisis dragging humanity into ever greater austerity, unemployment, inequality, homelessness and misery. It has created a socio-economic environment in which the fascist plague has once again reared its head. Its contradictions have created conflagration and war in the Middle East, in Africa, in the former Soviet republics and elsewhere, wars that even threaten a Third World War. And it has unleashed a process of environmental degradation that threatens not only our future as humans but all living species.

It is not sufficient to bemoan the scourges of austerity and unemployment, of war and fascism, of authoritarianism and climate change. We need to understand the dynamics behind these and fight those scourges according to the logic of the

objective situation. The left-wing movements around the world, so-called social democracy and what were once, before the deluge, official communist parties or their present-day avatars, have been sinking to ever lower levels since the collapse of the bureaucratically degenerated states (the Soviet Union, China, Eastern and Central Europe etc.). They have no compass to comprehend the course history has taken and no will to overturn this ugly socio-economic order. But only through a radical critique of the existing situation and a daring attitude of confrontation with the powers that can be the left really help to lead humanity out of the plight it is being carried into by imperialist capitalism.

### **In the throes of the Third Great Depression**

The period we are going through is marked deeply by the sweeping economic crisis of capitalism, certainly triggered by the financial collapse of 2007-2008, but produced by the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production as a whole and bearing the character of a thorough economic depression by no means confined to the financial sphere. Already eight years into this crisis, capital and its political-ideological personnel can see no way out and are trying their best to weather the storm without the least idea where salvation lies. The crisis has gone through different phases: the bailout of the private financial system through the so-called policies of “quantitative easing” and a zero-interest rate policy simply ended up transferring the burden to the public sector, begetting the public debt crisis, expressed most violently in the southern rim of the European Union from 2010 on. The expansionary monetary policy of all the major central banks of the capitalist world nonetheless kept the world economy afloat, assisted in this, as a result of uneven development, by the relatively high rates of growth of the so-called “emerging markets”, first and foremost China, but also countries such as India, Brazil, Russia, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey and others. These two factors were indeed what buoyed the more mature economies of the capitalist world, thus preventing a deeper stagnation of the world economy.

At present, both these factors are reaching their end. The quantitative easing program in the US has ended and the raising of the US interest rate in December 2015 by the Federal Reserve after a decade of nearly zero interest rates reverses the flow of capital to the emerging markets, which also face the impact of the slowing of the Chinese economy and the collapse of the prices of commodities, first and foremost that of oil. These dramatic changes have vast implications not only to the so-called emerging and underdeveloped countries but also in Europe, Japan, and the US themselves, all over the world. From the dawn of the year 2016, with the tsunami in the Chinese and world stock markets, rises the prospect of a much deeper stagnation of the global economy with much higher levels of unemployment.

Although in the first phase of the post 2007-08 world crisis, the “emerging markets” appeared to keep their steam, it is now their turn to fall into deep recession, as is already the case in Brazil and Russia. Even the main engine of growth reviving

the world economy, China, has now become a powerful factor of instability, having seen first its real estate market, then its stock exchange, and now the real economy declining further and further into trouble.

The move by the central bank of the US, the Fed, to decrease gradually and in circumspect manner the wholly artificial support given to the economy for years, first reducing and finally eliminating so-called “quantitative easing” and now raising interest rates, is by no means a show of confidence in the robust development of the American economy, but a preventive step to avert a new bursting of the bubble and a repeat of 2007-2008 on a much higher scale. However, coinciding with deep trouble in China, a third recession in Japan despite the much-vaunted Abenomics, and continuing morass in the Eurozone economy, it will in all probability contribute to the onset of a new phase of stagnation in the world economy.

Just how serious the situation is can only be gauged by the increasing panic sowed in some of the market actors themselves. The economists of the Royal Bank of Scotland, one of the largest in the world, have warned their clients in the following manner: “Sell everything except high quality bonds. This is about return of capital, not return on capital. In a crowded hall, exit doors are small.” The report also likened the current situation to 2008, when the collapse of the Lehman Brothers investment bank led to the global financial crisis. This time, it was said, China could be the crisis point.

### **Barbarism on the rise**

The Third Great Depression is not simply a road accident. Nor is it a market correction episode. It is one of the most profound economic crises in the history of capitalism that attest to the decline of the possibilities within the capitalist mode of production due to the contradiction that arises between the highly socialised productive forces and the private appropriation of the products generated by those advanced forces. The destruction of the environment is a sign of the throttling of productive forces by present-day capitalism. High unemployment, appalling misery and declining health and education for the labouring masses are indications of the fact that capitalism has become a barrier for the further advance of humanity. The tendency to create conflict and war, bordering more and more on a Third World War, is clear testimony that capitalism in its imperialist stage is now more than a barrier to progress, but, given the weapons of mass destruction it has developed, a full-scale threat to the sheer survival of humanity, indeed of all living species.

It is within this historical maelstrom that the seeds of barbarism are laid. Fascism is rearing its head in Europe. For the first time since the Second World War, fascist movements harking back to the Nazi period shared power, albeit temporarily, in Ukraine after the Maidan events. The European Parliament elections of May 2014 showed that no country on the old continent was immune to the spread of the fascist virus. In three countries (France, the UK, and Denmark) the so-called “extreme right” came out of the elections as the first political force. This concept “extreme



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right” is a kind of euphemism that hides the existence of explicitly fascist parties claiming Nazi symbols, such as the Golden Dawn in Greece or Jobbik in Hungary or of parties that threaten to swiftly transform themselves into such, for instance the Vlaamsblok in the Netherlands or the Front National in France. It is only because capitalism has once again carried humanity into a historic impasse that fascism has come on the agenda once again.

On the other hand, the black banner of ISIS is but the most extreme expression of the growth of extremely barbaric tendencies within the predominantly or partially Muslim countries of the Middle East and North Africa, reaching further into sub-Saharan Africa in such cases as Somalia, Mali and, above all, Nigeria. The rise of the takfiri movements, i.e. movements that stigmatise as “infidel” all save those who prostrate before them, irrespective of whether they are Christians or Jews or of the Shia or Alevi denominations of Islam or even Sunni Muslims, with their retrograde ideology that imposes an austere lifestyle on the entire population with a multitude of prohibitions, especially on women, is a scourge that threatens tens of millions in the regions where they are becoming stronger. Even more alarming is the fact that these movements recruit their militants internationally, not only from the predominantly Muslim countries of the Middle East, Africa, the Caucasus, or Central Asia (in particular Eastern Turkistan in China), but from among the destitute younger generation of Muslim communities of the imperialist countries of the West as well, facing social exclusion, racism, State repression and mass unemployment. This means of course that the barbarism of the takfiri kind and that of the classical Nazi genre are bound to clash in the heart of an imploding Europe.

The rise of the threat of Sunni-Shia sectarian belligerence in the Middle East both feeds into takfiri radicalism, but also transcends it to threaten the whole region with a barbaric internecine war that will surely ravage the entire Islamic world.

No mistake should be made, however, as to where the ultimate responsibility for this rise in barbaric tendencies lies. It is not against the backdrop of a supposedly immaculate “Western civilisation” that the hordes of fascists in Ukraine or the barbarians of the Islamic world rise up. “Western civilisation” in its capitalist form, what Marx in his day called “*the leper within civilization*” is the very source that breeds the dynamics of these barbarisms. Not only in the more immediate sense of supporting these retrograde tendencies, be it openly or in underhanded fashion. This undeniable aspect, clearly observable whether in the open encouragement given to the events of Maidan by the European Union, the United States and NATO, with the thinly disguised support extended to fascist groups such as the Right Sector there or in the support given to the Sunni sectarian groups in Syria that converted what started out as a popular uprising in the footsteps of Tunisia and Egypt into a wholesale civil war, is only part of the story. What is more fundamental is that capitalism creates the dynamics for these movements by creating unemployment and misery and by fanning the flames of war in order to reach its own despicable ends.

Were it not for the support extended by the Reagan administration to the so-called Mujahideen in Afghanistan in the 1980s, Al Qaeda would probably not have seen the light of day. Were it not for the fact that Bush junior through his war and occupation created havoc in Iraq and totally alienated the Sunni minority, the ISIS could certainly not have gained the support of that community to establish its first base to then spread its influence to other elements. And were it not for the rampant unemployment, misery and daily humiliation suffered by the teenagers of the *cités* in France and the vast interior of Tunisia and elsewhere, ISIS would certainly not have been able to reach out to so many tens of thousands of youth that would fight for its barbaric cause.

Donald Trump and Marine Le Pen are the living proof of the barbaric tendencies that are present in the so-called advanced societies of “Western civilisation”. Capitalism in its period of historic decline acts as the breeding ground for the barbaric tendencies that we see around us daily.

### **The source of hope: the recrudescence of class struggles**

But the tendency towards barbarism that capitalism creates is not the only product of the present world situation. There is also a very clear counter-current that creates hope for the future. Not to see this is to succumb to the pervasive pessimism that has gripped the left since the collapse of the Soviet Union and of the Stalinist regimes of the so-called “actually existing socialism”.

Great depressions create opposing tendencies. The crisis of the 1930s, created fascism and Japanese expansionism, on the one hand, and the Spanish revolution, the revolutionary events in France before and during the period of the “Popular Front”, the massive radicalisation of the Chinese peasants, and the rise of the American workers’ movement, on the other. With capital desperately trying to extricate itself from the contradictions of its own making, with no compromise between the contending classes any longer possible, society turns ever more towards radical political and ideological currents. Thus the simultaneous rise, on the one hand, of fascism and barbarism, and, on the other, class struggle tendencies bordering on or leading to revolution when conditions are ripe.

The years 2011-2013 were the scene of social upheaval internationally, in which masses fought for a different world. From Tunisia and Egypt, the truly mass-based revolutions in the Arab world that gave an impetus to less ambitious uprisings in many other countries including Bahrain, Yemen and Syria in the first six months of the events in that country to the United States, where the Occupy Wall Street movement provided the model for similar movements in dozens of American cities, from Spain where the Indignados movement occupied the central squares of the major cities of the country for weeks on end, and Greece, where another square occupation on Syntagma accompanied the dozens of general strikes that shook the country for years, to Tel Aviv, where a camp was established on Rothschild Boulevard to protest the economic problems of poor Israelis, peoples around

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the planet rose in tandem to fight for a better world. In the summer of 2013, it was the turn of the Turkish and Brazilian masses to rise. At the end of June that year, mass struggles in three countries synchronically shook the world, when 30 million Egyptians came out against the usurpation of power by the elected Muslim Brotherhood administration.

The specific demands may have been different, but the general perception was one of fraternity and camaraderie between the diverse movements. Egyptian revolutionaries ordered pizzas to go to the municipal workers of Wisconsin while Occupy Wall Street activists evoked the Egyptian revolution in all their actions. The Brazilian masses sent greetings across the ocean when they started out on their action only ten days after the Gezi uprising in Turkey by putting forth the slogan, "Love is over, henceforth this is Turkey". The most remarkable case was seen in Tel Aviv, where, after decades of hostility between Israel and the Arab countries, the campers saluted the revolutionaries of Tahrir square!

That revolutionary moment has faded. The first phase of the new revolutionary current has come to an end. It is important to be clear on the reason why. Egypt was the paradigmatic case of that revolutionary phase. And it was there more than anywhere else crystal clear that the masses lacked revolutionary leadership. The Egyptian working class was extremely combative both in the years that preceded the revolution and during the two years of revolution itself. The strike movement was decisive in bringing down Mubarak. Close to a million and a half workers joined independent unions in those years. A dynamics of permanent revolution was in the air. But there were no attempts on the part of the revolutionary political groupings to establish class independence and bring the revolution under the political hegemony of the working class. Hence the crisis of political leadership is the lesson to be drawn from that first phase of the revolution.

However, the retreat of the revolutionary wave does not imply that the masses are not fighting back. Even under the military dictatorship of al Sisi, the Egyptian textile workers in October 2015 succeeded to launch a combative and victorious strike.

It is true that since 2013, austerity, war, fascism and creeping authoritarianism have taken front stage. But the struggle of the masses has taken a different route in this second phase. The Arab revolution having fallen into what we believe to be a momentary setback, the European working class has taken over the banner of struggle. Given the overall historical conditions and the state of consciousness that is but a product of those conditions, the European proletariat, and in particular its sections in the southern rim of the continent, have turned to an electoral strategy to try to push back the devastating policy of immiseration imposed on them by the so-called Troika of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the IMF. (In the case of Greece at least, this has become the Quartet, as the European Stability Mechanism-ESM has joined the group of bandits.)

In country after country, the working masses are turning to parties to the left of

traditional social democracy, like Syriza in Greece or Podemos in Spain thereby giving a heavy blow to the discredited dominantly two-party systems of the previous period. 2015 was emblematic in this sense.

This new turn in Southern Europe finds its basis, of course, in the powerful mass movement that had emerged in the first phase of the struggle, when, especially in that decisive year of 2011, the masses in Greece and Spain had come out massively and resolutely to protest the wave of austerity, unemployment and poverty that had gripped their societies in the wake of the financial collapse of 2007-2008. It is important to be clear on the fact that the parliamentary victory of parties like Syriza and Podemos is but a specific (and we believe transient) form of the real content, which is the combative mood of the masses.

As the case of Egypt was paradigmatic in the earlier phase, so is the case of Greece paradigmatic in this second phase of the struggle. In this period of crisis that opened in 2007-2008, Greece has been the weakest link of the weak link of world capitalism, the European Union. It has been subjected to the discipline of austerity imposed by Brussels aided by the IMF with the collusion of the major political forces of the Greek bourgeoisie. The response of the masses has been exemplary. Prepared by the fire of the December 2008 revolt against the criminal murder of a 15-year youth by the police, the Greek masses staged countless general strikes throughout this whole period as well as a standing occupation in the early summer of 2011 in tandem with the indignados movement of Spain.

Greece is also the country that has most clearly revealed the contradictions of the new path chosen by the masses in their fight against the onslaught of capital. After having made a first turnaround at the end of February, in the mere interval of a month, to the demands of the Troika, the government of Tsipras consulted the masses in a referendum in early July, probably in the hope that the majority would vote “yes”, leaving its hands free for a full capitulation. The working masses of Greece said “no” with a resounding 62 per cent of the vote! The fact that Tsipras then went on to yield to the pressure of the EU despite this robust backing the Greek people had given him proved, in action, what we had said all along, that this strategy of backing reformist left-wing parties at a time when reform is the least possible, when taking power from the hands of the capitalist class is the only alternative to misery and reaction, is a blind alley. Syriza’s strategic line for a class “historical compromise” at home, and above all, abroad was condemned to fail ingloriously: **it asked for class peace in conditions of open class war.** Tsipras and his team went to Brussels and Berlin, marching in a minefield under a declared warfare, to confront ferocious, unyielding enemies, by raising the flag of class peace, that is, the white flag of surrender.

But the masses will have to overcome this setback, the political limitations posed by reformism and the confusion spread by its betrayal through their own experience. The task of revolutionaries is to demarcate themselves clearly from the misleaders of the movement, without any trace of sectarian posturing towards the

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masses themselves, joining them in all their struggles against the common enemy, but all the while exposing the treacherous leaders for what they are and building a political and organisational alternative that will be capable of serving the masses as an instrument when they are ready to take the revolutionary path. This is true for Greece and for Spain and all the other countries where the working masses rise in a struggle for survival in the face of the onslaught of capital.

The year 2016 will be crucial for a Europe with millions of unemployed and impoverished people, a stagnating economy, an insoluble banking and debt crisis, extremely vulnerable to the new shocks coming from East and West, from China and America, fragmenting among national state lines, imperialist antagonisms and rising nationalisms, between its Northern, more “privileged” part and the European South, between Western and Eastern Europe.

The entire EU project is shaken and now its crisis is exacerbated immensely by the **political** crisis produced by the huge, unstoppable tides of refugees coming from all the countries fallen victims to European and US imperialist wars, devastation, and humanitarian crises all the way from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan to Africa.

The social and political changes are already obvious: the Balkans are destabilized; Poland and Central/Eastern Europe under far right ultra-nationalist regimes start to turn against even their previous masters, Germany and the EU; Ukraine has become, economically, politically, military a “black hole” at the eastern borders of the EU. Only a few months ago, Merkel appeared as the most powerful political leader in the EU; now even a sizeable section of her own party demands her dismissal because of the refugee crisis.

From Greece to Portugal, from Catalonia to Scotland, from the prospect of a Grexit to the possibility of a Brexit, Europe has entered a period of historic social and national confrontations, of great transformations. The European ruling classes have failed miserably to unify the Continent. This is the task of the working class, at the head of the impoverished masses.

What is needed is a new leadership for the working classes of Europe, a leadership that is organised at the international level, together with the revolutionary parties of other continents, to fight for a new Europe, one that has done away with the power of capital and its complex apparatus of rule embodied both in the structures of the EU and in nation-states and replace all this with the Socialist United States of Europe.

### **The other Troika: the plight of the Middle East and North Africa**

The Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) has become the neuralgic centre of the cataclysm the world is going through. Syria, a country with a surface area of around 200 thousand square kilometres (70 thousand square miles) and a population, before the onset of the war, of 23 million, has become the scene of a war in which more than 65 foreign countries are involved! (62 countries are part of the anti-ISIS coalition formed by the US, mostly Arab and European countries,

in addition to which Russia, Iran and Lebanon via Hezbollah are present on the field, not counting the warlord political unit called the Islamic State under the self-appointed caliph al Baghdadi.)

Three major trends have to be clearly enunciated in order to clarify what at first sight looks like a chaotic situation. First, the catastrophe that has descended on the Middle East is closely intertwined with the results of past instances of imperialist and Zionist intervention and aggression in the region. To confine ourselves to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, without the war and occupation of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), without the 2006 Israeli aggression against Lebanon and the 2008 and 2014 bombing of Gaza by Israel, without the imperialist bombing of Libya in 2011, without the arming and financing of the Sunni sectarian and takfiri groups in Syria after September 2011, nothing would have been the same in the MENA region today. To grasp this provides sufficient grounds to understand why no support should be extended to the imperialist coalition in its fight against ISIS or any other forces in the region. The conflict between the US and its allies, on the one hand, and the takfiri sectarian forces, on the other, is a struggle between two maledictions for the peoples of the Middle East and the forces of the working class and the oppressed should refrain from opting for one or the other and develop their own line of struggle against both. Imperialism, US imperialism in particular, has never been this weak and ineffective in its action regarding the region, lacking any consistent and convincing strategy to cope with the risks involved.

Secondly, benefiting from the void created by this weakness of imperialism, three regional powers, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey under the strongman Tayyip Erdoğan, are clearly instigating a Sunni-Shia conflict that threatens to turn into a full-scale war. This kind of sectarian war, a veritable civil war of the entire Islamic world, cannot but cause massive death and destruction in the whole region. The proxy wars that the world has been witnessing successively in Iraq especially around the years 2006-2007, in Bahrain in 2011, in Syria since late 2011, and in Yemen for approximately a year now, have now receded to the background in importance once the main forces behind this sectarian conflict, Saudi Arabia and Iran, openly started to confront each other since the beginning of the new year after the execution by the Saudi regime of Sheikh Nimr Bakr al-Nimr, the most prominent Shia clergyman in Saudi Arabia, for having come out to clearly condemn the Kingdom's policies, especially its invasion of Bahrain in order to quell revolution there in 2011-2012.

The Sunni-Shia divide, based on an ideological-theological schism that is almost as old as Islam itself, is at present only the ideological expression of a material clash of interests between the two rentier states and their ruling classes that live off the ground rent provided by the oil and natural gas reserves under their soil. The scope of the problem is easily grasped when one remembers that the Eastern province of Qatif of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are major sources of ground rent that also happen to be Shia-dominated, but Sunni-ruled. When in 2011 Bahrain and the Shia population of Saudi Arabia joined the Arab masses in ebullition, this caused



a nightmare for the Saudi regime, already the principal centre of counterrevolution in the whole Arab world. The new self-styled “Islamic Alliance against Terrorism”, announced recently in Riyadh by the new strongman of Saudi Arabia, Muhammad bin Selman, son of the king and deputy crown prince, brings together 34 Muslim countries, but studiously excludes all countries with some degree of Shia or Alevi influence. It is no small irony that this very country that poses as the leader of the Sunni Islamic world, this country whose hallmark is, apart from being host to the holy places of Islam, being one of richest countries in the world thanks to its oil reserves, now finds itself, at this very critical juncture, in deep trouble economically as a result of the fall in the price of oil in the context of the world economic crisis.

All the more reason why a sectarian war in the Middle East will be one where the partition of the immense wealth produced on the basis of oil and natural gas between the ruling cliques of these countries will be the main bone of contention, the theological divide only serving to mask these interests. However, because the masses, unless convinced of this nature of the war, will come out on the side of their respective denominations, this will be one of the bloodiest settling of accounts in the annals of war.

The place of Tayyip Erdoğan in this equation is crucial to understand. Turkey is more advanced in terms of its capitalist economic structures and the formation of a capitalist class than all the Arab countries. The Turkish bourgeoisie has been exhibiting expansionist tendencies ever since the 1990s, when the collapse of the Soviet Union and the other bureaucratically degenerated workers’ states promised to open up new geographic spaces for the increasingly ambitious capital of the country. Riding on the crest of this wave, Tayyip Erdoğan has set his eyes on becoming the “Rais” (or leader) of the whole MENA region. This is what explains his and his party’s criminal policy of instigating civil war in Syria, pitting Sunni forces against the Alevi minority. However, Turkey has its own conflict with Saudi Arabia over Egypt, the former supporting the Muslim Brotherhood and the latter the hangman of the Brotherhood, the Bonaparte al Sisi.

The US should not be assumed to be automatically behind Saudi Arabia, long-time major ally in the region, and Turkey, member of NATO. In effect, the execution of al Nimr by the Saudi regime may be regarded partially as a forcing of the hand of the US to choose sides, since the nuclear deal with Iran signed in July last year was met by the Saudi regime with utter hostility. As for Erdoğan, he has his own frictions with the US over the Kurds of Syria, whom the US regards as one of the most useful allies on the ground while the AKP government regards them as a threat since the leading force within the Syrian Kurdish community is pro-PKK.

So the great current threat to the MENA region comes from what could be called the other Troika composed of the Saudi Kingdom, Qatar and Turkey.

Thirdly, several factors are now working, for the first time since the civil war started, in favour of a political solution to the Syrian impasse. Russia has realised that the longer the quagmire continues, the higher the threat of a contagion of takfiri



tendencies to its own Muslim populations both at home and in the so-called “near abroad” and may very well be willing to sacrifice Beshar al Assad in return for what is termed a “civil state” in Syria, roughly the counterpart of a “secular regime” in Arab political terminology. The European Union has confronted a million-strong flow of asylum-seekers, likely to cause an even bigger friction given the rise of racism all over the continent and is ready to find a political solution so as to stop definitively this migratory flow. The US is now, to take Obama for his word, even more worried about ISIS than Assad and may end up agreeing to a revamped Baath regime if Assad is personally removed. The position of Iran will depend on who prevails in domestic politics, the more pro-Western moderates, including a wing of the conservatives represented by the current president Rouhani, or the true conservatives, who are already quite hostile to the nuclear deal. If the former wing, receiving the support of all who stand to gain from an overture to Western capitalism, wins, then Iran will finally drop its adamant refusal to the ouster of Assad.

It is in fact the Sunni Troika that will try to prevent a political solution in Syria. They have invested so much in the fall of the Syrian regime that it will be utter defeat for all three of them if something akin to the Baath regime minus Assad remains in power. So a relentless struggle against the Saudi regime and the power system established by Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey is vital for the future of the peoples of the region. A Sunni-Shia war in the Middle East will mean devastation for the region and the breeding ground of the Third World War.

The salvation of the peoples of the MENA region lies in the revival of the spirit of the Arab revolution, of the Gezi uprising in Turkey, of the Rothschild Boulevard protests in Israel, the serhildans of the Kurds, the intifada of the Palestinians, and a renewed revolutionary movement in Iran. It requires the joining together of the forces of the working class and the poor peasantry, of the oppressed nations and creeds, of the downtrodden women and the destitute youth in order to create an alternative to the bloodthirsty belligerence of the ruling classes. Only the formation of a Socialist Federation of the Middle East and North Africa will really bring peace and prosperity to the age-long problems that afflict the peoples of the region.

### **Build revolutionary parties and an International!**

One can invest no confidence at all in the traditional leaderships to weather all the storms that rock the old continent and the Mediterranean world and to stop the headlong rise of barbaric tendencies. Neither the old Stalinist parties, nor the new supposedly pluralist parties devised as a refuge from the bankruptcy of Stalinism without any clear perspectives for the future, nor yet social democracy in Europe, on the one hand, nor the petty bourgeois nationalism of the Nasserite kind in the Arab world, on the other, can provide answers to the burning questions of our time. Postmodern identity politics or post-Marxist “radical democracy”, popular across a spectrum of parties of very diverse character, ranging from Podemos in Spain all

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the way to the predominantly Kurdish HDP in Turkey, are totally off the mark in a world where class struggle and outright war more and more say the final word.

What is needed is a revolutionary party of the working class in each country and an international organisation that brings them together to act as a leading light in regional, continental and worldwide struggles. What is needed more than ever is to provide leadership to the masses through internationalist parties reared in the traditions of revolutionary Marxism. The success of such a quest is the final condition of putting an end to barbarism through the creation of international socialism, in country after country, region after region, and continent after continent.

January 20, 2016

# Islamism: A comparative-historical overview<sup>1</sup>

Burak Gürel

Islamism has been one of the most hotly debated political ideologies of the world for more than three decades. A series of significant political developments have kept Islamism in the headlines during the 1980s and 1990s, such as the Iranian Revolution (1979), the war between the Soviet Union and the Afghan mujahideen (1979–89), the emergence of Hezbollah in Lebanon (1982) and Hamas in Palestine (1987), the Algerian Civil War (1992–97), and the Taliban’s takeover in Afghanistan (1996). Younger generations’ first encounter with Islamism was the suicide attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001 and the subsequent US invasion of Afghanistan. Islamism continues to be an important political subject in the twenty-first century. The war between the Taliban and the US-led coalition in Afghanistan is continuing. Different Islamist actors, ranging from the Islamic Republic of Iran to al-Qaeda-linked groups in Eurasia, pose a significant challenge to the United States

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is an expanded and updated version of a book chapter with the same title (published in *The Neoliberal Landscape and the Rise of Islamist Capital in Turkey*, edited by Neşecan Balkan, Erol Balkan, and Ahmet Öncü, New York: Berghahn Books, 2015, pp. 13–40).

and other Western powers. The Palestinian question remains important, and Hamas continues to be a powerful force in the Palestinian national movement. Islamist movements have recently resurged in the Arab world in the process of the Arab Spring that started in December 2010. The electoral success of Ennahda in Tunisia in 2011, the victory of Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimeen (the Muslim Brotherhood) in the presidential elections in Egypt in 2012, the killing of the United States ambassador to Libya by Salafists in 2012, and the shockingly rapid rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in 2014 are different manifestations of this recent revival. Finally, cultural and political problems experienced by the Muslim minorities in Western Europe introduce a new spatial dimension to Islamist politics.

Islamism appeared with a new face in Turkey at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, AKP), founded by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his associates in 2001, gained an immediate electoral victory in the parliamentary elections on 3 November 2002 and became the ruling party with a clear parliamentary majority. The AKP successfully defeated the Turkish military's memorandum on 27 April 2007 and the coup attempt on 15 July 2016. The AKP's uninterrupted rule in the last fifteen years based on its hegemony over the working class is the peak of Turkish Islamism. This hegemony has led to hot debates in political, media, and academic circles about the character of the AKP (whether it is an Islamist or semi-Islamist party, or simply a conservative party like the Christian Democrats in Western Europe) and its similarities with and differences from the National Vision movement. The globally strong Islamist organization headed by Fethullah Gülen, which had supported Erdoğan's AKP until recent years and then entered into a serious conflict with it recently, has also been an important theme of research and debate.

### Islamist ideology

In this essay, I define Islamism in line with Guilain Denoëux, as "a form of instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups, and organizations that pursue political objectives" (2002: 61). For Denoëux, Islamism "provides political responses to today's societal challenges by imagining a future, the foundations for which rest on reappropriated, reinvented concepts borrowed from the Islamic tradition" (2002: 61).<sup>2</sup> Therefore, instead of focusing on Islam as a religion, it makes more sense to focus on the political actors who have constantly reinterpreted Islam in different ways in order to achieve their particular cultural, economic, and political objectives in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Ayoob 1979: 535–36; Mamdani 2005: 148–49; Bayat 2008: 105). Reinvention of the Islamic tradition to address modern problems is the basis of Islamist politics of all brands:

It is the invention of tradition that provides the tools for de-historicizing Islam and separating it from the various contexts in which it has flourished over the

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<sup>2</sup> For another study following Denoëux's definition of Islamism, see Ayoob (2004).

past fourteen hundred years. This decontextualizing of Islam allows Islamists in theory to ignore the social, economic, and political milieus within which Muslim communities exist. It provides Islamists a powerful ideological tool that they can use to “purge” Muslim societies of the “impurities” and “accretions” that are the inevitable accompaniments of the historical process, but which they see as the reason for Muslim decline. (Ayoob 2004: 1)

This sort of invention of tradition lies at the heart of the political theory of all major Islamist theorists. They view the pre-Islamic history of the Arabs as an age of “ignorance” (*jahiliyya*) in which injustice and barbarism prevailed, and the history of the Arabs in the seventh century, when the prophet Mohammad (570–632) founded the first Islamic state, as an age of happiness. According to Sunnis, the age of happiness includes the period of the rule of the four caliphates after the Prophet, while Shiites limit this age to the period of the prophet Mohammad and the fourth caliph, Ali (599–661). Despite this significant disagreement on the history of Islam, since all Islamists see (at least parts of) the seventh century as an age of happiness, they all propose a “return” to the essence of Islam as experienced in its purest form in the seventh century. For instance, Mawlana Mawdudi (1903–79) argued for the necessity of a radical break from the past, which he saw as not Islamic enough, and the foundation of a truly Islamic state similar to the first one established in the seventh century. Famous Egyptian Islamist theorist and activist Sayyid Qutb (1902–66) took this call for a radical break from the not so Islamic past very seriously. He argued that the Muslim world was currently living in the age of the modern *jahiliyya* in which new ungodly idols such as nationalism and socialism had replaced the idols of the pre-Islamic past (Kepel 2002: 25–26, 34). The leader of Iran’s Islamic revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini (1903–89), interpreted the concept of the return to *jahiliyya* within a conceptual framework of Shiism. He argued that the history of the Muslim world after the death of the prophet Mohammad is an era of uninterrupted injustice and alienation from the real Islam (Harman 1994).<sup>3</sup> In short, the definition of *jahiliyya* and the goal of overcoming it by returning to an essentialized version of Islam is the basis of Islamist ideology.

It is necessary to emphasize two issues regarding the idea of returning to the essence of Islam. First of all, with the exception of a few individuals and marginal groups, Islamist intellectuals and movements have never advocated wholly mimicking the Islamic practices of the seventh century. This type of an extremely antimodern interpretation of Islam has not received much credit, even in Saudi

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<sup>3</sup> The audiences of Khomeini, Mawdudi, and Qutb in the Muslim world are not isolated from each other. For instance, Khomeini influenced many Sunni Islamists in some countries, including Turkey, especially during the first few years following the Iranian Revolution. However, due to the historical significance of the Sunni-Shia divide within Islam, Mawdudi and Qutb had a much broader appeal among Sunnis, while Shiites remained as the main constituency of Khomeini’s politics.

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Arabia, where the Wahhabi branch of Islam, which – at least on paper- advocates such a practice, is the official ideology. Thus, Wahhabism could be incorporated into the Saudi regime, which is deeply integrated into the world capitalist system. Similar to other religious ideologies, Islamism takes a selective approach toward modernity in which it keeps a certain distance from a number of modern ideas and practices without rejecting modern technology and capitalism, both of which lie at the core of modernity.<sup>4</sup> Second, despite viewing the seventh century as a century of happiness, some Islamist movements depart from Khomeini’s radical approach by embracing more recent experiences as political references. For instance, in Turkey the AKP and other Islamist parties view the Ottoman Empire as a positive historical reference. They advocate neo-Ottomanism, which aims to make Turkey an Islamic superpower that can act as a big brother of non-Turkish Muslims outside Turkey.

Mawlana, Qutb, and Khomeini proposed using state power to overcome *jahiliyya* and revive Islam. Putting the question of political power forward is as radical an intervention as the conceptualization of ignorance and has enabled Islamism to turn into a modern political movement. The question of political power inevitably brought the question of political organization to the agenda. Mawdudi, who founded the Jamaat-e-Islami (Islamic Community) in India in 1941, referred to the “vanguard” role of the first Muslims who accompanied the Prophet when he was moving from Mecca to Medina in 622. Qutb saw the solution to the question of political power in the organized struggle led by the “new Koranic generation.” Finally, Khomeini advocated the foundation of an Islamic state ruled by a leading Islamic jurist, for which he started an organized struggle (Kepel 2002: 26–40). Thus, Islamism is an ideology that attributes to *jahiliyya* responsibility for all the economic, social, and political problems that Muslims face in modern times and defines the return to the essence of Islam as a political project that can be realized through organized political struggle.

Leading Islamist theorist-activists like Qutb and Khomeini defined Islamism as an opposition movement against secular regimes. For this reason, despite all their differences regarding the strategy for taking political power, the political movements they inspired have aimed to change the status quo in secular countries. On the other hand, “Islamism in power” is as important as “Islamism in opposition.” As the cases of Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and (north) Sudan demonstrate, “Islamism in power” politicizes Islam for the sake of defending the status quo. Interestingly, “Islamism in power” may encounter opposition not only from secularists but also from Islamists. In contemporary Iran, a significant part of the opposition movement contains groups claiming to be the true heirs of Khomeini and utilizing Islamic themes and discourses. Today there are Islamist groups who aim to topple the Saudi kingdom, which claims to be an Islamic regime. Ironically, in the case of

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<sup>4</sup> For a similar emphasis on Islamists’ selective approach toward modernity, see Denoëux (2002: 58).

Saudi Arabia the ideological apparatuses once utilized by the regime to reinforce its political hegemony were later utilized by opposition groups in order to discredit the regime. Radical Islamist groups, whose leaders became familiar with the works of Ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328) due to the enormous Wahhabist propaganda campaign generously funded by the Saudi regime in the 1970s and 1980s, called for overthrowing the Saudi kingdom in the 1990s due to its alliance with the United States (Kepel 2002: 72). The complexity and contradictory character of Islamist ideology and politics require us to define the concept of Islamism broadly. Therefore, my definition of Islamism includes all (mainstream and radical) political movements and regimes that make politics with reference to Islam and state their aim as reviving Islam regardless of their differences in terms of political positions (in opposition or in power), strategies of power (reformist or revolutionary), and means to make politics (armed or unarmed).

### **Class dynamics of Islamism**

Although there have been numerous intellectuals and political movements that interpret Islam in an anti-capitalist framework, the great majority of Islamist movements do not aim to destroy capitalist relations of production. Regardless of the weight of state-owned enterprises in their national economies, all Islamist regimes have large private sectors in which the bourgeoisie owns the means of production.<sup>5</sup> Even in the distinctive case of Iran, in which the strong mass appeal of the leftist interpretation of Islam had forced Khomeini to adopt a more leftist rhetoric, the Islamist revolution did not destroy the capitalist relations of production. It only eliminated the secular bourgeoisie around the shah and assisted the Islamist bourgeoisie in increasing its economic power. Islamist movements' ability to establish (complete or partial) hegemony over the working class in spite of their bourgeois character requires us to understand the class dynamics of the mass support behind these movements very well. Islamist movements are products of an alliance of the Islamist bourgeoisie and the working class. The hegemonic force of this alliance is the Islamist bourgeoisie, and the subordinate force is the working class.<sup>6</sup> Similar to other capitalist states, all nation-states founded in the Muslim

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5 Afghanistan under the Taliban requires a more nuanced analysis, since it was entirely devastated by unending wars, neither the state nor the private sector had any significant production capacity, and the only commodity produced in significant quantities was opium.

6 Despite his recognition of the coalition of the Islamist bourgeoisie and the lower classes as the backbone of all successful Islamist movements, Kepel tends to present it as a coalition without any hegemon by arguing that Islamist ideology cannot be reduced to the interests of a single social group (Kepel 2002: 9, 29). As the vast literature on political hegemony indicates, different classes can join political movements that represent the core interests of another class. In fact, it is possible to read the entire political history of the world as the history of the formation and disintegration of alliances that represent the core interests of one class over others. Kepel's study itself provides enough material indicating the Islamist bourgeoisie's quest to establish hegemony over the



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world in the twentieth century were based on a power bloc that included certain factions of the capitalist class while excluding others. Islamist movements, which emerge as opposition movements demanding a regime change in secular countries, politicize the demands of the capitalists outside the power bloc with religious rhetoric. For instance, in Iran before the Islamic revolution, the big bourgeoisie, which had close connections and shared the same secular culture with the Pahlavi dynasty, was well positioned to obtain significant economic opportunities due to its inclusion in the power bloc. On the other hand, the small and medium-sized bourgeoisie (which were known as the bazaaris, since most of their businesses were located in the Tehran marketplace called the bazaar) outside the power bloc became the hegemonic force of the Islamist opposition against the Pahlavi dynasty. In Turkey, the Islamist movement represented the Islamist bourgeoisie of Anatolia, which consisted of small-scale, non-monopolistic capitalists who were outside the power bloc, which was dominated by the monopolistic and secularist capital of Istanbul and İzmir (Gürel 2004: 88–91).

Similar to all bourgeois political movements, the success of Islamism depends on the Islamist bourgeoisie's capacity to establish hegemony over the lower classes. Despite their historical differences, the successes of Khomeini in Iran in the 1970s and the AKP in Turkey in the 2000s are both products of the Islamist bourgeoisie's ability to win the support of the lower classes. Conversely, the defeat of Islamists in Algeria in the 1990s stemmed from the Islamist bourgeoisie's loss of hegemony over the lower classes (Kepel 2002: 67). For this reason, it is critical to understand what circumstances lead the lower classes to support the Islamist bourgeoisie. In all successful cases in the last and the current century, the Islamist bourgeoisie won the support of two groups within the working class: the informal sector workers and the white-collar workers with a high school or university degree. In order to understand the political behavior of these groups, we need to examine the economic and demographic indicators of the Muslim world for the second half of the last century. Between 1955 and 1970, the population of the Muslim world increased by 50 %. By 1975, 60% of this population was under the age of twenty-four. The development of capitalist relations of production in the rural areas and the industrial and service sectors in the urban areas increased the pace of rural to urban migration. Unemployment increased as the speed of employment creation fell behind the speed of population growth. Since urban infrastructure could not be improved to the extent needed to provide decent-quality housing to the new urbanites, the number and the population of the shantytowns increased rapidly (Kepel 2002: 66). Although a part of the shantytown population could find jobs in the formal sector, the majority was employed in the informal sector, with low wages, without access to social security, and under constant threat of unemployment. In fact, the majority of the people who are counted as unemployed in national statistics constantly oscillate between

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proletariat as the primary dynamic of the modern Islamist movements.

informal sector employment and unemployment. The informal proletariat, which is often called the “urban poor” in the academic literature, is the most important target population of the Islamist movements due to its numerical strength and mobilization capacity.

A significant source of the militant cadres of Islamist organizations is the workers and the unemployed who have received relatively higher education. Some commentators call them the “educated middle class” (Bayat 2008: 101) or the “new middle class” (Denoeux 2002: 62; Harman 1994), but it seems more proper to classify this group as the “educated proletariat” because of its economic distance from the higher echelons of white-collar workers and the middle class. Another significant transformation in the Muslim world in the second half of the twentieth century was the expansion of the middle and higher education so as to encompass lower classes. This transformation created a large educated segment within the proletariat composed of people who follow the outside world, popular lifestyles, and consumption patterns more closely than the less educated segments of the proletariat. This segment expected to find high-wage jobs providing the comfortable living standard that they think they deserve due to their higher educational credentials. However, since the speed of employment creation fell behind the speed of population growth, the unemployment rate of this group also increased rapidly. Moreover, most of the educated workers could find jobs that did not provide enough to let them achieve the high living standards they expected. The big disparity between the expectations and the actual results laid the groundwork for the crisis of hegemony of the secular (or partially secular) regimes in the Muslim world and ripened the conditions for the Islamist movements to gain the support of the educated proletariat (Harman 1994; Kepel 2002: 66; Bayat 2008: 101). On the other hand, these circumstances were no less advantageous for the Marxist organizations to win the informal and educated proletariat. In fact, Islamists were able to win the support of the working masses only with the decline of the radical left. Moreover, Islamist influence among the blue-collar workers in the formal sector is often much more limited than among the two groups mentioned above. This applies to the case of Iran, in which the Islamists had to carry out massive purges to eliminate Marxist influence among the factory workers (Poya 2002: 156–62). In order to establish hegemony over the informal and educated sections of the proletariat, Islamist movements adopted leftist themes as part of their political discourse. They blamed the *jahiliyya* as responsible for the existing economic problems and social injustice and argued that complete Islamization of the society and the state was the only way to bring welfare and social justice. Furthermore, they effectively utilized anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist slogans, which are always appealing to the masses. By doing this, they prevented the Marxists from becoming the only political actor representing anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism.

## **The crisis of secular ideologies and the rise of Islamism**

The national liberation movements in the Muslim world in the twentieth century were led mostly by secular elites. It was these elites that determined the developmental path of their countries after in-dependence. These postcolonial states promised the masses economic welfare and independence from imperialism. In the 1950s and 1960s, many countries in the Middle East and North Africa, both of which have central importance for the subsequent development of Islamism, were ruled by secular and nationalist parties that declared themselves “socialist.” These parties promised economic development and distributive justice to gain the support of the masses. The second important source of their mass support was their propaganda against imperialism, which retained its existence in the region both economically and militarily during the Cold War, and against Zionism, which became a strong regional actor after the foundation of Israel in 1948. The victory of the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–70) over Britain and France in the Suez Crisis (1956) was the pinnacle of the power of secular nationalism in the entire region. However, it did not take long for the secular nationalist regimes’ decline from that pinnacle to begin. Their failure to bring economic welfare became apparent from the second half of the 1960s on. Growing mass disillusionment was due not only to economic failure but also to the awareness of a rising capitalist class well connected with the so-called socialist regimes. The demagogic nature of the socialist rhetoric of these regimes became visible. As the struggle against imperialism and Zionism failed, this disappointment turned into anger. The quick and disastrous defeat of the Egyptian, Jordanian, and Syrian armies, which joined together under Nasser’s leadership, against Israel in the Six-Day War in 1967 was the second biggest trauma for the Arab world after the foundation of Israel. That trauma directly determined the course of the rise of Islamism in Arab countries and also made a less direct but still profound impact upon the masses in Iran, Turkey, and other non-Arab Muslim countries.

The Islamist movement was not the only potential beneficiary of the crisis of the secular regimes. Indeed, radical leftist movements gained some power in countries like Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, and Syria, while they experienced a considerable rise in Iran and Turkey in the 1970s. However, these movements were soon defeated due mainly to their lack of a coherent strategy of taking political power that could end the bourgeois hegemony over the working class. Hence, the radical left in Muslim countries entered into a long-lasting crisis about a decade earlier than the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. In short, the crisis of the secular regimes and the radical left laid the groundwork for the rise of Islamism.

## **A brief history of Islamism**

The great trauma of 1967 not only benefited the Islamist groups in opposition, but also Saudi Arabia, which was the most prominent Islamist regime at that time. The Saudi kingdom, whose economic power increased astronomically thanks to its

increasing oil exports, became a rising star almost simultaneously with the decline of secular nationalism. As mentioned above, the Suez crisis of 1956 symbolizes the rise of secular nationalism, while the Six-Day War of 1967 symbolizes its decline. It is possible to explain the rise and fall of Saudi prestige in the Muslim world similarly, with reference to two other wars. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) started an oil embargo to protest the support of the United States and Western European countries to Israel during the Arab-Israeli War in 1973. Saudi Arabia, a key OPEC member, gained twofold from the embargo. First, it increased its economic power thanks to increasing oil prices due to the embargo. Saudi capital effectively used the petro-dollars to expand the system of Islamic banking. The second gain from the embargo was political. The effectiveness of the embargo created an image that the Saudis could find more effective solutions to the Palestinian question than the secular Arab regimes. The new international landscape after the oil embargo appeared as a golden opportunity for the Saudis, who intensified their propaganda campaign, already begun in the 1960s, to spread Wahhabi ideology in the Muslim world. During the 1970s and 1980s, generous Saudi funds helped establish numerous Islamic institutions wherever there was a sizeable (Sunni) Muslim population, from Southeast Asia to Western Europe. Among many activities, these institutions distributed a vast amount of Wahhabi literature for free. Saudi influence among the Sunnis thus increased considerably.

However, given the continuation of the US-Saudi alliance and the remaining severity of the Palestinian question, the resilience of the Saudis' prestige remained contested. The Iranian Revolution of 1979, which quickly enabled the new Islamist regime of Iran and its revolutionary discourse to earn high prestige among Muslims, increased that uncertainty. It soon became clear that the Saudis could not easily break Iranian influence only by anti-Shia propaganda. The occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in the same year as the Iranian Revolution gave the Saudis an opportunity to divert the attention of the Muslim masses from Iran and Palestine to Afghanistan. They quickly seized that opportunity by establishing a triple alliance with Pakistan and the United States in order to start an anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup> In addition to vast economic and military aid given to different groups in Afghanistan, commonly referred to as the Afghan mujahideen, the Saudis effectively mobilized their global Wahhabi network in order to recruit volunteers to join the Afghan mujahideen. As a result, Saudi Arabia succeeded considerably in portraying the Soviet Union as the greatest enemy and the Afghan war as the greatest jihad. This success translated into the peaking of Saudi prestige in the Muslim world in the 1980s. Everything seemed pretty positive for the Saudis by the year 1989. The Afghan jihad had finally succeeded. Islamic banks and the Wahhabi network, which played important roles in that outcome, were strengthened.

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<sup>7</sup> For a detailed analysis of the formative role of these three countries in the Afghan jihad, see Mamdani (2004).

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However, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 turned the Saudi project of hegemony in the Muslim world upside down. The Saudi elite could find no other option but to seek the support of the United States and accept the deployment of tens of thousands of foreign troops in their country. Although Iraq's disastrous defeat in January 1991 relieved Saudi Arabia, deployment of Western troops on the holy lands of Islam played into the hands of Iran, which attacked the Saudi regime for its alliance with imperialism. More importantly, the alliance of the Sunni jihadists and the Saudi regime received a serious blow from the presence of foreign troops in Saudi Arabia. Many jihadists who fought in Afghanistan started to question the legitimacy of the Saudi regime. The most prominent figure among them was Osama bin Laden (1957–2011), the leader of al-Qaeda, who left Saudi Arabia and declared the Saudi regime illegitimate in 1991. In short, Saudi Arabia's star, having risen during the Arab-Israeli War in 1973, quickly fell after the First Gulf War in 1991. The Arab Spring that started in December 2010 has already approached the shores of Saudi Arabia, and the Saudi elites are extremely nervous about the unfolding of those events. They are currently implementing a variety of policies in order to defeat the Arab Spring. They have increased the level of economic aid given to ordinary citizens in order to prevent the radicalization of the masses. Saudi Arabia is currently providing military assistance to other countries like Bahrain in order to crush the revolution outside its borders. Finally, it is trying to transform the ongoing revolutions into sectarian bloodshed by playing into the Shia-Sunni divide, as clearly seen in the ongoing civil war in Syria.

Pakistan is an example of semi-Islamism in power. It is a product of the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 on the basis of the Hindu-Islam divide. Two of the most popular (and competing) Sunni Islamic currents in contemporary Pakistan, the Barelvi and the Deobandi schools, are all rooted in the pre-partition period. While the Barelvi school embraces popular devotion and mysticism and is closely associated to Sufism (White 2012: 182), the Deobandi school represents an interpretation of Islam that has certain similarities with Wahhabism in the sense of a strong emphasis on the return to seventh-century practices and a strong hostility toward heterodox interpretations of Islam such as Sufism (Kepel 2002: 58). Mawdudi, one of the principal ideologues of modern Islamism, was a member of the Deobandi school. Although Deobandis are numerically weaker than Barelvis, they have dominated Islamist politics in Pakistan (White 2012: 184).

Pakistan's character as an extremely diverse country both in terms of ethnicity and language forced the founders of the country, most of whom were secular (Noman 1990: 3-8), to construct the national identity mainly around religion. Although the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 after a national liberation war against Pakistan showed the limits of religious identity to maintain Pakistan's national/territorial unity, without any other effective tool to serve this end, emphasis on Islam was reinforced even further after 1971. Islam continues to be the only unifying element

in Pakistan, which lives in a state of permanent crisis.<sup>8</sup> That is why the secular elites did not repress the Islamists in Pakistan as harshly as they did elsewhere, for instance, in Egypt (Kepel 2002: 59). Similar to Egypt, Turkey and elsewhere, Pakistan's secular elites have utilized Islamic discourse especially when repressing the radical left. Although the religious establishment (which is made up of religious scholars – the *ulema*-, personnel, and institutions) has failed to make Pakistan a completely theocratic state like Saudi Arabia, it has preserved its power relatively better than in many countries in the Muslim world. Moreover, ordinary people have viewed secularism as a manifestation of Western influence and elite domination. For these reasons, Pakistan has never undergone a fundamental secular transformation (Noman 1990: 33-34).

Hence, the further Islamization of Pakistan progressed on a different path. Due to the growing economic influence of Saudi Arabia over Pakistan's economy following the post-1973 oil boom and the pressure exerted by the Islamist organizations, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (1928–79), a secular politician by Pakistani standards, made a number of sharia laws part of the legal system. Official declaration of the heterodox Ahmadiyya community as non-Muslim (a key Islamist demand rejected by the government in 1952) was also accepted by Bhutto in 1974 (Noman 1990: 7, 109). General Mohammad Zia ul-Haq (1924–88), who overthrew Bhutto in 1977, put several Islamic policies into practice. Zia supported the Afghan mujahideen enormously. He made *zakat* (a religious rule that requires better-off Muslims to give 2.5% of their wealth to poor people as alms at the end of the month of Ramadan every year) official by taxing 2.5% of all bank deposits during Ramadan every year. Those taxes funded the madrassas (schools where classes on religion make up the bulk of the curriculum), which provide meals and accommodation to their students, most of whose families were displaced and lost their sources of livelihood during the process of agrarian transformation (Alavi 2009). Zia also changed the laws to allow madrasa graduates to take teaching posts in public schools (Kepel 2002: 59). These policies of Islamization aimed to decrease the further radicalization of the poor and strongly tie the religious establishment to the regime. However, the Pakistani ruling elite did not entirely eliminate secularism in the country. For this reason, despite the significant erosion of secularism in daily life and politics, the Pakistani regime should be defined as semi-Islamist. This is one of the reasons why alongside the secular and semi-secular parties there are still many Islamist parties

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8 In an essay written in 1973, Waheed-uz-Zaman, a well-known scholar of the time, illustrated well the logic of the renewed emphasis on Islam in Pakistan in the post 1971 period: "If we let go the ideology of Islam, we cannot hold together as a nation by any other means... If the Arabs, the Turks, the Iranians, God forbid, give up Islam, the Arabs yet remain Arabs, the Turks remain Turks, the Iranians remain Iranians, but what do we remain if we give up Islam?" (quoted in Richter 1979: 550). On the other hand, as the growing hatred and violence against the Christians and Shia Muslims by the Sunni extremists demonstrates, the Islamization process since the late 1970s has become a factor that threatens the national unity of Pakistan significantly.



in opposition in Pakistan today.

The case of Iran makes possible the analysis of the transition of Islamism from opposition to state power. The Iranian Revolution (1979) is so far the only case in which an Islamist movement took power through a revolutionary overthrow of a secular regime by the masses. Although the revolution was a joint product of many Islamist, liberal, and radical leftist groups, the supporters of Khomeini succeeded in establishing hegemony over the liberal and the leftist opposition right before the revolution and destroying them after the revolution. For this reason, without forgetting the heterogeneity of the opposition that overthrew the Pahlavi monarchy, it is possible to define the period between 1979 and 1982 as a process of Islamic revolution.

The secular prime minister of Iran, Mohammad Mosaddeq (1882–1967), was overthrown in 1953 by a military coup backed by Britain and the United States. Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1919–80) returned to Iran after the coup and ruled the country on the basis of a secular monarchy until 1979. During the 1960s, Pahlavi implemented fundamental reforms, popularly known as the “White Revolution,” which triggered Iran’s capitalist transformation. Pahlavi faced opposition from three different social groups during the reform process. First, the religious establishment, led by prominent religious scholars, felt uneasy about the erosion of their cultural and economic power by the shah. For instance, the Iranian clergy fiercely opposed the Land Reform Law of 1962 that threatened to undermine the economic power of the landowning clergy and the religious institutions, which are financed by land-based income (Keshavarzian 2007: 238–39). Khomeini, the leader of the clergy, was sent into exile in 1964 after giving a speech condemning the shah for destroying national sovereignty by allowing US military presence in Iran. After that point, the religious establishment became a major force of opposition. The second major opposition group was the small and medium-sized bourgeoisie (the *bazaaris*), which started to feel alienated from the monarchy because of its nurturing of the big (and secular) bourgeoisie at their expense. In addition to this discriminatory treatment of the *bazaaris*, the Pahlavi regime also took openly hostile measures against them. For instance, in 1963, the state started stricter tax audits against the merchants who were refusing to pay taxes and threatened to launch an anti-speculation campaign (Keshavarzian 2007: 240). These policies forced the small and medium-sized bourgeoisie to join the opposition almost simultaneously with the religious establishment under Khomeini. The continuing expansion of the Iranian economy until the mid-1970s prevented further radicalization of the *bazaaris*, whose income kept increasing despite their decreasing share in the national economy. However, following the sudden decrease in oil prices and rising inflation in 1975, the shah started a massive anti-speculation campaign that hit the *bazaaris* hard: two hundred and fifty thousand businesses were fined or closed down, eight thousand businessmen were jailed, and twenty-three thousand businessmen were expelled to remote areas of Iran (Keshavarzian 2007: 242). After that point, the



bazaaris became increasingly radicalized and enormously supported Khomeini.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, all parts of the working class were antagonized by the Pahlavi regime during the 1970s. While Marxist groups such as the Tudeh (the Iranian Communist Party; the name means “masses” in the Persian language) became stronger among the formal workers than other parts of the proletariat, Khomeini’s movement won the support of the informal workers in the shantytowns of Tehran and other big cities. In addition to liberals and leftists, Islamists also gained ground among the well-educated proletariat, whose expectations rose during the White Revolution but were not fulfilled in the subsequent period. As mentioned above, the Iranian Revolution is the historical period in which the Islamists utilized leftist discourses and slogans to the utmost. The situation was not born in a vacuum. Tudeh and the leftist guerilla organizations such as the People’s Fedayeen were strengthened in that period. This overall rise of the radical left in Iranian society gave way to an Islamist-leftist hybridization. By reinterpreting concepts in the Koran such as *mostakberin* (oppressors) and *mostazafin* (oppressed) with reference to Marxist concepts of “exploitation” and “class struggle,” the Iranian intellectual Ali Shariati (1933–77) became the leading theorist of the leftist version of Islamism. Shariati’s works inspired groups like the People’s Mujahideen, which played a crucial role in the Iranian Revolution (Kepel 2002: 72).<sup>10</sup> After recognizing the strong influence of this leftist interpretation of Islam in Iran in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Khomeini also used the concepts of *mostakberin* and *mostazafin* quite often until his death (Abrahamian 1993: 47–51; Harman 1994; Kepel 2002: 39–41). The leftist turn in Khomeini’s political discourse did not scare the Islamist bourgeoisie much because it was instrumental in channeling the anger of the proletariat only toward the secular bourgeoisie and saving the Islamist bourgeoisie from that anger (Kepel 2002: 122; Poya 2002: 138).

Khomeini was equally careful when dealing with the secular opposition against the shah. He refrained from using a strictly religious language in order not to alienate the liberal opposition, which led the first big wave of protests against the shah in 1977. In November 1978, the leaders of the liberal opposition visited Khomeini in France and expressed their support to him. At that moment, Khomeini was declaring his goal as founding “an Islamic republic which would protect the independence and democracy of Iran.” A few months later, political circumstances

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9 This does not mean that all bazaaris were Islamists supporting Khomeini. There were three sections of bazaaris in the opposition before the revolution. One section was composed of Khomeini supporters; the other two supported, respectively, the Liberation Movement of Iran and the National Front (Keshavarzian 2007: 247). This shows that the Islamist small and medium-sized bourgeoisie and the religious establishment constituted the core of the Khomeini movement, which hegemonized the other sections of the bazaaris in the process of hegemonizing the entire opposition. Similar to other supporters of the secular organizations, many bazaaris were suppressed by the Islamist regime in the early 1980s (Keshavarzian 2007: 254–55).

10 For more detailed information on the People’s Mujahideen, see Abrahamian (1989).

changed in his favor to such an extent that the liberals' support became less useful than before. Khomeini then declared democracy as "alien to Islam." Similarly, the Tudeh leadership declared Khomeini to be their guide before the revolution (Kepel 2002: 122). Khomeini was careful to preserve this support from the left until the revolution, but did not wait long to attack the leftists after the revolution. The ability to encourage secular political actors to participate in the revolution under an Islamist leadership while preparing to crush them when the circumstances ripened demonstrates Khomeini's political genius.

After the fall of Pahlavi in February 1979, Khomeini at first allied with the liberals to attack the radical left. After getting the first successful results, he then turned against the liberals. In fact, the taking of the US embassy personnel hostage by Khomeini supporters was a well-crafted tactical move against the liberals. Challenging US power with such a bold act was enough to convince the majority of the Iranian left once again to support Khomeini, who had attacked them only a few months ago, and made discrediting the liberals easier. The hostage crisis, which lasted 444 days, was the turning point in the transformation of the heterogeneous revolution into an Islamic revolution. After the end of the hostage crisis, Khomeini made another move, this time against the left, and destroyed all leftist organizations in the country, many of which backed him during his campaign against the liberals.

The Islamic revolution destroyed the secular bourgeoisie associated with the shah. The Islamist bourgeoisie filled the vacuum left behind. The state sector, which expanded by expropriating the wealth of the Pahlavi family and the secular bourgeoisie, became another key actor in the Iranian economy. The private sector, controlled by the Islamist bourgeoisie, and the state sector, controlled by the Islamist bureaucrats, some of whom became capitalists later by acquiring significant amounts of personal wealth, determined the capitalist character of the Islamist regime. The regime consolidated itself during the Iran-Iraq War between 1980 and 1988. In addition to the United States, Saudi Arabia also supported Iraq during the war in order to weaken the influence of the Iranian model in the Muslim world. Hundreds of thousands of Iranian soldiers died in the war. During the war, the Islamist regime established an extensive social security system, including numerous foundations and social aid organizations. The biggest of these organizations was the Foundation of the Oppressed and War Veterans (Bonyad-e Mostazafan va Janbazan; its current name is the Mostazafan Foundation of Islamic Revolution), a hybrid of a state-owned corporation and a social assistance organization, whose name itself shows the goal of the Islamist regime to establish hegemony over the lower classes. These organizations put the families of the soldiers who died or were wounded in the war on salary and distributed scholarships to their children. Today, young people from such backgrounds constitute the human source of the Revolutionary Guards and the Basij organization (Basij-e Mostazafin; Mobilization of the Oppressed).

The first period of the Islamist regime ended with the death of Khomeini in 1989. Despite all its efforts to export its model to the Muslim world during the 1980s, the

Iranian regime ended up in relative isolation. Moreover, serious economic problems and the coming of a new generation who did not witness the revolution and the war challenged Islamist elites in their quest to preserve their hegemony over a rapidly changing society. Policies of privatization and opening up the economy started to be implemented under the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani between 1989 and 1997. Efforts to democratize the political system took place during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami between 1997 and 2005. However, those efforts failed to solve Iran's economic and political problems or bind younger generations to the system. The failure of those two politicians, considered the liberal faces of the Islamist regime, paved the road to the election as president of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, an economically more populist and politically more authoritarian figure, in 2005, with the support of the lower classes. However, Ahmadinejad also failed to come up with any permanent solution for the problems of the regime. This failure became visible immediately after the presidential elections of 2009. The Basij militia attacked mass protests carried out by the supporters of Mir Hossein Mousavi, the candidate of the alliance known as the Green Movement, who claimed that Ahmadinejad got reelected through a massive election fraud. The regime managed to repress the protests, but its crisis of hegemony became more difficult to hide. The landslide victory of Hassan Rowhani, a centrist figure between Ahmadinejad's authoritarianism and the Green Movement's reformism, in the presidential election in June 2013, with the support of Khatami, Rafsanjani, as well as many supporters of the Green Movement, is another indication of the Iranian regime's crisis of hegemony. It remains to be seen whether Rowhani will be able to overcome or at least alleviate this crisis and protect the regime from a popular revolt similar to (or even stronger than) the revolt in 2009.

In contrast to the successful revolutionary takeover of political power by Islamists in Iran, Islamists' attempts to take power in Algeria failed in the 1990s. Similar to the Khomeini movement in Iran, the Islamic Salvation Front (Front Islamique du Salut, FIS), founded in Algeria in 1989, quickly grew in strength by establishing an alliance between the lower classes and the Islamist bourgeoisie (Kepel 2002: 168). The FIS received 48% of the votes in the parliamentary elections in December 1991. A military coup aiming to stop the FIS's march to power took place in January 1992. A bloody civil war between the Islamists and the military started. More radical elements within the FIS, which were less assertive before the civil war, suddenly became more active and independent. While the Islamic Salvation Army (Armée Islamique du Salut, AIS) fought as the military front of the FIS, radicals who split from the FIS fought under the banner of the Armed Islamic Group (Groupe Islamique Armé, GIA). Militants who previously fought in Afghanistan played leadership roles within the GIA. In its initial period, the GIA gained the support of the shantytown population who voted for the FIS in the elections. The class alliance that underpinned the FIS's success thus crumbled. The horror of the bloody civil war, which took one hundred thousand lives within

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only five years, and the GIA's increasing influence over the lower classes forced the Islamist bourgeoisie to recognize the fact that it could not gain anything from a continuing civil war. The military regime initiated a dialogue with the FIS leadership at that crucial moment, and the AIS finally quit armed struggle. The GIA, which faced increasing isolation thereafter, divided into different wings and became less effective.

Egypt has a long history of Islamist politics. The Muslim Brotherhood, which was founded by Hasan al-Banna (1906–49) in 1928, became a source of inspiration to the Islamists worldwide mainly due to Sayyid Qutb's theory and practice. Nasser's secular regime executed Qutb in 1966. Nasser's repression also led many members of the Muslim Brotherhood to leave Egypt and go to Saudi Arabia. Some of them assumed prominent positions in Saudi universities and contributed to the development of Islamist ideology. Others played key roles in the establishment of the Islamic banking system and accumulated capital (Kepel 2002: 51). Islamists started to reclaim their influence in Egypt after the trauma of 1967. That process quickened with the presidency of Anwar Sadat (1918–81), who took office after the death of Nasser. Sadat made peace with the Islamists in order to overcome the regime's crisis of hegemony and to counter the influence of the radical left, which was a result of that crisis.

Islamists started to organize openly on the university campuses in 1973. They assisted the state security forces in repressing the leftists on the campuses. At the same time, Muslim Brotherhood members who got rich in Saudi Arabia were allowed to return to Egypt and join the ranks of the Egyptian bourgeoisie (Kepel 2002: 83). Different Islamist groups soon went outside the campuses and started organizing in the shantytowns. The honeymoon of Sadat and the Islamists did not last long. Islamists declared Sadat a traitor when he signed the Egypt–Israel peace treaty (1979), by which Egypt gave diplomatic recognition to Israel. The Islamic Jihad organization assassinated Sadat in 1981.

The new president, Hosni Mubarak, started a witch-hunt against radical groups. Although Mubarak put certain limitations on the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood, he refrained from completely repressing it because of the organization's strong influence in society and conciliatory attitude toward the regime. Groups more radical than the Muslim Brotherhood regained their strength in the shantytowns in the 1990s. The Imbaba shantytown, home to one-tenth of the population of Cairo, became a liberated zone for those radicals. While the civil war was continuing in Algeria, some groups resorted to armed struggle in order to start a similar war in Egypt. Similar to Algeria, the Islamist bourgeoisie of Egypt, having lost control over the radicals, made peace with the secular regime in the Nonviolence Initiative of 1997. Radicals tried to sabotage that initiative by massacring sixty-two foreign tourists in the Luxor Temple on 17 November 1997. Increasing unemployment caused by the damage to the tourism sector due to that incident led to the isolation of the radicals from the masses. Subsequent state repression weakened the radicals

further.

The determined struggle of the masses gathered in Tahrir Square overthrew Hosni Mubarak, who ruled Egypt by dictatorship for thirty years, on 11 February 2011. Islamists, having at first refrained from participating in the revolution developing outside their control, joined the revolution when it became clear that Mubarak's downfall was inevitable. Islamists of all brands, from liberal Islamists and the Muslim Brotherhood to Salafis and the Gamaa Islamiya, have participated in the post-revolutionary political process and gained strength. As the oldest and most experienced Islamist organization of the country (and probably the entire region), the Muslim Brotherhood was more prepared than others to make a bid for political power. Over the years it developed an extensive social assistance network serving basic social service needs of a large number of people. For instance, the Islamic Medical Association run by the organization was serving approximately two million people annually by 2013 (Brooke 2015: 2). Mohammad Morsi, the candidate of the Freedom and Justice Party (the legal political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood), was elected president with 51.7% of the vote in the second round of elections in June 2012. Morsi's increasingly authoritarian rule and failure to meet the economic demands of the lower classes quickly led to mass disillusionment. Mammoth demonstrations that started on 30 June 2013 in Tahrir Square and the Ittihadiya district in Cairo as well as squares in major cities throughout Egypt demanded Morsi's resignation and opened up a new wave of the revolution. The Muslim Brotherhood did not give up and organized counterdemonstrations. On 3 July 2013, the Egyptian army staged a coup in order to prevent a popular revolution and to restore the power it lost in the post-Mubarak period by receiving the support of the revolting masses. The military regime killed more than one thousand and arrested thousands of Muslim Brotherhood members after the coup. It also seized the economic enterprises and social service organizations run by the Muslim Brotherhood (Brooke 2015). Similar to the repression of the Muslim Brotherhood by the Nasserist regime in the 1950s and 1960s, which led to the formation and spread of more radical Islamist groups such as the Islamic Jihad and Gamaa, the current wave of repression of the Muslim Brotherhood seems to be leading to a new wave of radicalization among its young supporters (Yenigün 2016: 2315).

Islamism has been important for Turkish politics not only due to the relatively recent international context that is discussed throughout this essay, but also because of Turkey's own experience with politics with Islamic references at least since the late nineteenth century. Islamism became a political alternative for the first time within the context of the existential crisis of the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century. Many intellectuals and political elites supported the idea of reorganizing the empire along more religious lines in order to overcome its apparent decline. Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the Republic of Turkey (1923), the relationship between Islam and politics quickly transformed into a hotly contested terrain involving the secularist elites ruling the

new republic and the Islamist opposition. The contestation between the secularists and the Islamists increased especially during times of political reform, such as the abolition of the caliphate (1924), the abrogation of the constitutional provision that mentioned Islam as the religion of the state (1928), and the introduction of the principle of secularism into the constitution (1937). This contestation has evolved with the transition to a multiparty system after 1946, in which electoral competition between political parties made religious discourse and reforms related to religious education and practices crucial elements in Turkish politics. The legalization of the Arabic-language *azan* (Islamic call to prayer) is a prime example of this transformation. The Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party, CHP), then the ruling party of the single-party regime, had banned the Arabic-language *azan* in 1932 and replaced it with a Turkish-language *azan*. The Demokrat Parti's (Democratic Party, DP) election victory in 1950, which ended the 27-year-long single-party rule, ended the ban. Ironically, alongside the DP deputies, the deputies of the CHP, the party that had established the ban in the first place, also voted in favor of lifting the ban (Bardakçı 2006; 2010). This case demonstrates that even the CHP, the most secular establishment party in Turkish politics, could not ignore the mass appeal of religious motifs in the new political playground defined by electoral competition. The approach to Islam in public life retained its importance as a theme of political contestation between different (more or less) secular political parties in the first two decades of the multiparty system. There was not any Islamist mass party in Turkey in the 1950s and 1960s.

Necmettin Erbakan (1926–2011) turned Turkish Islamism into an independent and stable political movement in the 1970s.<sup>11</sup> Erbakan was elected to the presidency of the Union of Chambers in Turkey with the support of small and medium-sized capitalists from Anatolia, but was soon deposed from that post by the center-right Adalet Partisi (Justice Party, AP) government. Erbakan's subsequent application to the AP to present his candidacy for the 1969 parliamentary elections was also rejected. He then got elected to parliament as an independent deputy from Konya, a traditional stronghold of the Islamists. He founded the Milli Nizam Partisi (National Order Party, MNP) in 1970. The MNP and the subsequent parties founded by Erbakan are branded as the National Vision movement (Milli Görüş). The MNP soon became a representative of the small- and medium-scale, non-monopolistic capitalists of Anatolia, who felt alienated from the AP's policy of supporting big capital against them. The party was banned in 1971 on grounds of its activities against the constitutional principle of secularism. Erbakan soon founded the Milli Selamet Partisi (National Salvation Party, MSP). The MSP won 11.8% of the votes in 1973 and 8.5% in 1977. It participated in coalition governments with the CHP in 1974 and with the AP and the Nationalist Action Party in 1975 and 1977. Radical Islamism became more popular in Turkey after the Iranian Revolution. On

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<sup>11</sup> For a detailed investigation of different Islamic circles before 1990, see Çakır (1990).



6 September 1980, six days before the military coup, radical Islamists turned the MSP's "Save Jerusalem Meeting" in Konya into their own show of strength. That event demonstrated that Erbakan did not have total control over the more radical elements within the MSP.

The MSP was banned after the military coup of 12 September 1980. Nevertheless, the military junta made religion classes compulsory in secondary education and also dramatically increased the number of religious vocational middle and high schools known as İmam Hatip schools. By doing so, the military junta hoped to decrease the ideological influence of the Marxist left in Turkish society by utilizing religion. The generals thought that they would be able to keep the Islamization process under their control. They certainly did not expect that these policies would play into the hands of the Islamists in the long run. When the military junta allowed the establishment of political parties in 1983 as part of a controlled transition back to parliamentary rule, the supporters of Erbakan founded the Refah Partisi (Welfare Party, RP). The ban on the political leaders of the pre-1980 period was lifted in 1987, which allowed Erbakan to become the leader of the RP. The party benefited tremendously from the political vacuum in the shantytowns created by the repression of the Marxist left by the military dictatorship. It gradually won the support of the shantytown populations of the big cities like Ankara and Istanbul in the 1990s by effectively using populist slogans such as the "Just Order" and regularly distributing significant quantities of social assistance, including both cash and in-kind transfers. The RP successfully kept together the Islamist bourgeoisie and the proletariat as well as different types of Islamist activists. This success bore its first positive results in the municipal elections in 1994, when an Islamist party won the municipalities of Ankara and Istanbul for the first time. That was the first big shock to the secularists in Turkey, who eventually witnessed electoral victories of the Islamists in (almost) every election after 1994. In the parliamentary elections of 1995, the RP received the most votes (21%) of any party.

During the rise of the RP in the 1990s, Islamist capital underwent a significant transformation. Some Islamic companies captured the opportunities that emerged out of the neoliberal transformation of the Turkish economy and transformed themselves from medium-scale capital to big capital. The term "Anatolian tigers," an analogy made between the East Asian tigers and the rising capitalists of Anatolia, became popular during that time. Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği (Independent Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association, MÜSİAD), was founded in 1990 as the representative of the Islamist bourgeoisie, which was able to compete somewhat with the secular bourgeoisie represented by Türkiye Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği (Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association, TÜSİAD), albeit still much weaker than the secular bourgeoisie. The MÜSİAD supported the RP (and is currently supporting the AKP).

The RP formed a coalition government with the center-right party Doğru Yol Partisi (True Path Party, DYP) in 1996. Erbakan became the first Islamist prime



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minister of the Republic of Turkey. The secular capitalists and the military generals, who felt very uneasy about the political situation, soon started a coordinated attack against the RP. The decisions made during the meeting of the National Security Council on 28 February 1997 meant a military memorandum against the RP-DYP coalition. The coalition government was forced to resign six months after the 28 February memorandum. Soon after, the Constitutional Court shut down the RP and put a political ban on Erbakan for violating the constitutional principle of secularism.

Fazilet Partisi (Virtue Party, FP) soon replaced the RP. In the parliamentary elections of 18 April 1999, the FP took 15.4% of the popular vote and became the third largest party in the parliament. Recai Kutan and Abdullah Gül competed for party leadership in the first congress of the FP in 2000. That was the first leadership competition in the National Vision movement, which developed for almost thirty years under the undisputed leadership of Erbakan. The leadership competition was seen by many as a battle between the “traditionalists” (represented by Erbakan’s close aide, Kutan) and the “reformists” (represented by Gül) within Turkish Islamism. It certainly reflected the Islamist bourgeoisie’s search for an alternative leader. During the 1970s, when it lacked sufficient capital accumulation to transform itself into big, monopolistic capital, the Islamist bourgeoisie supported Erbakan. Erbakan’s economic policy was to carry out “state-directed industrialisation whose benefits would accrue to the small businessmen of small towns” through “measures to disperse capital accumulation geographically and to reverse the tendency of economic concentration” (Keyder 1987: 213). As it started down the path of becoming monopolistic finance-capital through a deeper integration with the capitalist world economy in the late 1990s, the Islamist bourgeoisie started to view Erbakan’s line as old-fashioned. It started searching for a younger and reformist leader who could represent their interests better than Erbakan.

Although Gül lost the leadership race in the FP, reformists soon prevailed in the entire movement. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan emerged as a perfect candidate for a new Islamist leadership. Erdoğan had enough charisma and political experience to gain the support of the masses living in the shantytowns. Moreover, partly due to his own business experience, he had a clear understanding of the Islamist bourgeoisie’s new requirements in the age of neoliberalism. Erdoğan and his associates founded the AKP in 2001 and won a quick victory in the parliamentary elections of 3 November 2002, taking 34% of the popular vote. Erdoğan was the prime minister of the country between 2003 and 2014, winning significant victories in each new election. The AKP defeated the military memorandum of 27 April 2007 against Abdullah Gül’s first bid for presidency by taking 47% of the total vote in the parliamentary elections of 22 July 2007. Gül was elected to the presidency after the elections and became the first Islamist president of the Republic of Turkey. The AKP took 50% of the popular vote in the parliamentary elections of 12 June 2011.

Turkish economy and society has been experiencing a significant Islamization process, especially since the AKP’s landslide victory in the elections of 22 July 2007.

While supporting the Islamist capitalists generously by mobilizing all economic means within the reach of the state, the AKP government has used a series of punitive measures (such as handing down huge tax fines, reduction of state support, and exclusion from big government contracts) against secular capitalists such as the Koç and Doğan holdings. Although these policies have not ended the secular bourgeoisie's dominant position in the Turkish economy, they have nevertheless managed to dramatically improve the position of the Islamist bourgeoisie as opposed to the secular bourgeoisie. The government budget allocated to the Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı (Directorate of Religious Affairs) has increased astronomically, and the institution has become increasingly assertive in cultural and political affairs (Peker 2012). The recent education reform that seemingly increased the years of schooling in fact allows students to pursue religious education after primary school. It also permits families to pull their children out of formal schooling after primary education, which could harm the educational attainment of girls from poorer sections of the Islamist constituency (Finkel 2012). Astronomical tax hikes on alcoholic beverages and administrative restrictions upon alcohol consumption are other manifestations of the ongoing Islamization process (Çağaptay and Ersöz 2010; Gürsel 2013). Overall, as a successful case of an emerging Islamist bourgeoisie challenging the secular bourgeoisie by establishing a clear hegemony over the poorest segments of the proletariat, the AKP experience has gained a special place in the global history of Islamist movements.<sup>12</sup>

Despite this success, however, recent developments have indicated that the prospects of AKP rule are far from clear. A small-scale, local protest against the destruction of Gezi Park (near Taksim Square at the center of Istanbul) for the construction of a shopping mall designed like an Ottoman-era army barracks, a project designed by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality and the AKP government with close supervision and advocacy by Erdoğan himself, turned into a nationwide popular revolt on 31 May 2013 against the neoliberal, authoritarian, and Islamist policies of the AKP government. Although the revolt, which mobilized millions of people all over the country in June 2013, could not topple the AKP government, it nevertheless made clear that the AKP has lost the ability to rule

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12 The Islamist bourgeoisie has always been the hegemonic force within the Islamist movement in Turkey from its time of inception in the early 1970s. The transition from the RP to the AKP reflects the transition of the Islamist bourgeoisie from small- and medium-scale capital to large-scale finance capital. My analysis is therefore entirely different from Cihan Tuğal's argument that the Islamist bourgeoisie became the hegemonic force within the Islamist movement only during the AKP period (2009: 8). The empirical material in Tuğal's study can be interpreted well within the framework that I propose here. In his new book, Tuğal correctly suggests that Erdoğan defended "the economic interests of provincial businessmen and traders" (Tuğal 2016: 68). However, elsewhere in the book Tuğal talks about "the absorption of Islamism into capitalism" in Turkey since the mid-1990s (Tuğal 2016: 122). These two arguments are obviously contradictory. Since the Islamists have clearly defended the economic interests of a section of the bourgeoisie, arguing that it was later on absorbed into capitalism does not make any sense.

Turkey with stability. The strengthening of the perception of Erdoğan as a source of instability produced two important results. First, the United States, which already had disagreements with Erdoğan regarding his attitudes toward Israel and the crises in Syria and Egypt, distanced itself further from him and started to give stronger signals of support to the mainstream political actors that are alternatives to Erdoğan. The second outcome, related to the first one, is the worsening of the relations between the Erdoğan leadership and Fethullah Gülen's organization.<sup>13</sup> Gülen's network has been sharing the United States' criticism of Erdoğan's foreign policy for a long time. Moreover, there had been serious contradictions between Gülen and Erdoğan regarding important internal affairs, such as Erdoğan's plan to close down the private educational institutions that prepare students for university entrance examinations (which have provided a significant financial and organizational source for the Gülen network for a long time) and Gülenist cliques within the police forces and the judiciary. Erdoğan's weakening after the popular uprising encouraged the Gülenists to take a much firmer stance against Erdoğan. This has led to the giant anti-graft and anticorruption operations against the AKP government on 17 and 25 December 2013, which were carried out by Gülenists within the police and the judiciary. After the operation, Erdoğan declared the Gülen organization an internal enemy. The group was then officially declared as the Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü (The Fethullahist Terrorist Organization, FETÖ). This is the largest split within Turkish Islamism in its recent history. Despite being weakened by the popular revolt and the anti-graft operation, Erdoğan's AKP managed to take 43% of the total vote in the municipal elections on 30 March 2014, thus remaining the largest party in Turkey. On 10 August 2014, in the first round of Turkey's first presidential elections by a popular vote, Erdoğan was elected president with 51.7 % of the vote. In addition to the secular-left opposition (symbolized by the Gezi revolt) and the Erdoğan-Gülen split and animosity, the Kurdish movement has also posed an enormous challenge to the AKP's attempt at hegemony.

The general election of 7 June 2015 was a turning point for the AKP and all other political actors in Turkey. The AKP received 40.87% of the votes (9% less than the general elections in July 2011 and 2% less than the local elections in March 2014) and lost its parliamentary majority for the first time. Another historic aspect of 7 June 2015 was the success of the Halkların Demokrasi Partisi (People's Democratic Party, HDP) which is composed of the Kurdish movement and various leftist groups. The HDP obtained 13.12% of the total vote. This was an alarming outcome for the AKP.

Nevertheless, the incompetence of all of AKP's opponents was (once again) proven by the post-election developments. Erdoğan managed to marginalize all voices within the AKP (especially prevalent among the Islamist capitalists) supporting the formation of a coalition government with the CHP for the sake of

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13 For an introductory (and journalistic) account of the Gülen organization see Filkins (2016).

overcoming the political instability. At the same time the so-called “solution process”, referring to the negotiations and *de facto* ceasefire between the government and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), was declared null and the war restarted. Two suicide attacks of the ISIL against the demonstrations organized by the Kurdish and socialist movements (massacring 33 people in Suruç town near the Syrian border on 20 July 2015 and 103 people in Ankara on 10 October 2015) accompanied this process. A new general election was scheduled for 1 November 2015. This election was organized under exceptional circumstances and a *de facto* – not *de jure* yet-state of emergency. With the exception of the AKP, no party was able to carry out a real nationwide election campaign. Having been released from the burden of the so-called “solution process”, which did not pay well in terms of votes, the AKP carried out an effective campaign with a heavy dose of Turkish nationalist discourse. The party received 49.5% of the popular vote. While a small portion of this 8.7 percentage point increase in the AKP vote (compared to the election five months ago) came from the Sunni Kurds, the majority of it came from the Sunni Turks, which previously supported the Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Action Party) and several small rightist and Islamist parties. This shift was massive enough to compensate the Kurdish votes lost to the HDP.

Similar to the previous election victories, the AKP’s victory on 1 November 2015 did not bring political stability. On 15 July 2016, Gülenist officers and (probably) some secular and pro-Western elements within the military made a coup attempt. Compared to all previous coups and coup attempts in the history of the Turkish Republic, the coup attempt on July 15 seems amateurishly organized and therefore quickly failed in a few hours. Putschists killed 248 people who resisted the coup attempt including civilians, policemen, and soldiers. The government declared a state of emergency on 20 July 2016. So far over 85,000 people have been fired from state institutions including the army, police, the judiciary, public schools, and universities (Öztürk 2016). This number will probably keep increasing in the coming months. Some of the people fired have links with Gülen. On the other hand, a large (and rapidly expanding) portion of the public employees fired consists of HDP supporters and socialists who have no relationship whatsoever with the Gülenists. The members of the Kamu Emekçileri Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (Confederation of the Public Workers’ Unions, KESK), the only pro-labor, leftist, and relatively combative public sector union of the country, have been specifically targeted.

The coup attempt demonstrated that the AKP is still unable to control the state apparatus entirely. Given the increasing political instability, mounting economic problems, and successive foreign policy failures, it is too early – and therefore wrong- to declare the AKP triumphant for the coming years. However, the AKP’s success (especially in terms of establishing hegemony over the Sunni Turkish workers) should be taken very seriously in discussions about Turkey’s future. AKP’s uninterrupted rule in the last fifteen years demonstrates Turkish Islamism’s

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success in transforming the state and society.<sup>14</sup> The AKP is currently working on a constitutional amendment for the transition to a super-presidential system without any significant mechanism of checks and balances.

## Conclusion

Islamism is a political ideology that attributes the socioeconomic problems of the Muslim world in the modern era to an alienation from Islam and a return to *jahiliyya*. It proposes the establishment of a new state and society that are thought to fit Islamic principles. It is the political expression of the Islamist bourgeoisie's quest to become the dominant class by establishing hegemony over the proletariat. Islamists can take a revolutionary or a reformist stance while in opposition. They quickly become a force of the status quo after taking political power. The crisis of the secular regimes and the radical leftist movements that started in the mid-1960s provided the background to the rise of Islamist movements of different types. While Islamists successfully established hegemony over the proletariat and took power with a revolution in Iran, they lost their hegemony and the struggle for power in Algeria in the 1990s. Islamists have recently entered into a new struggle for political power in countries like Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Syria in the wake of the Arab Spring, which started in December 2010. By simultaneously adjusting to neoliberalism and establishing hegemony over the proletariat, the AKP has come a long way in terms of the Islamization of the state and society in Turkey. However, recent developments in the region indicate that the future prospects for the Islamist movements and regimes are far from certain.

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<sup>14</sup> The AKP's share of votes within the people having a household income less than two minimum wages increased from 57% in the general election of 2007 to 71% in the general election on 7 June 2015 (Comin and Yörük 2016: 3). In other words, the party managed to expand its proletarian electorate even in its poorest performance in general elections.

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# The class bases of political articulation: Islamism in Turkey

Mustafa Kemal Coşkun

## Introduction

Islamism, as political ideology rather than a religious or theological construct, was born with its followers' convictions that Islam offered a set of beliefs which had a lot to say about how the political field and the society should be organized and realized within the modern Muslim world (Ayoob, 2004: 1). Within this framework, Islamism has been defined as a movement which covered a whole set of political and intellectual practices dominated by activist and eclectic features materialized at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in order to reinstate Islam as a whole into everyday life and to save Muslims from slavery, imitation, and superstitions through a rational method thereby civilizing, uniting, and improving their lives (Kara, 1986: 15). Thus, Islamism is also a historical fact when one takes into account how it presents itself as an emancipatory ideology although it has been considered to be a movement pushing for a return to a single text and essence. The assessment of Islamism as a movement to return to a text and essence renders it possible to uncover its conflicts and contradictions with, and differences from other ideologies. No matter how it has been defined, Islamism as a historical and social fact, however, has been generally articulated with forms of thought with different stamping grounds reflecting the dominant ideologies of the era that can be referred to as nationalism,



conservatism, liberal constitutionalism, and even civil-societism and economic liberalism especially in Turkey from the last quarter of the 1800s when it was born up to the present. Therefore, Islamism, as a historical and social fact, is nothing more than the statement of political struggles which can only be defined within a historical framework. Thus, those lines of thought, which associate Islamism's need for articulation with different political and ideological ideas with Islamists' pains in establishing an independent intellectual line (see Duran, 2005: 129), if not, with Islamist intellectuals' problematic and conflicting relationship with modernity (see Göle, 2000), tend to ignore the social power and class relationships reflected by Islamism. Hence, the articulation of Islamism with this or that ideology actually refers to a situation imposed by historical and social conditions rather than the foundation of an intellectual process emanating from an intellectual practice on its own. It is inevitable that these material conditions secured a place in the intellectual field as well. Yet, it is not a secret that Islamism has been following a parallel path with the dominant intellectual and political currents, which is generally referred to as "takiyye," or hypocrisy (Gülalp, 2003: 12). What matters for us is not the question that whether Islamists were sincere in this articulation or acting as such as a tactic. The important question which begs an answer is how Islamism gained strength by uncovering the historical and social conditions of this articulation. In this regard, the actual focal point of this study is to offer an analysis of within which framework of social power and class relations has Islamism been articulated with the ideas mentioned above, each of which reflects the dominant ideology of the period, while trying to understand the developmental process of Islamism in Turkey.

If the way and the process in which Islamism is intertwined with other ideologies are the products of historical and social conditions, then it is necessary to offer an analysis which takes into account the whole of economic, political and cultural/ideological fields. Then, it would be futile to try to explain this articulation only through the change in the minds of Islamist intellectuals. If the stand that calls for an handling of the issue by looking at both socio-economic and political and cultural areas is correct, it is necessary first to reveal the class dynamics behind Islamists in Turkey.

Gellner argues that the most significant feature of Islam was the internal division between the high Islam of the Ulema and the Islam of the masses (1994: 25). Şerif Mardin also makes use of a similar distinction. There are two religions in Turkey according to Mardin as well. The first one of these was the Sunni high Islam which constituted the ideological superstructure of especially Abdülhamid II's reign and which became the informal religion of the state in the post-republican era. The second one was folk Islam, which had flourished in Anatolia and had been rather kneaded with tradition (Mardin, 1992). Both Gellner and Mardin situate religious orders and sects into the category of folk Islam. We, however, believe that there should be a distinction between everyday popular Islam and Islam of religious orders and sects that assumed more political forms and became more organized.

For such a distinction renders it significant to fully grasp the place of religion in social life in Turkey at least in the post-1940 period. In this regard, a distinction in Gellner and Mardin's binary classification proves to be necessary in order to comprehend the class dynamics of Islamism. As different from folk Islam, this distinction covers the religious understanding and practices that religious orders and sects, which represent organized religion especially in Anatolia, present and the state cannot intervene or does not do so. Therefore, we are of the opinion that there should be a three-way distinction referring to such categories as higher Islam, folk Islam, and Islam of religious orders and sects. For, while folk Islam is a more general and massive phenomenon, Islam presented by religious orders and sects have a narrower social base. As many studies have demonstrated, this base is explicitly comprised of a union of classes like tradespeople, merchants, artisans, capitalist owners of small and mid-sized enterprises in changing forms from the 1940s up to today (Lewis, 1991; Güllalp, 2001; Rabasa and Larrabee, 2008; Yücekök, 1983). Islamism and Islamic movements in Turkey in the vein of political Islam manifest themselves as the products of this very union of classes. For, religious orders and sects are organized through complex and expansive webs with small or mid-scale capital groups. In the following periods some of these would generally be organized through the conglomeration of diversified firms under a holding company, for which Server Holding of the Nakşibendi Order serves as an example (Öztürk, 2014: 186). It is at this very point one can clearly begin to see why political Islam and Islamism needed to articulate with the dominant ideologies of a specific era. Indeed, such articulations are mostly related to the interests and needs of the abovementioned tradespeople, merchants, artisans, small and mid-scale capitalists, and companies some of which have been transformed into finance capital through conglomerations and concentrated in small conservative Anatolian cities. Simply put, Islamism and the Islamic movement articulate with any ideology which is called for by the interests of the classes they represent and this ideology will unavoidably be the dominant ideology of the period. The other point that needs to be discussed is the ways in which the mentioned capitalist bourgeoisie is able to incorporate the different segments of the working class and the urban poor into its own hegemony. In the following parts, we will analyze the course taken by Islamism in Turkey taking into consideration the axes regarding the articulations within the framework of the abovementioned class interests and the characteristics of the hegemony that these classes establish over workers and labourers. We believe that such a frame will explain how and in what forms the vast majority of Islamists were able to articulate first with Turkism, then with constitutionalism during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Constitutionalist Period (1908), with conservatism in the initial periods of the Republic, with a conservative liberalism within the framework of a discourse referring to "to carry the nation's will to power" against Westernist elites during the reign of the Democrat Party after the 1950s, with nationalism during the 1970s, and with civil-societism, conservatism, more importantly with free-marketist economic

liberal discourses since 2002 when AKP (Justice and Development Party) came to power.

One point needs to be clarified initially. It is absolutely impossible to refer to a monolithic whole when talking about Islamism in Turkey. For, Islamism in Turkey has a pluralist structure, probably like the ones elsewhere, and these can be defined by many different characteristics. Just as Egypt has various Islamic currents and groups like Ikhvan-i Muslimin, Cemaat-i Islami, Kutupçular, and Jihadists, Turkey too has many different Islamisms and these have many significant differences among themselves. Indeed, while some Islamic currents have a sectarian and militant, therefore a jihadist attitude, some others cannot be defined by such characteristics. We, in this study, however, do not refer only to one specific group and current by pointing out to Islamism but rather to a totality of intellectual, ideological, and political movements which find their sense of belonging in the religion of Islam and are shaped according to the general parameters of this religion. Within this framework, we are interested in an Islamic ideology which has been and still is effective in the political field of Turkey and in the classes behind this ideology rather than the historical and contemporary differences among Islamists in Turkey.

### **From the last stages of the Ottoman rule to the National Order Party**

One can surely assert that the Ottoman Empire was experiencing great chaos at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It is not hard to imagine the trouble engendered by the inability to keep up with the scientific, economic, and political developments in Europe both in the state and among the intellectuals and the public. The idea İttihad-i Islam was a product of this period and attempts by Abdulhamid II. Ottoman Islamism, contrary to that of the Republic, was a movement with a state axis (Aktay, 2005a: 20). Therefore, this period must have been one in which Islamists essentially had to face both the West and themselves. Islamism, however, was to reveal its actual development and emergence as a systematic idea during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Constitutionalist Period. It will not be right to claim that Islamists of that period accounted for a monolithic whole just like the current ones either. It goes without saying that there were supporters as well as opposers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Constitutionalist Period. What is decisive here was the relationship of the Union and Progress Party (İttihat ve Terakki) with Islamists supporting the 2<sup>nd</sup> Constitution. Indeed, supporters of Union and Progress Party who acted on a nationalist and Westernist ideology did not leave their reference to Islam until at least 1912-1913. To put it more accurately, their points of reference were Westernism in the world, while these were Turkism and Islamism at home. Therefore, Islamism, which had been rendered to be the official ideology of the state by Abdulhamid II once, was evaluated in line with constitutionalism in the form of an ideology advocating change at least by some of the supporters of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Constitutionalist Period and was backed by Union supporters

within this context. There were even Islamists occupying significant posts within the Union and Progress Party (Sevil, 2005: 147). But the facts that Westernism and nationalism had become the founding ideology of the Turkish bourgeois revolution in the following years alongside with Islamism's failure in its goal to salvage the state had transformed Islam into "a nationalism consolidated by Islam" (Kara, 1986: 30). As the supporters of Union and Progress had followed a policy based on Turkification in every field, the most significant of which had been economic policy, beginning with 1913 (Savran, 2014: 60), Islamism had to experience a withdrawal beginning with this date until the 1940s.

Islamism, with Union and Progress supporters' complete facing of Turkism and Westernism as of 1913, became a representative of artisans, landed aristocracy, and peasantry that suffered because of this process and was backed by them. Although the revolution of 1908 was simultaneously a popular revolution (Savran, 2010), the facts that Union and Progress supporters after 1913 and Kemalists during the revolution of 1919-1923 completely sidelined all classes from the landed aristocracy to peasantry and laboring segments from the bourgeois revolution stand as a testimony to the class dimension of the issue at hand. For, the fact that initially the supporters of Union and Progress then the Kemalist revolution stayed away from the masses shows that the conflict between the modern and the traditional becomes at the same time a form of class conflict (Savran, 2014: 66). It is not hard to guess that orders and sects would be prevalent among these segments and small and mid-scale enterprises which had been alienated by the actors of the bourgeois revolution as well. Within this framework, Islamism during the Constitutionalist period consisted of attempts by classes, whose economic interests had gradually wasted away during the process of modernization, to protect their own status and their integration of their own requests with the Islamic rhetoric.

The Turkish bourgeois revolution took place in the process between the years 1919 and 1923 following a failed attempt in 1908. Revolution, in the sense that a mass mobilization replaces the old state with a new one acting against the established order, sometimes solely carries a political quality and this does not end in a social revolution. The process, whose foundations were laid in 1908 but was essentially completed in 1923, was a political revolution more than anything else when this frame is taken into consideration. This revolution, however, had a significant difference from other revolutions (UK, USA, and France) which fell into the category of the first phase of bourgeois democratic revolutions. This fact pertains to which other classes the revolutionary classes formed alliances with. As different from the first phase of bourgeois revolutions, the revolution of 1919-1923 was not a revolution that mobilized the peasants, artisans, and the newly-emerging proletariat to overthrow the government through this alliance. On the contrary, the political revolution of 1919-1923 can be defined as a massless revolution from the top to bottom (Savran, 1985). Additionally, there are revolutions materialized by going beyond the scope of the political field, in other words, by surpassing the mere

change of power and the replacement of classes in power with others through the reconstruction of social relations like religion, language, law, education, and daily life, which account for the complementary changes made to the political revolution, thereby changing the reproduction process of the society through and through. The major characteristic of the process Turkey went through in the 1920s, and even in the 30s, was the elimination of a significant portion of the obstacles before capitalist development. In other words, a full-scale social revolution following a political revolution. The fact that the political revolution was massless, however, made it sudden and unexpected while rendering it imperative to materialize social revolutions of the 1920s and 30s without the consent of the masses. Indeed, changes and transformations, which were put into effect both in the field of religion and language as well as in clothing regulations and other rules of conduct organizing social life, especially in the field of law, did not generally put the requests and needs of neither the rural nor the urban lower classes into the agenda, therefore the independent initiatives of these classes were overlooked. There undoubtedly is another set of reasons emanating from objective, or in other words, from the development level of capitalism, from the statuses of classes in the concerned period and their relationships with one another, from conflicts within class fractions, and from the impacts of imperialist countries. As the discussion of these reasons goes well beyond the scope of this study, we need to leave this issue to a future study. A significant result of the massless sudden and unexpected political and social revolution, however, was the formation of problems in adopting rapid and radical changes by the whole society. The top-down characteristics of the social revolution in Turkey led to a much harder and longer adoption of the transformations by the masses, and sometimes even not being adopted at all.

The Kemalist revolution imbued with both political and social features attempted to get rid of Islam's utilization as a political instrument and succeeded in doing so for a long time. While it transformed an empire into a nation state, it also replaced the legitimizing ideology of the state as Islam and Islamism with nationalism. A significant result of the bourgeois revolution's attempt to alienate religion from public and political life was its tendency to create an increase in orders' and sects' probable impact on large segments of people.<sup>1</sup> For sects and Islamic monasteries were shut down and this practice forced them to operate underground. While the revolution tried to diminish and even eliminate the public and political impacts of religion, it inversely paved the way to the prevalence of Islamic networks among large masses: A class distinction occurred with, on one hand, the big bourgeoisie, emerging petite bourgeoisie, intellectuals, and bureaucrats who adapted to a

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<sup>1</sup> Within this framework, one can assert that the revolution in fact did not attempt to diminish the social power of religion but to break the influence of Islam on the political field. Indeed, the ruling classes have constantly utilized the emphasis on Islam throughout the history of the republic (Coşar, 2014: 79).

western life style and, on the other hand, with the rural peasantry, tradespeople and artisans, urban working and laboring segments who insisted on maintaining a traditional life style. This period is one that witnessed the expansion of the impact of such sects and orders as Nurculuk, Süleymançılık, and Nakşibendilik especially among large segments of people in Anatolia (Sitembölükbaşı, 1995). These sects and orders, thereby, got the opportunity to become popular among these classes by taking advantage of the abovementioned class segments' profound dislike of modernization and westernization. This also explains the major reasons why Islamism especially articulated with conservatism in the name of staking a claim to tradition and voicing the interests of the mentioned classes at least from the founding of the Republic to the mid-1940s. This relationship established by orders and sects with large masses would prove to provide an adequate basis for political Islam to evolve on in the following years.

The 1930s in Turkey point out to a period when the foundations of industrial capitalism were laid under the guidance of the state. In other words, the transition from a capital accumulation process, marked by commercial capital and other types of capital acting in the circulation space, to industrial capital accumulation, happened on the basis of state capitalism (Savran, 2010: 154). This was a rather long process and statist policies enacted during this period have also laid the foundations of an actual industrial bourgeoisie in the 1950s. Indeed, one can argue that statism, enacted in the 1930s, reconciled with the interests of private industry and brought about an environment for the benefit of capital circles and landowners within a larger frame (Boratav, 2006: 163). Therefore, this period can be referred to as the initial industrialization period. This process, however, has witnessed a halt for about more than a decade because of the break out of WW II until the beginning of the 1950s. Thus, it is safe to assert that Turkish society was a peasant society whose economic basis was laid on agriculture until the 1950s. Although the industrial bourgeoisie started to develop more rapidly by the 1950s, the military coup d'état of 1960 would provide the opportunity for the industrial bourgeoisie to establish its hegemony as the governing power of the other fractions of the bourgeoisie. Therefore, the economic policies implemented by the Democratic Party up until this period were shaped according to the interests of the agricultural and commercial bourgeoisie. The issue of religion has once more become a sensitive subject within this framework. Contrary to popular conviction, CHP (Republican People's Party) had already begun to make concessions about religion and secularism by 1945, long before the Democratic Party. CHP engaged in an attempt to evaluate secularism within a more flexible understanding by changing its policies regarding Islam because of the competitive situation brought about by the multi-party period and the discontent of the masses. The "religious reform" project presented in 1945 by a group within the party precisely initiated a moderation in the field of secularism (Bila, 1999: 53). The discussions in the 7<sup>th</sup> CHP Convention held on November 17, 1947 demonstrate the party's moderation in this field more clearly. The most



prominent features of the convention were the requests for a reinterpretation of some of the six ideals of CHP (statism and secularism) and for a popular religious education by its representatives and members of the parliament. Another topic that was scrutinized, other than the issues believed to enforce a structural transformation within the party, at the convention was the claim that communism posed a threat against the state and social life. The fact that religious education was regarded to be a significant instrument to prevent communism became one of the most leading suggestions during the discussions on the subject (Uzun, 2012). The Democratic Party government proved to be one that continued with these concessions and broadened their scope some more at the most.<sup>2</sup>

The commercial bourgeoisie and contractor capital which were rapidly consolidated by the excessive profits of wartime conditions and large landowners and the agricultural bourgeoisie who were at odds with the CHP leadership on agricultural policies, initiated their efforts to exert their influence on ruling the country (Savran, 2010: 159). Thus, large landowners, in alliance with the commercial bourgeoisie, would break their ties with the Kemalist leadership and found the Democratic Party instead. Religious orders and sects gathered around the Democratic Party within the framework of the party's economic policies targeting the materialization of the interests of rural agricultural and commercial bourgeoisie. The same groups made use of bank loans and of other economic activities of the state as well (Şişman, 2013: 67). In this sense, the DP government did not only materialize the interests of the orders and sects, which aimed to contribute to both the spiritual and the material well-being of its members, but also it enabled religious circles to become visible again in public space after many years (Kanra, 2013: 54). Although formal bans on religious orders and sects continued during the Democratic Party regime, religious statements and religious unions found themselves a wide area. They grasped the opportunity to widen their networks and activities, to unearth their educational-cultural organizations and publications. Specifically Nurculuk and Naksibendilik had a quite central function within the field of "political Islam" (Zubaida, 1996: 12). Within this framework, as Faik Bulut stated, Naksibendi and Nur sects, which happened to be two of the most effective religious orders in Turkey, supported the Democratic Party in the 1950s while they extended their support to the Justice Party in the 1960s (quoted in Öztürk, 2014: 193).

Before passing onto the 1970s, when Islamism emerged as a political ideology and gradually gained strength in the aftermath of the period, a couple of significant points that rendered the birth of Islamic bourgeoisie possible can be identified. The first point is the fact that the large masses maintained their relationship with tradition

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<sup>2</sup> First of all, this shows that the Democratic Party cannot be defined as "counter-revolutionary," while its policies refer to a restoration process initiated after the bourgeoisie revolution at the most. Secondly, however, it demonstrates that, if one necessarily has to define some others in the same vein, this definition primarily suits CHP. But the more significant part of the issue is that such an assessment ignores class relations during the restoration of the bourgeois revolution.



and religion as a result of the rupture between the revolution and the masses during the bourgeois revolution; the second pertains to the fact that religious orders and sects, which had been forced to go underground, were able to grasp the opportunity to organize and spread among these masses making use of their profound discontent; the third, as a consequence of the second, points to the fact that the conservative bourgeoisie in Anatolia, whose life styles in relationship with sects and orders were deemed to be closer to the public's, achieved a great advantage.

### **From the National Vision Movement to AKP governments**

One of the largest and most significant political movements in Turkey was the National Vision Movement (Milli Görüş Hareketi) that has maintained its impact until the end of the 1990s. Led by Necmettin Erbakan, this movement first founded the National Order Party (Milli Nizam Partisi) in 1970 then founded the National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi) in 1972. Both parties were shut down in the process by the 1971 and 1980 military interventions owing to their anti-secularism. Erbakan founded the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) in 1983. The most important victory of the party was the results of the 1995 general elections and it turned out to be the first party with 21.4% of the popular vote. Erbakan became the prime minister of the coalition government formed with the True Path Party (Doğru Yol Partisi) in 1996. Following the “soft” military coup d'état in February 1997, the coalition government was dissolved and the Welfare Party was shut down by the Constitutional Court.

The National Vision movement followed an anti-EU, anti-globalization, and anti-Western path until the end of the 1990s. It objected to Turkey's membership to the EU. It was inclined towards developing Turkey's cooperation with Muslim countries and founded an international organization under the rubric of D-8 (Developing 8) among 8 Muslim countries. The National Vision movement was a national movement that aimed to transform the society from the top to down through politics and from the down to the top through education (Kuru, 2006: 269). Therefore, this movement had a political Islamist and anti-Western agenda.

The significance of the National Vision movement, however, is attached to a couple of points with regards to the scope of the study at hand. The first one of these pertains to the fact that the National Vision movement appeared as a result of the conflicts between the big industrial bourgeoisie (TÜSİAD, Turkish Industry and Business Association) and the petite bourgeoisie in Anatolia (SMEs) and through the recognition that the interests of these small capital groups were not protected by the Justice Party (Adalet Partisi). Thus, traditional middle and lower middle classes and conservative segments mostly associated with religious sects and orders formed the basis of this movement (Yaşar, 2005: 330; Gülalp, 2003: 45). The second significant point within this framework pertains to the fact that religious orders and sects, specifically the Naksibendis, with intimate ties with SMEs played a pivotal role in the founding of the National Order Party. Indeed, it was none other than Mehmet

Zahid Kotku, the leader of the İskender Pasha Sect, who enabled the founding of the party as well as naming it. The National Order Party proved to be the first party, around which a group of small employers, merchants and artisans who had lost their income and reputation against the big bourgeoisie together with a group of Islamists who had objected to the Westernization movement from the beginning, closed ranks and where political Islam participated in political life as an organized entity. Among the founders of the National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi), which was founded after the March 12 memorandum, were important figures of this sect (Yaşar, 2005: 331). The third and more important point to be made here is that the Islamist movement simultaneously articulated with conservative ideology and nationalism during this period. It is not even a coincidence that the movement was called the National Vision.<sup>3</sup> As Islamism developed as a salvation ideology with regards to its main axis, it already had features highly compatible with a nationalist frame (Mert, 2005: 414). Nationalist discourse and ideas put forward during the 1970s, however, were quite different from the nationalist rhetoric and ideas produced by the Islamists of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Constitutionalist period. One needs to look for the reasons of this articulation with and differences in the social power and interests of classes and their conflicts with other fractions of the bourgeoisie underlying the abovementioned movement. Indeed, the major ideology of the period extending from WWII to the 1980 coup d'état was the rhetoric of "national developmentalism" which was quite concordant with the "import substitution" capital accumulation strategy. In this period development and reconstruction were tied to the intensive and extensive interventions of the state as well as its economic practices (Güler, 2005: 38). The idea of National Vision, too, not only was an Islamic language but also an economic one within the framework of even more developmentalist strategies. The claim of the movement back then was to champion this case, to advocate that a truly independent development could have only happened under its leadership through a heavy industrial move (Gülalp, 2003: 13). In this regard, the National Vision could be able to articulate with a nationalist ideology very much in line with the import substitution mode of accumulation. For Kemalism, the dominant ideology of the time, was also an developmentalist ideology. The National Vision, however, was also talking about a spiritual development, which also included morality and tradition, alongside with this developmentalist rhetoric. Even though developmentalism and traditionalism seem to be at odds with each other, Erbakan's religious, nationalist, and developmentalist rhetoric was concordant with the interests of Anatolian bourgeoisie as well. The actual development of conservative Anatolian bourgeoisie, however, would take place not in the period when import substitution policies were in effect but would be materialized within neoliberal free trade and open market

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted here that Erbakan's "being national" or nationalism was not only shaped by an emphasis on ethnicity but also, as is mentioned below, by both a religious content (in the sense of *ummah*) and a domestic industrialization model and developmentalism.

policies. This growth happened as a result of neoliberalism alongside with the gradual Islamization of the society. Its consequence, the emergence of a new party (AKP, Justice and Development Party), would be an increase in the contradictions and conflicts within the dominant class and the transformation of Islamism with the entry of the Islamic big capital (Öztürk, 2014: 185).

On February 28, 1997 the National Security Council convened with the intervention of the army and expressed that the greatest threat against Turkey was reactionism. The decisions reached at the meeting were the ones that directly affected specifically religious education and Islamic Clerical High Schools (İmam Hatip Liseleri). As a result of these decisions wearing hijabs was categorically banned from universities, the duration of compulsory education was extended to 8 years as a consequence of which the junior section of clerical high schools were shut down. The teaching of Quran to children younger than 12 years was banned and all Quran tutoring was requested to be affiliated with the National Ministry of Education. At the end of this process the Welfare Party was shut down by the Constitutional Court. The deputies of the Welfare Party founded, this time, the Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi) but this party was also shut down in 2001 on the grounds that it was undertaking anti-secularist activities. This shutting down of the party proved to be a turning point for the Islamist movement and a cleavage appeared between the followers of the National Vision movement and the younger generation of the party. While the former would found the Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi), the latter would found the Justice and Development Party (AKP, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi). The newly founded AKP, as different from the Welfare Party, adopted a more globalist and reconciliatory stand both at home and in foreign policy. AKP actually started to follow a pro-EU and pro-secular path by defining itself as conservative democrat in contrast to the traditional Islamist rhetoric, into which it was born, based on a binary between Islam and the West. It adopted liberal policies in both economic and political spheres. It, in the end, came to power on its own with 34% of the popular vote in the November 3, 2002 elections. The Felicity Party, on the other hand, which maintained its National Vision rhetoric could only get 2.5% of the votes in the same election.

It seems possible to analyze this change, which carried the Islamic discourse and policies to liberalization, through two developments in Turkey. The first one of these developments was the emergence of a novel Islamist bourgeoisie and the second one is the appearance of a novel intellectual group (Yavuz: 2006). The emergence of both the novel Islamist bourgeoisie and novel intellectuals was a direct consequence of the changes and transformations seen in the economic, political and cultural spheres. These developments will be briefly discussed below.

As is known, Turkey has been one of the countries that has been inclined to implement neoliberal economic policies based on outward-oriented policies with a focus on free markets supported both by the IMF and the World Bank since the beginning of the 1980s. The gradual deterioration of the capital accumulation

problem and the gradual intensification of the class struggle between 1970 and 1980 resulted in the introduction of an economic project under the rubric of January 24 decisions just at the beginning of 1980. These decisions would serve, in the most general sense, the consolidation of the capital against labor and the country's implementation of an outward-oriented economic policy. It goes without saying that the historical significance of the September 12 coup d'état can be found not in the protective impulses of the military and bureaucrats to safeguard the state (see Heper, 2006) but in its ability to render both the country's economic base and its political and judicial superstructure appropriate for the basic needs of capital accumulation concordant with the neoliberal orientation based on an integration with capitalist world markets. For, the military government that came to power on September 12 was completely engaged in the economic and social program of the bourgeoisie (Boratav, 2005: 74). With the coup d'état, two of the characteristics of the major changes seen in economic policy become prominent. The first one of these refers to the fact that an inward-oriented protective program based on import substitution implemented in economy was replaced by an outward-oriented policy in order to integrate the economy of the country into the capitalist world economy. The second one appears in the dramatic changes seen in the role played by the state in the economic field (Şenses and Taymaz, 2003: 431-433). Post-1980 developments stand witness to the evolution of such concepts as "reconstruction of the state" and "structural adaptation" used to describe the transformations in interventions of the state in terms of social reproduction of the relations of production.

One of the most significant consequences of this process was its paving the way to the development of small and mid-scale enterprises in Anatolia that felt sidelined by the state's protectionism and the market. For, the fact that the fees were low and workers' rights were limited in the oppressive environment of the period between 1980 and 1989 was in fact serving small and mid-scale businesses well rather than large holding companies (Savran, 2014: 79). Political Islam found a rather fertile ground to grow upon with the regression in classical working class politics and the rise of microentrepreneurship. This newly emerging bourgeoisie had a traditional structure, thereby developed its opposition over an Islamist discourse and became the supporter of the Welfare Party founded after the 1980 coup d'état. They also founded MÜSİAD (The Association of Independent Industrialists and Businessmen) in 1990 to compete with the owners of Istanbul-based big capital. This process resulted in a cleavage within the capitalist class which initiated an inter-class conflict. The political Islamist movement became the representative of Anatolia-based small and mid-scale capital. Therefore, while TÜSİAD, which was the organization of big capital, became the champion of a secularist and modernist ideology, MÜSİAD became the proponent of a conservative ideology.<sup>4</sup> The "postmodern coup d'état"

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4 Buğra defines the difference between TÜSİAD and MÜSİAD as such: "TÜSİAD has been engaged in an effort to reorganize transformations within the whole society maintaining the power

of February 28, 1997, however, became the driving force of the change in political Islamist policy as well. Following the decisions passed on February 28 the conservative capital in Anatolia recognized that it could not progress further with a party which was constantly in conflict with the system and that its economic interests would sustain even more blows. What they needed was policies which would articulate them with the global economic system, thereby enabling them to get hold of more substantial shares from the market. The rise of Islamic holding companies tied to the world market in various forms was increasingly at odds with the ideas of the National Vision. For, the dominant ideology of the period was not a developmentalist nationalism shaped around national developmentalist policies, on the contrary, it was “democratization” within the framework of an outward-oriented economic policy concordant with capitalism. The mindset of traditional National Vision, as they did not serve the purpose of globalization and anti-Western policies, and the Welfare Party with its policy on Islamic identity were not adequate for this anymore.<sup>5</sup> Thus, they supported the opposition within the Welfare Party and this opposition founded AKP after splitting up with the party. AKP leadership, which claimed to “take the shirt of National Vision off its back,” often underlined that it was a party aiming to “serve” the society rather than maintaining an Islamic identity policy. Therefore, the new party of Anatolian capital was a party, which stayed away from the Islamist discourse, rather prominently featured Turkey’s integration into global economic policies, regarded itself to be “conservative democrat,” and presented itself as the conservative face of democracy. Thus, this time the Islamists were articulating with economic liberalism and civil-societism rather than a nationalist ideology.<sup>6</sup> Broadly speaking, AKP represents the interests

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balance between the state and big business circles along the same lines with the characteristics of European democracies. The example of MÜSİAD, on the other hand, has underlined the Islamist character of Turkish society in order both to demonstrate that Islam was concordant with capitalism and to utilize religion as a source to vitalize sentiments of solidarity among these segments of the national and international business circles that have been trying to benefit from the rising partnership” (Buğra, 1998: 536).

5 In fact Erbakan noticed this process and took in neoliberalism into the program just before the 1995 elections, but this was a belated adaptation. The National Vision was useful for the Islamist bourgeoisie for a specific period of time but this usefulness was eliminated now (Savran, 2014: 85).

6 One should note that this situation is not considered to be a “passive revolution.” For, this theory initially appropriates Islamism and the Islamic movement as a threat against the established order and claims that what AKP did was an integration of Islamism and political Islam, seen as threats, into the system (see Tuğal, 2011. Also see “Galip Yalman’la Gramsci Üzerine Söyleşi”, 2012, *Praksis*, 27 for an evaluation suggesting that proposing a set of analyses inspired by Gramsci became on the vogue as political Islam gained entry to the process of being a candidate for power.) Whereas, as is shown in this study, the Islamist movement constantly articulated with dominant ideologies throughout the historical process, thereby was never able to challenge the established order. Moreover, the major inclination of the Islamist movement in Turkey was not to establish a political and social order in which Sharia principles can be implemented (Çiğdem, 2005: 26). At the same time, neither the National Vision nor the preceding Islamist movements could challenge the

of Anatolian conservative bourgeoisie and essentially of both the Anatolia-based and Istanbul-based big capital segment of this bourgeoisie, namely the interests of Islamist finance capital. The major reason why Islamism articulated with the abovementioned ideologies in this period should be found here.

A novel group of intellectuals emerged, in parallel with these developments, who claimed the defense of both liberal economic policies and AKP's conservative ideology. These intellectuals essentially functioned to spread the economic, political, and cultural interests of Anatolian capital into the society. Their greatest support was, doubtless, Anatolian capital again. For, they served to enable the wide acceptance of this conservative ideology by using their newspapers, TV stations, radios, etc. What they defended was a conservatist but reconciling policy with some modernist values rather than a political Islamist rhetoric now. For instance, Ali Bulaç, who was one of these intellectuals, proposed the demise of political Islam. Instead he called for a novel civil Islam, which was not contradicting secularism, that was a political regime. Ali Bulaç evaluates religious sects generally, and the Gülen sect specifically within this framework. According to Bulaç, religious sects were democratizing the society, integrating it into the modern process, and demilitarizing it. He stresses that religious sects cannot have the power to overcome the waves of globalization, and if they do, they would be rapidly dissolved, therefore they should be included in this process. He also states that religious sects should remain civilian and cannot lay a claim to govern the state.<sup>7</sup> Ali Bulaç, through these ideas, claims that political Islam is in some sort of an evolutionary process. The transformation underlined by Bulaç is in fact is none other than the fact that Islamism, as a political stand which is not foreign to us at all since the inception of the Turkish Republic, has created a proper channel for the neoliberal model to develop in Turkey (Coşar ve Yücesan-Özdemir, 2014: 13). In this regard, political Islam's self-definition of being conservative democrats can be read as a sign of its adaption into the process of neoliberal restoration at the most, rather than a rupture from the Islamist tradition.

At the end of this process, AKP eliminated all kinds of obstacles before the implementation of neoliberalism, practiced privatization policies at an unprecedented speed and intensity, and thoroughly looked out for the idea of free markets. Alongside with all these, it embarked on efforts for EU membership, along completely different lines than the National Vision, and tried to improve the ties with the US. What lied beneath all these was the fundamental needs of the classes it represented. Islamism, within this framework, is a political ideology moving forward by generally succeeding in articulating with the dominant ideologies of the period and adopting itself to the needs of the period. Although whether such articulations are temporary or essential and doctrinary is open to discussion, there

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capitalist system, on the contrary, they articulated with it through various ideologies. AKP proves to be the peak of these articulations.

<sup>7</sup> Ali Bulaç, *Yeni Şafak*, 05.05.2008.



are many signs which show that these are permanent when a historical analysis is conducted.

### **The Islamist movement and the economic crisis of 2008**

It seems, however, possible that a new process has been opened up for the Islamist movement recently. What renders this possible is none other than the conflicts and contradictions among the different fractions of the bourgeois class. Namely, the Westernist-secular bourgeoisie had quite extended its support to AKP in its initial phase. Some of the most significant reasons among its many reasons were the fact that AKP never conceded from its anti-labor policies, its decisive implementation of pro-free market and pro-privatization policies, and its insistence on EU membership. But both the domestic and foreign policies of AKP governments, which they have been trying to implement recently, were not the policies that would be approved by this wing of the bourgeoisie. Actually the fundamental reason of this conflict was the transformation of a segment of the Anatolia-based small and mid-scale capitals into an Islamic capital with a monopolistic quality by hugely prospering and their becoming a power against the Westernist-secular capital which is a fraction of the dominant monopolistic capital (Tanyılmaz, 2014: 144). One can talk about three dimensions of this conflict: the economic, political, and ideological/cultural dimensions. The first one pertains to the problem that which one of these two capital groups would confiscate the created total surplus value and get more shares (Tanyılmaz, 2014: 159). A very simple example is the pressure AKP put on Koç and Doğan groups that aligned with the Westernist-secular bourgeoisie. The second is the problem about the interests of which class would be primarily represented politically in international relations and at this point international powers like the US and the EU also step in. At the same time, deviations seen especially in the policy towards Syria and the relations with Northern Iraqi Kurdistan account for the fundamental points of the conflict. The last dimension of the conflict is the struggle in the ideological/cultural field. For, both the reactionary transformation of educational policies and intervention into life styles or the conservatization of all fields of life at home, and also the stand taken by the government against the Gezi Uprising of 2013 were not the policies that would be approved by the Westernist-secular bourgeoisie.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, the fact that the impacts of the economic crisis, which started in 2008, gradually started to be felt more and more in both Turkey and the world also demonstrated that AKP was an instability factor rather than being a

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<sup>8</sup> As is misconstrued by some, this –departing from the fact that Cem Boyner, who owns one of the big capital groups, was in the Gezi Uprising and the example of Divan Hotel- does not mean that the big capital supported the Gezi Uprising. It rather refers to the fact that capital sides with a government that would be able to manage such events in the case of possible riots and uprisings. AKP, on the other hand, could not manage this uprising well and could not materialize maneuvers which could be diverted into the benefit of capital.



stability factor. The most important feature of AKP for the imperialist and domestic dominant classes was its establishment of economic and political stability in Turkey located in a tumultuous Middle Eastern and Euroasian region. This was the reason why foreign capital was flowing into Turkey. This was the reason why the US was putting up with the contradictions created by AKP's Islamism. It seems that the underlined policies above, the impacts of the 2008 crisis and the Gezi Uprising, which can also be more or less identified with this crisis, reversed this trend with regards to the dominant classes and the US.

The abovementioned conflict can result in a reconciliation or the establishment of hegemony of one of the parties over the other as well. At this point, one can discuss towards which direction Islamist movement will evolve. Simply put, theses arguing for the idea that political Islam or the Islamist movement is dead, at least in Turkey, are problematic. For, such a thesis ignores Islamists' ability to articulate with different ideologies within the framework of the needs of the classes which extended their supports to them in various periods.<sup>9</sup> However, as is demonstrated in this study, Islamism maintained its existence and impact through various forms of articulation even in its underground years. What might happen hereafter if the impacts of the 2008 crisis last?

## **Conclusion and discussion**

The aim of this study was to unearth the social power and class relations underlying the ideologies with which Islamism articulated from its inception up until today. Within this framework, it can be suggested that one needs to explore the material bases, which signify class interests and class struggles, of this intellectual articulation to find such forms of articulation by Islamism rather than search for those in Islamists' inability to create an independent intellectual line or their problematic relationship with modernism.

Now, departing from this general conclusion, it might be significant to discuss with which ideologies the impacts of the 2008 crisis might force Islamists to articulate. The 2008 crisis, although a long time has passed since its breakout, seems to be newly showing its impacts both in EU countries and Turkey. In this regard, one can talk about a long-lasting period of depression as well. One of the ways to

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<sup>9</sup> Türköne declares the demise of Islamism as it came to power: "When one gives up the dream of a political order based on Islamic principles, Islamism dies as well" (2012: 151). There are many reasons why such an assessment proves to be misconstrued. Although Islamist movements aiming to establish an Islamic social order have emerged from time to time, the fundamental tendency of the Islamists in Turkey, as was stated before, has not been towards the establishment of an Islamic social order after all. Moreover, an idea about an Islamic state had long before become meaningless in the Republican period as there had been no state left to save (Aktay, 2005b: 67). The more important point, however, is that such assessments ignore Islamism's quality to be able to adapt to the established order in the historical process and its being "a process that operates, develops, and produces itself in each and every new condition" (Bulaç, 2004: 51).

overcome this period of depression for the dominant classes seems to implement nationalist economic policies in order to be able to continuously maintain capital accumulation. This possibility is further enhanced by the increase in the popular vote rates won by fascist parties in the latest elections especially in Europe.<sup>10</sup> This might naturally result in the gradual emergence of extremely nationalist, even fascist regimes sporadically. It is quite possible to suggest that nationalist and fascist parties might undertake this function when Turkey is taken into consideration. As was pointed out throughout this study, however, Islamism can articulate with other types of ideologies within the framework of class interests. One, then, can assert that political Islam, which is articulated with such discourses as “democracy,” “civil society,” and “free market” today, is capable of articulating with fascistic and racist-nationalist discourses in the periods to come far from being eliminated, dead, or bankrupt. To put it more clearly, one might not have to wait for parties like MHP, BBP, or, if push comes to shove, CHP to come to power for the emergence of a fascist regime in Turkey, as AKP seems to be able to serve this function as well. As Zubaida (1996) underlined, Turkish Islam is closely connected to nationalism and state supporter. We believe that the historical development of Islamism in Turkey, its intimate relationship with nationalism since its inception demonstrate the existence of practices which will render such an articulation possible.<sup>11</sup>

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10 A reaction is developing against the EU which has been forcing central decisions by eroding the sovereignty of nation-states in accordance with the interests of international capital but which has been unable to find a remedy against the economic crisis. Immigrants, whom the capital has brought in to obtain cheap labor force, are being forced to pick up the cost of the negative impacts of the crisis. The results of elections seem to stand testimony to this. Firstly, one needs to scrutinize the results of elections in a couple of European countries. In the first round of the local elections in France, it is seen that the central-right witnessed an increase in its votes which surpassed the central-left. The most important point overlooked by many people, however, is the increase in the votes won by the fascist National Front, led by Marine Le Pen. It will not be wrong to suggest that the actual victor of the elections is Le Pen. A similar result was also experienced by Greece in June 2012. This time the central-right party won the general elections similar to France. Though, one needs to mention the significant increase in leftist votes as well. The point that went ignored again was the increase in the votes won by the fascist Golden Dawn Party. The party, which had won about 0.5% of the votes in the 2009 elections, got more than 7% in 2012. Finally, the results of the elections in Spain need to be seen. On the one hand, the rightwing Popular Party won the elections held in November 2011 for the first time with 186 deputies in the parliament even surpassing the number of 183 deputies in 2000. On the other hand, the Socialist Workers' Party had to face an absolute defeat. The results of the elections for the European Parliament held on the last days of May 2014 also reveal similar characteristics. Generally speaking, the extreme rightwing has been able to increase its votes particularly in France, Germany, England, Austria, Denmark, Belgium, Sweden, and Greece. (see [http://www.zaman.com.tr /dunya\\_ap-secimlerinde-asiri-sag-depremi\\_2220112.html](http://www.zaman.com.tr /dunya_ap-secimlerinde-asiri-sag-depremi_2220112.html), May 26, 2014).

11 The political Islamist block has experienced a split in itself since 2013 and a civil war has broken out between AKP and its former backer Fethullah Gülen's movement. The conflict itself is not within the scope of this study but one significant point about this conflict between the Islamists needs to be highlighted. The oppressive and authoritarian policy initiated by AKP, in the aftermath of the failed

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coup d'état in June 2016 by the Gulenists, reveals that this prediction of ours cannot be underestimated at all. Indeed, the AKP government started to follow a Turkish Islamist and nationalist policy rather than panislamism [ümmetçilik] since 2015 and formed a new national consensus government.

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# Economic background of the collapse of the Soviet Union

Özgür Öztürk

Historians tell that the 20th century ended on 25 December 1991. On that cold winter day, Mikhail Gorbachev left the presidency of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and in Kremlin the Soviet flag was replaced by the Russian flag. This was the end point of the most important socialist construction experience so far. While revolutionary movements and leftist currents went into depression all over the world, there was an enthusiasm of victory on the right: according to the spokesmen of the bourgeoisie, people oppressed by “communism” for decades were at last free. Henceforth, there would be only democracy, human rights and free market.

Twenty-five years passed and now we have a country of oligarchs, the mafia, and Putin. We have the ex-Yugoslavia broken up by a brutal civil war; and Hungary, Poland and Ukraine suffering from ultra right-wing regimes. There are the Central Asian republics moaning under dictatorships for twenty five years. The triumph of capitalism opened the way for repressive, reactionary and bigoted regimes, not democracy and liberties. That’s an undisputable fact.

Everything looks like destiny in retrospect, but at any moment, there are always many possibilities. Things could develop in different ways and the Soviet Union could still be standing. Thus, the “collapse” was certainly not inevitable. Yet it didn’t

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happen by chance or at an unexpected moment. In fact, just before this, in the second half of 1989 the “people’s democracies” of East Europe had fell like dominoes. When it was understood that the Soviet Union would not intervene, communist parties fell from power in Poland in August (by election), in Hungary in October (after opening the borders to East Germans wishing to go west), in East Germany in November (with the fall of the Berlin Wall), and then in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and finally in Romania (by a bloody uprising that overthrew Ceausescu). The Warsaw Pact and the CMEA (Council of Mutual Economic Assistance) that had become practically nonfunctional as a result of all these developments were also closed by mid-1991.

It was not hard to estimate that the Soviet Union was next. As a matter of fact, within the USSR, nationalist currents and separatist tendencies had gotten stronger in many republics (Baltic countries, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan), and especially in Russia. It was obvious that the system had hit a wall and could no longer function as before. After the failed coup attempt of August 1991, the days of the Soviet state were numbered.

A “superpower” that was founded by the most magnificent revolution in history, that had survived for more than seventy years, that had challenged imperialism, and that looked robust from the outside, dissolved almost bloodlessly in front of the puzzled gaze of the whole world.

Why did the Soviet Union collapse? There is no simple, shortcut answer to this question. As in all great events, many different dynamics interacted in the closing off of the curtain opened by the October Revolution, and led to such a result. In retrospect, it can be said that the system was actually blocked since the late 1960s. But “blockage” or depression is not necessarily a signal of collapse. In fact, world capitalism survived despite a serious crisis in the same period. The Soviet Union did not collapse because of economic crisis. Every system experiences crises, but thanks to its internal mechanisms, it overcomes them and continues on its way. So the main question is why the Soviet Union has become fragile against crises in the mid-1980s.

If we want to learn something from the experience of the USSR, we first need to distinguish the factors that triggered the collapse and the more basic structural elements. The Soviet Union may have collapsed as a result of external influences or outright betrayal, as many faithful socialists believe. The actions of Gorbachev and his team were indeed “erroneous, heretical, even treacherous”. But even if there was a conspiracy, it was only the trigger of the event; just like the touch that sends a person standing on the edge down from the cliff. Such triggering (or efficient) causes will not be discussed in this paper. I will rather try to look at structural dynamics, and discuss what was not going well in the Soviet Union experience. I will focus primarily on the economic background.

It is worth mentioning from the outset that political and social factors were more important than narrowly defined economic reasons in the collapse of the USSR.

Nevertheless, political acts depend on an economic basis, and are effective on the ground of certain relations of production. As Marx said, what turns upside down the “whole immense superstructure” is the change in the economic foundation.<sup>1</sup>

I emphasize this principle of historical materialism, because too many Marxists are falling into idealism while trying to avoid “economic reductionism”. They are attributing decisive importance to ideas. There is no doubt that the cadres who had adopted bourgeois ideology had a certain influence in the collapse of the Soviet Union. Yet, how such ideologies existed among the leadership of a so-called “socialist” country, or why they showed their destructive effects in the 1980s but not before, can be explained only on the basis of material relations of production.

On the other hand, many Marxists who have no problem with reductionism also put the historical materialist approach aside when the Soviet Union is concerned. They dream that socialism can be established by revolutionary will alone. Hence, they attribute the failure to a lack of faith, ideological tiredness, or simple misconceptions. In this way, they also take an idealist position by crediting determinacy to ideas.

We can say without hesitation that politics and ideology gains an enormous (even central) significance in any socialist construction attempt (“transition to socialism”). But this occurs on the ground of relations of production, the economic basis. Marx once wrote that it is the mode of gaining their livelihood that explains why politics in the ancient world, and Catholicism in the Middle Ages, “played the chief part.”<sup>2</sup> There is no reason to reject that the same principle will also apply for the case of the transition society, **mutatis mutandis**.

Obviously, it is impossible to cover all the lessons of the Soviet experience in an article. Below, I just point out to some basic dynamics. Apart from this short introduction, the article consists of two main parts and a conclusion. In the first part, two common views among Marxists are criticised. In the next part, I make an attempt to establish an alternative explanatory framework. This alternative explanation is not original or new, but it is an effort to stay in strict adherence to historical materialism.

## 1) How not to look at the Soviet Union experience?

The explanations about the collapse of the Soviet Union naturally involve an implicit or explicit evaluation of the USSR. This evaluation usually determines whether the collapse will be explained by internal or external factors. Those who accept the “socialist USSR” thesis tend to explain the collapse in terms of accidental or external conditions, and those who do not see the Soviet Union as a socialist

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1 Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, in Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol 29, Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, p. 263.

2 Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol I, in Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol 35, Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, p. 93.



country often emphasize internal-structural factors.

There is a huge literature on this great event that ended the 20th century. It is undoubtedly not an easy task to evaluate the literature adequately, and such a task well exceeds the limits of this paper (and the writer too). Below, as an introduction to the ideas I will later address, I will only criticize two particular views that I see as including problems. It is possible to call the first one as the “bad management thesis” and the second the “capitalist USSR thesis”.

### **Did the Soviet Union collapse because of bad management?**

According to an argument that is widespread among “sovietic” circles, the Soviet Union collapsed because of the ideological incompetences and inadequacies of the leaders after Stalin. This argument accepts that there were some socio-economic problems in the USSR, but does not regard the system as inherently unsuccessful. According to this approach, the main problem was the moving away of the CPSU leadership from the correct line. In short, the problem was not the car, but the driver.

In Turkey, this idea is most clearly defended by Yalçın Küçük. In the new edition of his 1991 book, he claims that “the Soviet Union collapsed because the Soviet elite had lost belief in communism.” He goes on to say that, “Communism had no economic or technological problem; the only issue was disbelief.”<sup>3</sup>

Many Marxists, who do not use striking expressions like Yalçın Küçük, resort to a similar argument. For example, Kemal Okuyan also emphasizes the ideological inadequacies and imprudent politics of the CPSU leadership. Okuyan defends that in the post-World War II era (including the last years of Stalin), the party did not lead the society correctly, and in fact lagged behind it. In his preface to the third edition of his book, he writes, “Economic problems and etc. could have been overcome,” if a leadership “could be created that would energize the Soviet peoples who increasingly became urbanized, forgot hunger, unemployment, ignorance and backwardness.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, the Soviet Union could continue on its path with an enlightened leadership. Okuyan points to Cuba and Venezuela as examples.

Why such a leadership could not be created in the Soviet Union? Okuyan answers this question by pointing out that the Soviet people and leaders were exhausted by the Second World War. He claims that the ideological struggle was easier during the “open fight” between 1917-1945; but after 1945 the struggle changed shape, and the party was caught unprepared. He suggests that, despite rapid urbanization, the country was still ruled by provincial mentality, and centers such as Moscow and Leningrad were completely left to bourgeois ideology.<sup>5</sup>

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3 Yalçın Küçük, *Sovyetler Birliği'nde Sosyalizmin Çözülüşü* [*The Dissolution of Socialism in the Soviet Union*], İstanbul: Mızrak Yayınları, 2010, p. 7.

4 Kemal Okuyan, *Sovyetler Birliği'nin Çözülüşü Üzerine Anti-Tezler* [*Anti-Theses on the Dissolution of the Soviet Union*], İstanbul: Yazılama Yayınevi, 2014, p. 10.

5 Okuyan, pp. 8-9.

If the leadership of the CPSU has exhibited ideological weakness for a very long time, this must have a material basis other than exhaustion. By stepping on the correct thesis that politics and ideology will gain great importance in the socialist construction process, Okuyan seriously weakens the link between the superstructural elements and relations of production in the “transitional society”. Instead, he constantly puts forward the force element necessary in the socialist construction process. As a result, no objective criteria are left for a leadership that is expected to follow the correct line, and political-ideological mistakes turn into accidental events. Okuyan asks, for example, “how can be explained other than foolishness that the USSR, which tumbled fifty times to keep Egypt away from the imperialists, was so indifferent to China’s shift out from its orbit?”<sup>6</sup> He obviously does not see any problem in the structure that gave birth to such a leadership.

In Okuyan’s perspective, it is not an issue that socialist construction efforts were organized as separate national formations in each individual country. The making of the Communist International dysfunctional also does not matter much, because internationalism means “to determine the point that will advance the world revolution in reference to your position, and then concentrating on it.”<sup>7</sup> The bureaucracy is already unimportant because in the USSR “the number of bureaucrats is less than the number in developed capitalist countries, by every definition and in all periods.”<sup>8</sup> In short, there were no serious problems, but, unfortunately, foolish mistakes and incompetent staff.

Kemal Okuyan’s anti-theses, Yalçın Küçük’s “disbelief” diagnosis etc. can of course be criticized from various angles. In the following parts of the essay, I will try to present a different picture of the Soviet Union. However, in this section, I just want to remind a “sociological” phenomenon, one of the causes of bureaucratic deformation.

Competitors for any political or bureaucratic position (office, seat) often represent certain social forces and tendencies, whether they are aware or not. But a representative is also an individual and enters the competition with her individual qualifications. If those positions include some privileges, as is often the case in hierarchically structured systems, a natural selection process starts: those that better maneuver and adapt the environment survive. The more shrewd, pitiless, and tricky people become successful. So, at the higher levels of the hierarchy, those with the worst personal traits are left. As a rule, the top ones are the most craftiest. In such a mechanism, which well suits to the functioning of capitalism, those who adhere to communist ideals don’t have much chance, and the survivors often do not have

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6 Okuyan, p. 157. In fact, there are many similar claims in the book.

7 Okuyan, p. 129.

8 Okuyan, p. 97. I will deal with the problem of bureaucracy below, hence I don’t feel the need to consider it here. However, it must be emphasized that the size of the bureaucracy has secondary importance. The problem is not even “bureaucratization”, red tape, or slowness. It is that the social power has concentrated in the hands of a privileged section.

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any ideological affiliation. As a result, less faithful staff comes on the scene with each new generation.

This can be observed in many mass organizations. Such a selection mechanism operated within the CPSU in the 1920s. The leadership problem, that is, the subjective factor, depended on a very objective factor. Even worse, this problem deepened over time. In the Soviet Union, the bourgeois ideology was able to live comfortably for many years between the layers of the party and the state bureaucracy because it had such an objective ground. In the 1980s, there was a “communist party” in which the Central Committee bureaucrats were regarding Marxism as “bullshit” and Lenin as a criminal.<sup>9</sup>

Being a leader in a small party requires some personal traits. Being a leader in a large organization or state requires very different traits. Lenin and, to some extent, Castro took power while they were leading small parties, so they were not effected by this deformation. However, all of the subsequent leaders in the Soviet Union, including Stalin, succeeded as a result of the intra-party struggles (including, of course, many tricks). Stalin might be the “last Bolshevik” as Kemal Okuyan claims (perhaps because he killed all the rest), but he was also the first defective leader.

There is no need to look far for the solution to the deformations we are talking about. The Paris Commune example is clear. The bureaucracy is a social segment that emerges as a result of an objective need, and in any socialist construction attempt, power will be seriously centralized at the hands of the bureaucracy. That is precisely why, from the very beginning, it will always be necessary to approach the issues from the perspective of the working class, to ground the organization of the relations of production and general processes on participation and egalitarianism, and to take measures to systematically eliminate privileges. The creative solutions of the Parisian communards (such as the right to call back the representatives, or equal wages to representatives and workers) are practices that have emerged from life, from the class itself. Political or administrative duties should bring burden, not privilege. If people have started fighting each other for the material advantages of a duty, then there is a problem. In addition, the leadership has to depend on an as wide as possible collective mind, and for this, developing the mechanisms for political participation at all levels is extremely important. “Soviet democracy” in the exact meaning of the term is not a luxury but a basic need that will provide the functioning of the planning process and will be a permanent political engine of socialist construction.<sup>10</sup> If it is said that this is impossible, and such political

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<sup>9</sup> Philip Hanson, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Economy: An Economic History of the USSR from 1945*, London: Routledge, 2014, p. 199.

<sup>10</sup> According to Trotsky, the “political lever” for the regulation and application of plans is “unthinkable” without Soviet democracy. However, Trotsky does not expand this claim, just proposes it. Leon Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed: What Is the Soviet Union and Where Is It Going?*, trans: Max Eastman, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1983, p. 67. See also Özgür Öztürk, “Trotsky ve Sovyetler Birliği” [“Trotsky and the Soviet Union”], *Devrimci Marksizm*, no 24, 2015.

participation will not work in a big country, then this means that we will continue to complain about the “foolishnesses” in the future.

The Soviet Union was managed badly, but it did not collapse because of this. Just as the collapse of the Ottoman Empire stemmed not from incompetent sultans, but largely from the structural problems of the economic organization of the empire. Yes, the driver was not a master; but the car was already aged, its tires were worn out, and the gasoline was finished.

### **Was the USSR capitalist?**

Before the collapse, many revolutionaries in Turkey were defining the Soviet Union as a socialist country, implying that socialist construction was essentially completed in a part of the world. And some of them were defending that the Soviet Union was “advancing to communism”.

The revolutionary generations of Turkey, who have carried out great struggles by paying a heavy price, have not sought to critically evaluate the Soviet Union experience. Rather, the official statements of the CPSU were tried to fit in the theoretical bag. The emergence of socialist movements outside the general pattern was mainly a result of the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s. The “USSR evaluation” of the Chinese and pro-Albanian currents were “monopoly state capitalism, social imperialism”.<sup>11</sup>

Which one is right? Was the Soviet Union a socialist country advancing towards communism, or was it capitalist? In fact, from the very first day of its seventy-four year history, the Soviet Union experience created both great excitement and admiration, and some question marks among Marxists. Even Rosa Luxemburg, who supported the October revolution to the end, expressed some criticisms of the Bolshevik Party at that time.<sup>12</sup> Over time, as the revolutionary hopes faded in the west, and the social structure of the Soviet Union which had started the construction of “socialism in one country” became increasingly clearer, the opposing views, which did not recognize this as socialism, also became clear.<sup>13</sup> Both in the Western countries and in the East (China), one of the most common theses of the Marxists that were critical of the Soviet Union experience was that the USSR was a capitalist country. There is a wide literature about this topic.

According to one opinion, the Soviet Union can be defined as “state capitalism”. With this concept, Lenin had characterized the situations in which a bourgeois state

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11 For a comparative compilation of the views of Turkish socialist movements on the Soviet Union: *İkibin'e Doğru*, no 27, September 1991, pp. 15-21. This source can be found on the internet by searching.

12 Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution and Leninism or Marxism?*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1961.

13 For a detailed study on the opposing Western views: Marcel van der Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union: A Survey of Critical Theories and Debates Since 1917*, trans: Jurriaan Bendien, Leiden: Brill, 2007.

takes control of the economy. According to him, state capitalism promotes the further socialization of the means of production and functions as the entrance gate to socialism, hence is not in conflict with the dictatorship of the proletariat. Thus, Lenin used the concept of “state capitalism” to describe the New Economic Policy (NEP) period. However, since the 1920s, the opponents used the concept of “state capitalism” in order to claim that the Soviet Union was a kind of capitalism. After World War II, people like C.L.R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya in the USA, and Tony Cliff in England, who came from within Trotskyism but had moved away from the “bureaucratic/degenerated workers’ state” formulation of that tradition, accepted this thesis.<sup>14</sup> For example, according to Cliff, despite the fact that it was a proletarian revolution, the October revolution had been defeated in the second half of the 1920s, and a state capitalism, in which the bureaucracy was a ruling class, had been established in the USSR.<sup>15</sup> There were not private companies and etc., but the Soviet Union was acting like a collective capital in the capitalist competition (including military dimensions) on a world scale.

In another approach, the USSR is not “state capitalism” but a proper capitalist country. This view was further elaborated and defended by various theoreticians, from Amadeo Bordiga in Italy to Paresh Chattopadhyay in Canada, with some differences in details.<sup>16</sup> The common point is that, they see the October revolution as a bourgeois revolution and claim that the USSR, though it had some specific aspects, moved on a capitalist line from the beginning.

In the Maoist tradition, it is argued that capitalism was restored in the Soviet Union after Stalin.<sup>17</sup> So the USSR was socialist in the beginning, but turned to capitalism when revisionists came to power during the Khrushchev period. Since the Maoist current also adopts the Stalinist legacy, the Maoists defending Stalinism, and Cliff supporters who strongly oppose it, agree on the idea that the USSR is not socialist but capitalist.

The strength of the capitalist USSR thesis is that it tries to explain the domination over direct producers in the Soviet Union on a class basis, and it has no difficulty in explaining the fact that especially the upper layers of the bureaucracy turned into a bourgeoisie after the collapse. In fact, it can be argued that the collapse does not present a special problem for this approach, because power changed hands in a country that was already capitalist. Moreover, since the Soviet bureaucracy continued to rule in disguise, it is debatable whether political power has changed

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14 Marcel van der Linden, pp. 110-115, 119-122; M.C. Howard, J.E. King, “State Capitalism in the Soviet Union”, *History of Economics Review*, no 34, 2001.

15 Tony Cliff, *State Capitalism in Russia*, Pluto Press, 1974.

16 Marcel van der Linden, pp. 122-125, 266-270; Paresh Chattopadhyay, “The Soviet Question and Marx Revisited: A Reply to Mike Haynes”, *Historical Materialism*, vol 12 no 2, 2004.

17 Willi Dickhut, *Sovyetler Birliđi 'nde Kapitalizmin Restorasyonu [The Restoration of Capitalism in the Soviet Union]* trans: A. Sever, İstanbul: Komün Yayınları, Books I and II, 1976, Book III, 1977; Martin Nicolaus, *Restoration of Capitalism in the USSR*, Chicago: Liberator Press, 1975.

hands at all.

The key proposition of this thesis can be expressed as “the USSR is a capitalist country where the bureaucracy is in the position of bourgeoisie.” Two questions are answered positively: Is the bureaucracy a class? Moreover, is it a bourgeoisie? When the first question is answered negatively, the answer to the second question must also be negative. If the bureaucracy is not a class, then it cannot be a bourgeoisie. But there are some who positively respond to the first question (they say “yes, bureaucracy is a class”), but negatively to the second, which means that the bureaucracy is not a bourgeoisie, but a class with specific characteristics (the bureaucratic collectivism thesis). Let us first check if the bureaucracy is a class.

The definition of classes is a matter of intense debate among Marxists. But one basic and undisputed criterion is the position of a social group vis-a-vis the means of production. In the capitalist society there is a clear contrast between the capitalist class which possesses the means of production and the working class without such property. The situation is different in a transitional society like the Soviet Union where the means of production are under public and collective ownership. Every state depends on class domination, and in the Soviet Union the state was organized as the state of the working class, not the state of all people (I will explain this below). Therefore, the working class collectively owned the means of production. The bureaucracy had the power to decide on behalf of this state and therefore on behalf of the working class; it was a social layer that had identified its interests with the state that it was serving. The increasing alienation of this stratum from the class it was representing does not mean that it became a separate class. In short, according to Marxism, the idea that the bureaucracy is a class is very dubious. Moreover, according to the capitalist Soviet Union thesis, the bureaucracy was also the dominant class. But a group cannot suddenly emerge at the dominant class position without developing and strengthening in the previous social structure. The social root of the Soviet bureaucracy, however, is not in the tsarist period, but in the post-revolution era.

The claim that the bureaucracy corresponds to a bourgeois class (the second question) is more suspicious in terms of Marxism. In English, there is a saying like “if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, swims like a duck, it is a duck.” This may be a wise advice for everyday practices, but points to a scientifically faulty reasoning: a bird that resembles a duck in every respect may still not be a duck anyway. Those who define bureaucracy as a bourgeoisie are saying “this is a bourgeoisie!” by looking at its domination over the working class, its various privileges and its decisive position. In other words, they are relying on external, superficial similarities. However, these are not the defining criteria.<sup>18</sup> In scientific

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<sup>18</sup> In this context, Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff’s observation that the “state capitalism” thesis depends not on Marx’s concept of surplus labour but on a more vague notion of power, is not only on the mark, but also valid for other versions of the “capitalist USSR” thesis. Stephen Resnick,



classification, it is necessary to rely on theoretical criteria, not similarities. The bureaucrat can not personally own, buy, sell, or inherit the means of production. She cannot appropriate surplus labour for her own. All these qualities make her different from the bourgeois. Using the concept of “bourgeoisie” to express very different historical and social realities, for example putting the US and the USSR in the same “capitalist” bag, may be a political choice, but it does not make much sense in terms of the historical materialistic approach.

Can the bureaucracy be a “collective” bourgeoisie? When Marx started his critique of political economy, he argued that the capitalist was the being of capital “for-itself”; capital as a social relation was represented by a concrete social agent. Capital emerged as embodied in the shape of a capitalist; so the capitalist was the personification of capital.<sup>19</sup> Later, in the third volume of *Capital*, he wrote that forms such as corporations meant “the abolition of the capitalist mode of production within the capitalist mode of production itself.” According to Marx, this was “a necessary transitional phase” towards a more advanced mode of production. Capital would be “property of associated producers ... direct social property.”<sup>20</sup>

Marx’s observations include the possibility of collective forms of ownership in advanced capitalism. Today, many large companies do not have any specific owner. For example, in Turkey, a part of İşbank’s shares (32 percent) are traded in the stock market, and the largest share (40 percent) is held by the İşbank Pension Foundation. Examples can be multiplied.<sup>21</sup> Depending on such examples, American researchers Adolf Berle and Gardiner Means put forward the “managerial capitalism” thesis in 1932, which claimed that the bourgeoisie was now replaced by managers. According to Berle and Means, most large companies have no owners, and the actual control is in the hands of managers, not stock owners. The capitalist class is disappearing.<sup>22</sup> The views of Berle and Means also laid the ground for the “bureaucratic collectivism” thesis, which is related to the “capitalist USSR” thesis.

There are two problems with these types of theses that are not well known in Turkey. First, Marx regards the emergence of “collective capitalist” forms as a sign that capitalism is already on the way to annihilation. Secondly, the bourgeoisie has

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Richard Wolff, “State Capitalism in the USSR? A High-Stakes Debate”, *Rethinking Marxism*, vol 6 no 2, 1993. However, despite this observation, Resnick and Wolff still try to develop an explanation based on power, and this is perhaps related to their post-modern philosophical tendencies.

19 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans: Martin Nicolaus, London: Peunguin Books, 1993, pp. 303, 452.

20 Karl Marx, *Capital, vol III*, in Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works, vol 37*, Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, pp. 434, 436.

21 In the US, there was no dominant shareholder in about one quarter of large companies in 1900. The ratio of this kind of companies rose to 40 percent in 1929, and to more than 85 percent in 1975. John Scott, *Corporate Business and Capitalist Classes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 59.

22 Adolf A. Berle, Gardiner C. Means, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property*, New Brunswick, Londra: Transaction Publishers, 1991.



not completed its role on the scene and left its place to managers. Indeed, in other empirical studies of the same period (1930s) as the work of Berle and Means, it has been shown that a small number of families dominate banks, large industrial plants, and many important businesses in the United States.<sup>23</sup> As capitalism develops, more and more impersonal forms emerge and become widespread; yet it will be realistic to accept that there will be capitalists as long as capitalist production continues.

As a result, to describe the Soviet Union as a capitalist society is very questionable in Marxist terms. But that does not mean that it was socialist (or communist). At least the following are clear: advancing towards communism requires taking steps to abolish the state and put an end to the existence of classes. The state refers primarily to the repressive apparatuses (army, police, etc.), the bureaucracy and the ideological apparatuses. During the history of the USSR, no attempt has been made to remove these institutions altogether. On the contrary, the bureaucratic rule continued to strengthen the state apparatus, arguing that class struggle would become more intense as stages of socialism are passed. Therefore, to claim that the Soviet Union established socialism and passed on to the next stage and approached communism is to force both the theory and the facts quite a bit.

Many Marxists who will not defend the communism claim for the Soviet Union will still insist on its “socialist” character. We need to be very clear at this point: socialist construction can only be completed on the world scale, on a geographical area so large that the capitalist countries can no longer be a threat. Before this, socialist construction continues. Saying that is not disrespect for the people who gave their lives to “defend socialism”. Theory and practice cannot be separated; but theoretical concepts do not have to coincide with the language of politics. In Marxist terms the Soviet Union was a “transitional society” in the socialist construction process; and fell back to capitalism before completing, or rather because it couldn’t complete, this transition.

Transition society is the dictatorship of the proletariat, a workers’ state. The bureaucracy is not a class, it is not a bourgeoisie at all, but a social group that (mis)represents the working class; it has even established domination on that class.

The specific aspects of the Soviet Union experience do not lie in that it is a capitalist society or that the bureaucracy has become a bourgeoisie. The specific aspects of this experience lie in the contradictory dynamics between the productive forces and the relations of production.

## **2) Economic structure and its problems in the Soviet Union**

### **Relations of production and productive forces**

Marxism acknowledges a coherence, a rationality in human history. This is not a belief reached through philosophical speculation, but a result of the scientific

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<sup>23</sup> Maurice Zeitlin, “Corporate Ownership and Control: The Large Corporation and the Capitalist Class”, *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol 79 no 5, 1974.

examination of material facts. The relations of production between people become objectified in various means of production, machines, buildings, as well as in the state, the law, other institutions, and thus acquire permanence. At the same time, human labour force, regarded as a productive force in itself, is also shaped by these relations. People are shaped by their relations. Hence, social relations of production shape both the means of production and people. On the other hand, the productive forces, once formed, react back and influence the relations of production. Establishing and operating a factory does not only mean to produce goods, but also to produce and reproduce certain relations of production.

All the industrial plants in a country can be destroyed because of a great war or earthquake. But if the relations of production are unchanged (or have not returned to backward forms), then all the means of production of that country, the same factories, the same buildings, and even better ones, can be rebuilt in a short time. Despite the huge destruction of World War II, both Germany and Japan and the Soviet Union became industrial giants again within five to ten years. This was possible because, in these societies, relations of production had remained largely unchanged. Their means of production were destroyed, and they suffered considerable losses in terms of labour power also, but the relations of production had not changed. By contrast, countries like Turkey and Brazil, which did not suffer a similar destruction, and even though they had started a certain industrialization experience before the war, couldn't reach the same level.

Just from this example alone, we can say that the **relations** of production have priority in the relation between the productive forces and the relations of production. It is of course difficult to build factories and large industrial plants, but it is much more difficult to separate the direct producers from land. Once this is accomplished, those flashy industrial plants can soon be built one after the other.

Different societies and historical periods are distinguished from each other by the way in which the relations of production are organized, or rather, the way in which they appropriate the economic surplus. A particular set of **relations of production** coincides with certain **productive forces**, which include the nature as object of production, the means of production, and the direct producers that provide the labour force that must be considered as the most important productive force. The productive forces and the relations of production are two sides of a unity. They form a mode of production that is in the final analysis a contradictory, dialectical totality.

At any given moment, there is a certain "conformity" between the productive forces and the relations of production in a society. As Marx wrote, "The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist."<sup>24</sup> By the use of steam as an energy source in industry, production was

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24 Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, in Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, vol 6, Lawrence & Wishart, 2010, p. 166.

liberated from the whims of weather conditions, human beings took a big step towards controlling nature, productivity increased dramatically. It is no coincidence that the Industrial Revolution took place within the context of capitalist relations of production.

But this “conformity” between the productive forces and the relations of production, or in other words the element of coherence in history, is in no way a barrier to change. On the contrary, change takes place within this framework. Together with the change and development of the productive forces, the relations of production change gradually. At one point, an inevitable break occurs.

In dialectics, it is said that quantitative changes lead to qualitative transformations. This is a general law, and can be observed in various cases, from the boiling of water to great social revolutions. As Hegel wrote poetically,

just as the first breath drawn by a child after its long, quiet nourishment breaks the gradualness of merely quantitative growth -there is a qualitative leap, and the child is born- so likewise the Spirit in its formation matures slowly and quietly into its new shape, dissolving bit by bit the structure of its previous world, whose tottering state is only hinted at by isolated symptoms. The frivolity and boredom which unsettle the established order, the vague foreboding of something unknown, these are the heralds of approaching change. The gradual crumbling that left unaltered the face of the whole is cut short by a sunburst which, in one flash, illuminates the features of the new world.<sup>25</sup>

Hegel wrote these sentences in the first years of the nineteenth century, probably during the period when he saw Napoleon passing on a white horse in Jena (1807). His representation immediately evokes the French Revolution (the continuous feeling of boredom of the 18th century French aristocrats is famous!). This passage almost certainly affected young Marx. Marx also says that the revolution is a qualitative leap, but not a random one; a leap which, although at first seems crazy, is in line with the rationality of history, since its conditions mature slowly within the pre-revolutionary society.

### **Transition society**

During the “transition” from one mode of production to another, elements specific to two different modes of production coexist. For example, in the transition from feudalism to capitalism, which lasted roughly from the 16th to the 18th centuries in Western Europe, there were feudal forms like serfdom or lordship, as well as forms such as manufactures specific to capitalist production. The process of capitalist development lasted for centuries. Marx writes that capitalist production becomes

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<sup>25</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans: A.V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, pp. 6-7.

dominant only by the large-scale and systematic use of machines in factories. “The full development of capital, therefore, takes place - or capital has posited the mode of production corresponding to it – only when the means of labour has not only taken the economic form of fixed capital, but has also been suspended in its immediate form, and when fixed capital appears as a machine within the production process, opposite labour.”<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, capitalist production takes its specific form only with machine-producing machines. Because, capitalist production thus becomes a system and begins to produce its own inputs. But this is just the “technical” side of the event. The most important social process is the separation of large masses from the means of production, so they become workers. When labour-power becomes a commodity, all the inputs and outputs of the capitalist production process gains the character of commodity. By standing on its own feet, capitalist production makes a sudden breakthrough.

How should transition from capitalism to socialism be evaluated in this perspective? First, this will be a change in the mode of production, hence grasping society from the roots. Marx called the the transformation period as the “dictatorship of the proletariat”. In this period, the private property of the means of production will come to an end, social forms of property will develop, the withering away of the state will start and steps will be taken to eliminate classes. However, it is unlikely that the state will be abolished in a transitional society as long as the main central countries are not included in the socialist construction process, since a country (or a group of countries) attempting to build socialism will always be exposed to military and economic oppression of capitalist states. The result is that the transition to socialism can only be completed on the whole of the world, or on a large enough part of it (enough to defeat the threats of capitalist countries). The internationalist character of the socialist revolution is a necessity, not a question of choice. It is meaningless to open up a debate in this regard, to claim that “we can go to the end, even in one country,” and to accuse those who disagree with it by disbelief, or not trusting the Soviet Union.

In the transition society, elements of both modes of production coexist. This includes both relations of production and productive forces. The productive forces in the transitional society will be taken over from the previous capitalist production. The decisive move here is to change the relations of production, to end the labour-capital relationship. The most important steps are putting the means of production under public and collective ownership forms, the abolition of the commodity character of labour-power, and the initiation of planned production as the new type of production relation. However, in order for socialism (communism) to stand on its own feet, it seems that there must be a transformation in the productive forces and in the labour force itself, the most revolutionary productive force. In the Marxist tradition this is expressed with the formula that “work will become a primary

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26 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 699. Also see Marx, *Capital vol I*, pp. 385-388.

necessity”, at the same time a great increase in labour productivity that is beyond capitalist production is expected. In the last fifty years, the level reached by the information technology, automation, and communication provide some indications about how productive forces in socialism will be. But there is no prescription, and the “techno-socialist” approach which claims that socialism became possible only with modern information technology, remains quite naive.<sup>27</sup>

According to Marx, communism is not the design of an intellectual, but a new form of society that will mature within capitalist relations of production and will necessarily emerge when the time comes. In this society there will be no capital, exploitation, classes; the ownership of the means of production will be social, and production and consumption will be planned, not left to the mercy of the market. All these characteristics stem from the operation of capitalism. However, the development will not be evolutionary, but revolutionary.

The flow of history has led to the emergence of forms different from what Marx expected. Unequal and combined development of capitalism throughout the world resulted in the concentration of revolutionary potentials not in the west, but in a backward country like the tsarist Russia. At the beginning of the 20th century, the feudal superstructure of tsarism was easily torn away like a shell in Russia, which had entered the capitalist process. Thus history brought both a huge task and a unique opportunity to the Russian revolutionary movement: permanent revolution, or in other words, to integrate the democratic (bourgeois) revolution with the socialist revolution.<sup>28</sup>

The economic aspect of this historical task was to find and implement a method of resource allocation that is not based on the law of value, to abandon market relations and establish a planned system, but without falling behind the possibilities that capitalist production offers to humanity while doing so. It is of course very difficult to accomplish such a task in a backward peasant society. Nevertheless, after a while the Soviet Union tried to accomplish this.

The Soviet Union experience is an attempt at socialist construction, and in this sense, it obviously has a “socialist” character. The October revolution is the moment when humanity was nearest to socialism throughout history. However, in the process, a structure that did not match this target emerged, and the result was failure. The main reason for this is not the “disbelief of the Soviet elite in communism” but the organization of the relations of production in Soviet society, which is also the cause of this loss of belief. This is also what prevented an internationalist orientation in the final analysis.

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27 An example of this approach is: Daniel E. Saros, *Information Technology and Socialist Construction: The End of Capital and the Transition to Socialism*, Londra, New York: Routledge, 2014.

28 About permanent revolution, see Leon Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution & Results and Prospects*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 1978; Michael Löwy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development: The Theory of Permanent Revolution*, London: NLB, 1981.

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Success and failure are two sides of the same coin: existing relations of production provided a rapid development of the productive forces for a period, but then they became obstacles in front of them. At a certain stage, the huge superstructure turned upside down in a short time, and collapsed. Below, I will try to trace the economic background of the collapse on two lines. The first line will focus on the developmental dynamics of the productive forces, the specific problems of Soviet industrialization. The second one will look at the relations of production and in particular the problem of bureaucracy. These two lines are not separate but are intertwined like the branches of an ivy.

### Before the “revolution from above”

The planned economic system (called by some “the command economy”) that comes to mind when speaking about the Soviet Union, was established in the 1930s. From this date until the collapse, the economic structure was constantly “reformed”, especially in the period following World War II, but the basic configuration was not changed. Therefore, it is necessary to ask why this basic configuration failed.

The “USSR model” was formed between roughly 1930 and 1965. In outline, during the periods of Stalin (1924-1953) and Khrushchev (1953-1964), the economic system was established and experienced its classical expansion phase. During the Brezhnev years (1964-1982), the blockages in the system became apparent. The 1980s are the period of dissolution, that is, efforts to overcome the crisis and then sudden collapse.

It must be remembered that when the revolution took place in 1917, there was no ready-made formula and there were many uncertainties. It was expected that production would be planned, everyone would get according to her labour and money relations would eventually end. But it was not clear how all these would be done. Moreover, hopes were largely tied to a European revolution.

The civil war that began in mid-1918 marked the first few years after the October revolution. At that time, the tax system collapsed, and because of the continuous issuing of money, inflation continued to rise at an unbelievable rate and the rouble depreciated considerably. In October 1920, the value of the rouble was one percent of its 1917 level. Due to very high inflation, the use of money came to an end and direct barter became widespread in many regions. In fact, in 1918 almost half of the wages were paid in kind. This ratio increased to three fourths in 1919 and nine tenths in 1920.<sup>29</sup> At the time, by the gradual decline in the use of money, some communist economists, such as Yevgeniy Preobrazhensky, even suggested that the money system could be destroyed by printing money in abundance (thus artificially creating inflation)!<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Maurice Dobb, *1917'den Bu Yana Sovyet Ekonomisinin Gelişimi* [*The Development of the Soviet Economy Since 1917*], trans: Metin Aktan, İstanbul: Özdemir Basımevi, 1968, pp. 98, 99; Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR 1917-1991*, London: Penguin Books, 1992, p. 58.

<sup>30</sup> Nikolay Bukharin, Yevgeniy Preobrajenskiy, *Komünizmin Abecesi* [*The ABC of Communism*],



Although the money economy was eroded seriously, War Communism was less a consciously planned communist economic organization, than “the systematic regimentation of consumption in a besieged fortress” as Trotsky says.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps the most basic economic practice of this period was the forced collection of grain from the villages. In this method, which was taken over from the tsarist regime, the state was determining a subsistence level for the villagers (in the village communes called **mir** or **obshchina**) as food and seed, and seizing the rest.<sup>32</sup>

When the civil war ended in early 1921, the economy had collapsed, the population had decreased, and especially the industrial proletariat had suffered tremendous losses. It is estimated that fifteen to twenty million people died in World War I, civil war and the subsequent 1921-22 famine. For eight or nine years, on average, two million people died from unnatural causes each year!<sup>33</sup> By 1921, large-scale industrial production was one seventh, while iron and steel production was only four percent, of the 1913 level. Even small-scale (atelier) handicraft production was less than half the prewar level. Grain production was only two-thirds of the average of 1909-1913.<sup>34</sup>

Rebellions among the peasants became widespread, as a result of both the economic downturn and the continuing forced acquisition of grain during the civil war. In 1920-21, the Tambov revolt including tens of thousands of villagers was suppressed with difficulty by the Red Army. The alliance of workers and peasants which brought the revolution to success began to dissolve, and even the physically torn working class became increasingly dissatisfied. The Kronstadt uprising of early 1921 shook the Bolshevik power from below. But most importantly, in the meantime, it gradually became evident that a revolution would not take place in Europe.

Under such circumstances, it became clear that War Communism could not be sustained, let alone be the ground of a socialist regime. In 1921, New Economic Policy (NEP) was introduced that made important concessions to the peasantry, by legalizing market relations, employment of workers, and land renting. A new agricultural tax was introduced. Now, the state would not determine the subsistence level of the peasant, but the amount of tax she would pay (again in kind). Thus, the peasant could bring to market the surplus exceeding the subsistence portion of production. After a while, this tax was also converted to a monetary one. The results

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trans: Yavuz Alogan, İstanbul: Belge Yayınları, 1992, p. 421.

31 Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, p. 21.

32 R.W. Davies, *Soviet Economic Development from Lenin to Khrushchev*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 18, 19; Lars T. Lih, “Bolshevik Razverstka and War Communism”, *Slavic Review*, vol 45 no. 4, 1986.

33 Jean-Marie Chauvier, *Sovyetler Birliği: Ekonomik ve Siyasi Gelişmeler (1917/1988)* [*The Soviet Union: Economic and Political Developments (1917/1988)*], trans: Temel Keşoğlu, BDS Yayınları, 1990, p. 21.

34 Davies, p. 23.



of all these practices came to be seen towards 1923. As the agricultural production increased and the food supply to the cities was regulated, the new regime managed to take a breath and survive.

### **The need for industrialization**

Since the revolution took place in a backward country, socialist construction overlapped to a great extent with problems of capitalist development. If, for example, the revolution had been accomplished in England at the time, the problems to be faced would probably be somewhat similar, but the primary objective would not be “industrialization”.

In a capitalist society, industrialization takes place, as a rule, in a historical process in which the industrial bourgeoisie emerges, gains strength and defeats the agricultural and commercial interests. As the share of industry increases in total production, the means of production gradually concentrate in the hands of the industrial bourgeoisie. The industrial bourgeoisie is formed by the entrance of some merchants, artisan-based capitalists and a part of the land-owning class into industrial sectors. In parallel to this, proletarianization also accelerates. A large section part of the peasantry migrates to the cities as a result of, on the one hand the “repulsion of the village”, and on the other hand the “attraction of the city” (in Turkey this was once expressed with the saying “The streets of Istanbul are paved with gold.”)

Industrialization is a tremendous leap forward in the productive forces of society, and at the same time the city’s victory over the countryside. One of the most important indicators of this is the increase in the number of urban population, primarily urban workers, depending on the transformation in class relations.

Before the revolution, industrial workers were only 2-3 per cent of the population in Russia. 40 percent of them were employed in facilities with at least one thousand workers, most of which were foreign-owned. Large-scale industry was concentrated in Moscow, St. Petersburg and the Urals region. There were some large enterprises also in Ukraine and in the South Caucasus region. Apart from these, the vast majority of the country did not have any industry at all. The overwhelming majority of the population were peasants. The general rate of the urban population doubled between 1926 and 1939, from 16 percent to 33 percent; and continued to increase to 48 percent in 1959, 56 percent in 1970, and 65 percent in the 1980s. Non-agricultural workers and civil servants (roughly, there was one civil servant for two workers) accounted for less than 20 percent of the total workforce in 1928, but more than half in 1940. In general, between 1928 and 1965, the number of workers employed in industry, construction and transport increased six times, from 6.5 million to 39 million.<sup>35</sup>

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35 Moshe Lewin, *Sovyet Yüzyılı [The Soviet Century]*, trans: Renan Akman, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2009, pp. 75, 76, 84-87; Davies, pp. 14, 38; Chauvier, pp. 23, 37.

When we refer to Soviet industrialization, we are talking about an enormously large geographical area and a tremendous social transformation in a very short period of about ten years. The USSR covers 15 percent of the world's land, a land hundred times larger than the size of the United Kingdom. Two thirds of the land is roughly in alignment with Canada, north of the 50th parallel. Weather conditions are severe and only about 30 percent of all land is arable (this ratio is 60 percent in France). And the amount of land that can be planted is only one third of that. However, the main advantage of Russian geography is that its natural resources are abundant and diverse.<sup>36</sup>

The Soviet regime's need for industrialization was a negative legacy of the tsarist era. In the first half of the 20th century many countries, including Turkey, felt this need. But since the Soviet Union was an attempt at socialist construction, this was felt much more intensely. Because the capitalist world showed hostility from the first day. Military competition also included a challenge in economic, political and social spheres.

Though it could be postponed to a certain extent during the NEP years, the need to rapidly develop the productive forces came to be increasingly apparent in the 1930s. The signal came with the 1928 crisis. Since the end of 1927 a serious threat of hunger emerged, as the villagers had a tendency to avoid bringing agricultural products to the market because of low prices. In 1928, the Soviet country once again suffered mass hunger. After the relatively peaceful atmosphere of the NEP period, the first coercive practices on the peasantry started in the same year. Then came a quick collectivization campaign. The regime gained its own character with the Stalinist "revolution from above" from 1929 onwards.

In this first period, almost all significant moves were responses to specific situations, especially agricultural crises. The 1921-22 crisis was the ultimate stimulus for the transition to NEP, and the 1928 crisis for the start of collectivization. But before that, there was a serious period of intellectual preparation. The "scissors crisis" that emerged in 1923 triggered a major controversy that would last a few years, about the general industrial strategy.<sup>37</sup> The debate on industrialization was, in fact, a reflection of a clash of social forces in the background. It was also important in determining the paths and strategies to be followed in the first large-scale socialist construction experience. Naturally for a large debate that went on for years, some positions changed somewhat over time, some became more clear, and others fell off the agenda. It can be said that there were a few different opinions in conflict with each other. Some (such as Bukharin) demanded the continuation of NEP, while others (Sokolnikov, Chayanov, Kondratiev, etc.) wanted the priority to be given

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<sup>36</sup> Chauvier, p. 22.

<sup>37</sup> "Scissors" expresses the divergence of relative prices between industrial goods and agricultural products, to the advantage to industry. Dobb, p. 148; Nove, Chapter 5. The basic source on the Soviet industrialization debates is the PhD of Alexander Erlich, which is also printed as a book: *The Soviet Industrialization Controversy*, New York: New School for Social Research, 1953.

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to agriculture. Preobrazhensky and Trotsky, who were on the left opposition then, argued that planned industrialization should be initiated urgently.

In the latter part of the NEP period, the economic structure entered a vicious cycle: the productivity of agriculture had to increase in order to transfer resources to industry, and the industry had to be developed for this. Under such circumstances, the Stalin team which succeeded in eliminating both the leftist opposition and the rightist line led by Bukharin, started a forced collectivization in agriculture, and at the same time accelerated the oppressive methods in industry.

### **Forced collectivization: the yoke over the peasantry**

Marx and Engels saw the working class as the power to transform capitalism, and the dictatorship of the proletariat as the first step on the way to communism. They had no sympathy or opposition to the peasantry. However, they pointed out the restrictive aspects of rural life. For the post-revolutionary period, economically they generally argued for large farms and producer cooperatives in agriculture. They thought that agricultural transformation would take place not with forced methods, but partly spontaneously due to the appeal of superior production techniques, and partly due to economic incentives.

The October revolution was accomplished by an alliance of workers and peasants. But the structure that emerged in the Soviet Union during the 1930s took the form of the domination of a bureaucratic state based primarily on the proletariat, over both the peasantry and the working class.

When we look from the perspective of peasantry which constituted the largest part of the population when the revolution took place, it can be said that an industrialist coalition subjugated the peasantry in Soviet industrialization. This coalition included in general the bureaucracy, in particular the army, managers of industrial plants and the urban working class. More precisely, it was formed by the urban working class, and the various wings of the bureaucracy that came from within the working class but ruled over it.

The most important factor that ensured that the Soviet workers' state could rule the peasantry, was the generally isolated character of the rural geography. Against centralized forces, the resistance of the scattered villagers remained limited, although violent. With the forced collectivization campaign, which was launched in 1929 and after a short break in 1930 accelerated again in 1931, by the end of 1932, more than 60 percent of all peasant households and two-thirds of all lands were collected in 200,000 kolkhozes.<sup>38</sup>

The most severe struggles of the war against the peasantry took place in the winter of 1932-33, with the slogan of "destroying the kulaks as a class". Because

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<sup>38</sup> In the USSR, collective farms were called **kolkhoz**, and state farms **sovkhov**. Sovkhozes were generally very large scale farms, formed in newly opened land. Kolkhoz peasants could market the product they obtain from a small land of their own. The revenues and social rights of the sovkhov workers were higher. Davies, p. 53; Dobb, pp. 225, 248, 249.

of the resistance of middle and upper peasant strata against forced acquisition of grain and collectivization (“kulak sabotage”), an estimated 5-7 million people died from hunger in a single winter season. In the same year, a significant portion of the livestock was also destroyed. Between 1929 and 1933, the number of cattle decreased from 67 million to 38 million, while the number of horses decreased from 32 million to 17 million. The same quantities would only be reached towards the end of the 1950s. The number of cattle in 1953 was less than the number in 1916, although the population had increased by 30 million in the meantime. However, in the middle of the 1930s, the domination over the peasantry was indisputably established. By the end of 1939, close to 30 million people were working in the kolkhozes, and 2 million in sovkhozes, and more than 500 thousand in the state-owned plants of means of production, called the Machine-Tractor Stations. By 1940, the prosperity level of the peasantry was probably lower than that of the pre-revolution period.<sup>39</sup>

One of the greatest social inequalities in the USSR was between the city and the countryside. The consumption standards of cities, especially Moscow, were always much higher. In 1932, an internal passport system was introduced, and the freedom of the villagers to travel within the country was restricted for many years, since only residents in the cities were given passports. The villagers could not leave their villages or change jobs without permission from the kolkhoz administration. Until the time of Brezhnev, the elderly kolkhoz members did not even have the right for pensions. The peasantry clearly meant second-class citizenship. A saying popular among the bureaucrats was, “When you go forty kilometers far from Moscow, you return to the Middle Ages.”<sup>40</sup>

A fundamental reason for this pressure on peasants was to guarantee the uninterrupted supply of food to the cities. In addition to this, the need to transfer resources from agriculture to industry has also been one of the main motivations. Resources were transferred (in a few ways) from agriculture. One of the most important mechanisms was that the prices of agricultural products were always determined lower than those of industrial goods. In addition, in the 1930s, agricultural taxes were also increased tremendously. In 1928, 73 million tons of grain were produced and 10.7 million tons were given to the state. In 1938-40, 30 million tons of grain were obtained by the state from an average of 77 million tons production. Another contribution of agriculture to the industrial sector was to prevent the importation from abroad of agricultural inputs used in industry, such as cotton etc., by increasing the cultivation of agricultural inputs. Finally, with forced collectivization in agriculture, the labour force needed by the urban industries was

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39 Robert Conquest, *Sovyet Rusyada Tarım İşçilerinin Elli Yılı [Fifty Years of Agricultural Workers in Soviet Russia]*, Ankara: Kardeş Matbaası, 1971, pp. 8-9; Lewin, p. 90; Chauvier, p. 119.

40 Hanson, pp. 59, 66; Conquest, pp. 34, 116, 117.

also provided.<sup>41</sup> At a time when urban unemployment was almost zero, the new workforce flowing from the countryside became a major resource for a long time for the system to expand.

As long as the weight of the peasantry continues in the population, the workers' state must carry out class relations sensitively. Lenin always took care to ensure that the political alliance with the peasantry did not deteriorate. At the same time, however, it was accepted that a threat could come from the countryside (the "kulak danger"). This was not just a political threat. The development of market relations in the villages was thought to undermine the economy. This is why NEP was clearly regarded as a step backwards. However, as the public and collective ownership of the means of production continues, and large industrial plants, banks, transportation system, foreign trade etc. continue to be in state monopoly, it is not realistic to think that the workers' state will not be able to cope with the capitalist relations of production emerging in the countryside. Collectivization is essentially a correct practice, but the idea that it must be carried out by force, crushing millions of peasants with terrorist methods for years is alien to Marxism.

In terms of class relations, Soviet industrialization means the subjugation of the peasantry once again (after the tsarist period). However, it can not be said that the industrialization was realized only by the resources provided by the peasants. For example, since the trade volume between rural and urban areas was low, despite the fact that internal terms of trade were against agricultural products, there was not much resource transfer in this way. Moreover, the direct and indirect tax burden on the peasantry was lower in 1928 than in 1913.<sup>42</sup> Russian economist Barsov suggests that not the peasantry but the working class undertook the cost of Soviet industrialization.<sup>43</sup> Though this view is misleading because it takes into account only the "financing" dimension of the event, it contains a certain share of truth: though not as much as the peasantry, the working class was also quite torn in the process.

### **Domination over the working class**

Parallel to forced collectivization in the countryside, the control over the working class was also tightened. The domination of the bureaucracy over the workers is naturally different for a workers' state than that of capital over labour. The dual nature of the Soviet Union experience here manifests itself in a clear way: on the one hand, the working class achieved tremendous gains. Unemployment was zero and the most important step was taken to end the commodity character of labour-power. The workday was significantly shortened to initially eight, and

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41 Davies, p. 57.

42 Davies, p. 27.

43 Cited by: Mark Harrison, "Survey: The Soviet Economy in the 1920s and 1930s", *Capital and Class*, vol 2 no 2, 1978.

then to seven hours. The authority of the engineers and foremen on the workers clearly diminished compared to the pre-revolutionary period. The gap between skilled and unskilled workers was also reduced. (In general, wage inequalities rose in later periods, even matching the capitalist countries in the 1950s.) The number of female workers increased, with more than 80 percent of women in urban areas participating in employment, together with the very important achievement of equal pay for equal work.

On the flip side, workers actually lost their right to strike during the mid-1920s. In the Soviet labour law, the right to strike was conditionally recognized and the general policy of the unions was against strike.<sup>44</sup> The material results came out very quickly. Between 1928 and 1940, the real incomes of non-agricultural wage earners fell roughly to a half. However, the increase in the income of the households due to zero unemployment and the increase in the rate of female participation in employment compensated this to a certain extent.

One of the most important problems faced by the new workers who came to cities from rural areas was housing. As a result of rapid proletarianization the average housing per capita in cities was 8.3 square meters in 1926 and 6.7 square meters in 1940. This amount was about 6 square meters even in 1960, at the level of 1913. The housing problem in Soviet cities became a constant source of distress.<sup>45</sup>

The working class was led to overwork by methods such as single-man management in plants, piece wage, the Stakhanov movement, and shock regiments. The piece wage, defined by Marx as the most convenient wage form for the capitalist system was used more in the USSR than in the West and, for example, in 1931, 80 per cent of the workers in the coal mines worked according to this principle. In 1932, at the high time of the forced collectivization campaign, the provisions of the labour law of 1922 were tightened further and a labour book system was introduced. Arousing the jealousy of the most stony hearted capitalists, a worker absent for a single day could immediately be fired in a workers' state! Moreover, in 1938, disciplinary punishments were made even harder. After Stalin this rigid approach was abandoned considerably, and especially in the Brezhnev period, the working environment became relatively relaxed.<sup>46</sup>

From the beginning of the 1930s the unemployment rate in cities was practically zero. This provided a certain range of freedom for workers, for example, change of work was common. Even though workers collectively lost power, they were able to protect their interests individually. In the post-World War II period, the working conditions were relatively better and the working day fell to seven hours. Also, compared to the capitalist world, the tempo of work in the workplace was generally low in the Soviet Union, and plants wanted to employ as many workers as possible

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44 Dobb, pp. 409, 410; Davies, pp. 26, 46.

45 Chauvier, p. 37; Davies, p. 47.

46 Hanson, pp. 18, 19; Dobb, p. 419; Lewin, pp. 221-223.



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because of the lack of labour. In fact, in many plants in the USSR, there was a predictable working tempo, such that a prolonged relaxation period was followed by a short period of hard work (**sturmovschina**) to reach the plan targets.

One thing that should not be missed when talking about the domination over the working class is forced labour, often stressed in the bourgeois literature on the Soviet Union, and silently passed in socialist literature. In the far corners of the vast Soviet geography and in Siberia, mines, factories, railways were built by workers who were essentially forced to work. The fact that there were about 5.5 million people in prisons, camps, labour colonies and private settlements at the time of Stalin's death gives an idea about the dimensions of this practice in Soviet industrialization.<sup>47</sup>

It is not inconsistent to say that the workers' state, or rather the bureaucracy, subjugated the working class. The roots of the domination go back to the civil war, even earlier. For example, immediately after the October Revolution, factory committees were tied to the Labour Control Council, and all economic institutions were tied to the Higher Economic Council (Vesenka).<sup>48</sup> At the First All-Russian Trade Union Congress of January 1918, factory committees were made dependent on unions.<sup>49</sup> Thus, the self-organizations of the working class gradually lost power and were eventually erased. Both Soviets and workers' committees were institutions that gradually became dysfunctional during the civil war, and then the bureaucracy preferred to forget them completely.

In fact, in the course of the revolution, peasants confiscated land and other properties of the nobility, and workers confiscated factories and plants, hence practically invalidating, negating the private ownership of the means of production. These actions were also supported by the Bolshevik Party. With the Land Decree of November 8, 1917, one of the first acts of the new government, the land was left to the peasants. This decision was in fact contrary to the Bolshevik approach, but was in line with the expectations of the peasantry, which constituted 80 percent of the population. In addition, most of the expropriated enterprises were taken over by the workers' committees themselves and started to be employed. Another decision on 14 November granted a number of powers to workers' committees.<sup>50</sup> However, the new government soon opposed such "syndicalist" tendencies.

The Bolshevik Party led by Lenin, succeeded in directing the diffuse energies to a single goal and carried out the greatest revolution of history, but neglected worker's democracy and put it to second place while building the new production relations,

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47 Davies, pp. 50, 68; Lewin, pp. 153-159.

48 Maurice Brinton, *Bolşevikler ve İşçi Denetimi* [*The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control*], trans: Necmi Erdoğan, İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 1990, pp. 54, 55.

49 Carmen Siriani, *İşçi Denetimi ve Sosyalist Demokrasi: Sovyet Deneyimi* [*Workers' Control and Socialist Democracy: The Soviet Experience*], trans: Kumru Başoğlu, İstanbul: Belge Yayınları, 1990, pp. 178, 181; Dobb, pp. 87-91.

50 Dobb, p. 81.



partly due to necessity and partly not to lose control. The Stalinist bureaucracy took this opportunity and turned it into an absolute rule.<sup>51</sup> It can be argued that soviets, workers' committees, and so on are spontaneous organizations of the revolutionary process and they are appropriate for extraordinary situations but not normal times. However, in the long run, a workers' state can not create excitement in people only by way of top-down instructions, and economic plans prepared by "experts". The masses expected to embrace socialist construction have to participate in its formation in some way. But a stiff bureaucratic structure emerged in the Soviet Union. This was of course not inevitable; but history continued its course by taking into account the actuality, not the alternatives.

### **Bureaucratic domination**

The first fundamental problem that marked the whole history of the Soviet Union was the need for industrialization, that is, the rapid development of productive forces. In order to solve this problem, the new society organized in a top-down manner since the 1920s, and a bureaucratic system of domination was formed in the rapidly industrializing country. In other words, the problem of bureaucracy emerged along with the industrialization process.

When we say industrialization, we understand first of all a leap in the productive forces. Rapid industrialization means to mobilize all potential resources and to allocate them mostly to industry. Planning as a relation of production to provide this, in fact, can also be observed in the cases of capitalist late industrialization. In the Soviet Union experience, it was obvious that planning was necessary, but the answer to the question of what kind of a planning it would be was not obvious. The answer was to be found by trial and error.

Liberals argue that the USSR model is characterized by a centralization obsession at all levels. But this is not an *idée fixe* or ideological obsession; a model that succeeded for revolution was naturally projected to other fields as well. In 1921, only the first phase of the civil war ended. Both in the country and in the international arena, the struggle continued in different forms. Therefore, everyone behaved as if there was a permanent war. Thus, a hierarchical structure was established and a centralized approach was followed in the industrialization war. The organization of the relations of production provided rapid development of the productive forces, but at the same time brought the concentration of political and social power in the hands of the bureaucracy. In this sense, bureaucracy is a social agent that emerged as a result of asymmetric relations of production in a late industrialization project.

The problem of bureaucracy is different from what is called the "bureaucratization tendency". The problem of bureaucracy has nothing to do with paperwork, or

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<sup>51</sup> Trotsky wrote in 1936 that "Soviet democracy is not the demand of an abstract policy, still less an abstract moral. It has become a life-and-death need of the country." *The Revolution Betrayed*, p. 276.

slow work. The size of the bureaucracy is also a secondary issue. What matters is the decisive position of the bureaucracy in the decision-making process. In a capitalist country, the bureaucracy, no matter how large it is, has a limited power of decision-making and enforcement; this power is in the hands of the capitalists. In the workers' state, in the process of industrialization, bureaucracy emerged as the social agent that centralized power. However, once it emerged, it used every opportunity to defend and develop its own interests.

Trotsky notes that bureaucracy is needed when it is necessary to soften and regulate strong antagonisms in a society. This is generally valid for all class societies. In particular for the USSR, according to Trotsky the basis of bureaucratic power was the inadequacy of consumption goods and social tensions that arose as a result of this. The social backwardness that created the need for industrialization has also created a bureaucracy. In the process, democratic centralism has left its place to bureaucratic centralism! The social base of the bureaucracy was between 10-15 percent of the population.<sup>52</sup>

From a purely economic point of view, the bureaucracy means primarily the plant managers. According to the 1939 census, there were about two million managers (factory managers, their assistants, kolkhoz chiefs, etc.) in the USSR, roughly half of them in the rural areas.<sup>53</sup> What was expected from them was basically to reach plan targets. These targets were determined via a kind of bargaining process carried out with the State Planning Commission; and once this was completed, the inputs (raw materials, land, labour, machinery, etc.) to be used in production were converted into free goods for the plant. For example, since land did not have a cost, it did not make sense for plant managers to economize on the use of land. Therefore, plant managers usually didn't bother with economizing inputs or raising labour productivity. Since they received 20 to 40 percent of their revenues from premiums, they tried to determine low plan targets, usually declared the existing production capacity lower to get more resources, and when the plan was decided, did what they can to reach plan targets. Thus, there were idle (extra) capacities on one side, and shortages of goods on the other.<sup>54</sup> In short, the interests of plant managers, who constituted the most important part of the economic bureaucracy, predominated over social interests. More precisely, the economic structure was shaped like this.

In sum, the emergence of bureaucracy as a powerful social actor is not the result of ideological mistakes and bureaucratization tendencies, but the result of the way relations of production are organized. Since the early 1920s the problem of bureaucracy was discussed intensely within the party, but then it naturally fell off

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<sup>52</sup> Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*.

<sup>53</sup> Lewin, p. 83.

<sup>54</sup> Hanson, p. 19; Wilczynski, pp. 33, 34, 37, 85, 235; Michael Lebowitz, *Reel Sosyalizmin Çelişkileri: Yöneten ve Yönetilen [The Contradictions of Real Socialism]*, trans: Barış Baysal, Ankara: NotaBene Yayınları, 2014, pp. 53, 56, 57.

the agenda, as the bureaucracy itself came to power. After Stalin, with the gradual slowing down of the forced methods and thus the fear of liquidation no longer effective, the hierarchical structure within the bureaucracy relaxed to some extent, the power of lower bureaucrats increased, and bureaucratic bargaining processes began to be valid at all levels.<sup>55</sup> Some researchers argue that as the system began to soften, the pressure on direct producers (workers and peasants), as well as plant managers was lowered, plan discipline was lost, and therefore productivity fell.<sup>56</sup> Especially during the Brezhnev era, plant managers who were in office for too long established close ties with their superiors and found ways to keep their output targets low and their input high, thus achieving success without much effort! Nevertheless, the idea that the Soviet Union collapsed because it left discipline shouldn't be exaggerated, as this so-called "softening" did not in any way mean that the top-down character of production was changed.

### **Extensive growth path**

In the Soviet Union experience, the need for rapid industrialization led to bureaucratic domination, together with all the other social consequences, and these two basic problems developed in connection with each other. The Soviet bureaucracy was born when socialist construction became a problem of development-industrialization. The bureaucracy embraced industrialization, which was the ground of its own legitimate existence. Thus, the USSR model provided a major breakthrough in the development of productive forces for a while. Because, in a backward country, to manage to mobilize social resources brings success in a short time. The problem is not capital deficiency or anything else, it is basically a matter of mobilizing resources and channeling them to industrial sectors.<sup>57</sup>

By 1965, industrial production in the Soviet Union had increased ten, or perhaps fourteen fold, compared to 1928. Since different calculation methods are used in the USSR than from the West, the actual performance of the Soviet economy is a constant topic of debate in the literature. According to relatively realistic estimates, the national income in the USSR increased by 5-6 per cent on average between 1928 and 1940 and 5-7.5 per cent in the 1950s.<sup>58</sup> More concretely, production capacity between 1928 and 1938 increased four times in iron and steel industry, three and a half times in coal, three times in petroleum and seven times in electricity. In the same period aircraft, heavy chemicals, plastics, artificial rubber, aluminum, copper, nickel industries were established. The USSR was the first in the world for tractors

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55 According to the 1970 census, there were about 13 million people in the administration, of which about four million were in "chief" positions. Lewin, pp. 74, 430, 431; Chauvier, p. 55.

56 Hanson, pp. 7, 162; Mark Harrison, "Stabil'ny li komandnyye sistemy? Pochemu poterpela krakh sovet'skaya ekonomika?", 2001, <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economics/staff/mharrison/public/kollaps2001.pdf>.

57 Dobb, p. 31.

58 Davies, pp. 38, 42.

and railways, the second for oil, gold and phosphate.<sup>59</sup> All these were important developments that enabled the Soviet Union to pass the test of the Second World War.

However, it must be remembered that these striking achievements were based on an extensive growth strategy. As was the case with most of the late industrialization experiences, industrial growth in the Soviet Union was extensive in the beginning. In other words, the amount of production increased with the continuous increase in the amount of inputs used. Intensive growth, on the other hand, is characterized not by an increase in inputs, but by increases in productivity.<sup>60</sup> More is produced with the same amount of inputs. In a backward country extensive growth provides a significant leap in the short term, achieving great and visible successes. Indeed, the success of World War II and the subsequent expansion of the Soviet model to Eastern Europe was a result of this.

The Soviet Union lost more than 25 million people in World War II. The population of USSR was 197 million in June 1941, and only 171 million at the end of 1945. In general, over the thirty years that cover the two world wars, the human loss (both deaths and birth deficits) of the Soviet society was over 74 million.<sup>61</sup> Almost as many people as the current population of Turkey disappeared within a generation! In addition, a considerable part of the newly formed Soviet industry was destroyed in the second war. In the territories occupied by Germans there were about one-third of the Soviet industrial capacity, two-thirds of coal production, 60 percent of iron production, half of steel production, two-fifths of grain production, almost all of sugar production, two-fifth of livestock, and half of total weapon capacity. In 1941-42, with an an urgent operation some of the major factories and personnel were moved to the east, but one-fifth of the entire industrial capacity was left behind or deliberately blown up. In the occupied territories, according to official estimates 98,000 kolkhozes, 1876 sovkhoses, 2890 Machine-Tractor Stations were partially or totally destroyed by the enemy.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, despite all the difficulties, the USSR managed to pass this test.

After the October revolution, European imperialist countries had tried to establish a **cordon sanitaire** around the USSR. After World War II, this time the USSR created a buffer zone between Europe and itself. The Soviet model was exported to new countries, a central planning system was introduced in each country, and about 95 percent of the national income started to be produced in the “socialist sector”. Common economic and political organizations were established. In the late 1960s, the Soviet Union was supplying 55 percent of the raw material purchases

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<sup>59</sup> Dobb, p. 176.

<sup>60</sup> J. Wilczynski, *Socialist Economic Development and Reforms*, Londra: The Macmillan Press, 1972, Chapter 2; Hanson, p. 49.

<sup>61</sup> Chauvier, p. 21; Nove, p. 291.

<sup>62</sup> Dobb, p. 292; Davies, pp 59, 60, 63; Conquest, p. 58.

of other CMEA countries; and 80 to 100 percent of critical raw materials such as crude oil, iron ore, coke, aluminum. The USSR was also the address for two thirds of the exports of these countries.<sup>63</sup> But there has never been a union around a single economic plan. In other words, the “systemic” expansion of the Soviet Union did not bring about the creation of a monolithic economic geography. If Yugoslavia and Albania, which left the Soviet influence early, and China are left aside, the fact that the other eight countries collectively provided about one third of the world’s industrial output, shows the importance of the opportunity that was missed.

From an economic point of view, there are two main dimensions of extensive growth: the growth of the mass of means of production (machines, inputs, agricultural land, etc.) and the increase in the number of workers who will use these. In the post-war period, the industrial capacity of the Soviet Union increased with the re-introduction of the destroyed factories, and industrial plants which were dismantled as war indemnity and transported to Soviet territories from some European countries, mainly Germany. Another source of development in the means of production was the expansion of agricultural land. In the USSR, the arable land is actually not proportionally large. For this reason, it is necessary to use the whole of the existing. The Virgin Lands Project, one of the most important projects of Khrushchev, enabled extensive growth in agriculture to continue for another decade by the opening of a new area close to one quarter of the existing land. Grain production increased from 81 million tons in 1950 to 126 million tons in 1960, with three quarters of the increase coming from new soils.<sup>64</sup> It also brought a rise in the standard of living of the people for the first time since the 1920s. In general, the post-Stalin period was a relative welfare phase in which agriculture and the main consumer sectors were both given relative importance, and mass deaths were no longer present after the 1946-47 hunger.

In extensive growth, another factor accompanying the increase in the mass of means of production is that labour continues to increase and new labour power is constantly involved in the system. In the Soviet Union, skilled labour was always scarce, and unskilled labour was relatively abundant. The need to increase production volume constantly, under conditions of low labour productivity, resulted in the use of too much labour. Accordingly, production increased as long as the labour input increased. In a situation where input cost was not an issue, plants turned to the use of too much unskilled labour. Thus, together with the priority given to heavy industry, a strange combination arose. In the words of Ralph W. Davies, capital-intensive technologies were being used in labour-intensive forms.<sup>65</sup>

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63 Wilczynski, p. 97.

64 Davies, pp. 69-70; Hanson, pp. 54-56; Lewin, p. 270; Conquest, p. 70.

65 Davies, p. 43; Wilczynski, p. 28.

### **The blockage of extensive growth and the search for a solution**

Like everything else, extensive growth has a limit. Once that level is reached, the known methods no longer work and alternatives are sought. The Soviet Union reached this level in the mid-1960s. When the recession trends in the economy started in this period, low productivity and the lack of general technological dynamism in agriculture were seen as the two most important problems.<sup>66</sup>

When we look at the annual average growth rates of the national income, we see a declining graph. The USSR's national income grew at around 9 percent per year between 1946-50, but in the 1950-70 period this declined to around 5 percent. It fell below 3 percent in the first half of the 1970s, and below 2 percent in the second half. The average annual growth rate was 1.7 percent in the first half of the 1980s and **minus** 2.1 percent in the decline period of 1986-1991.<sup>67</sup>

It would be misleading to take this constant decline of the USSR's national income as the reason for the collapse. In fact, it is not surprising that economic growth has begun to slow down over time. More importantly, it is interesting that this fall has not been stopped at one point. Why couldn't the USSR prevent the recession by passing to a different economic strategy?

Marx tells that a society puts in front of itself the problems it can solve. We can add that, every society puts those problems in front of itself, in a form it can solve them.

It is argued that in the process of industrialization, at least in capitalist examples, an intensive model should be introduced when the limits of extensive growth have been reached. Now the system cannot grow by expanding physically, increasing the amount of input, but by increasing its efficiency. It is not without reason that Trotsky did so much emphasis on labour productivity in the 1930s. For example, although the USSR was at the forefront of wheat production in the world, Soviet efficiency was nine times lower than the US. In general, in the post-World War II period, labour productivity levels of the USSR, as well as Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary converged to the US until the early 1970s, and then the trend reversed and the gap widened.<sup>68</sup>

The organization of relations of production blocked the path of intensive growth in the USSR. There was no rationality in the Soviet system to increase productivity, that is, to get more output with the same amount of input.

The Soviet economy grew extensively during the period from 1930 to 1965. In the 1965-1990 period of stagnation and eventual fall, in spite of all the efforts, it couldn't pass to an intensive model. This quarter century was a period when failures arose in solving problems. As early as the mid-1970s, for the first time since the

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66 Wilczynski, p. 38; Hanson, pp. 214, 215.

67 Hanson, p. 5.

68 Chauvier, p. 27; Hanson, p. 246.

1920s, Soviet national income has grown even slower than in the United States.<sup>69</sup>

Many liberalization experiments were made at the Khrushchev and the beginning of the Brezhnev periods. In 1954-1956, a “decentralization” reform was done, then in 1957, the economy was reorganized on a regional basis. In 1958, it was tried to sell the means of production of the Machine-Tractor Stations to kolkhozes. All of these reform practices failed, which, despite their liberal character, were presented as “communist” practices. In fact, the long-term performance of the Soviet economy was hardly effected by the reform efforts.<sup>70</sup>

At the beginning of the Brezhnev era, in 1965 extensive liberal reforms took place in both the USSR and the other Eastern Bloc countries. In these reforms, the aim was to prepare an intensive growth environment, and neo-classical themes such as decentralization, commercialization of economic relations, profits and specialization were emphasized. It should be noted that “reforms” were prepared in accordance with the liberal approach, with an anti-equalitarian spirit. However, as of 1970, these have also become totally ineffective.<sup>71</sup>

Why these “reforms” prepared by “experts” did not work? An example will explain why. Along with the reforms, “profit” was accepted as a criterion in industry. Because profit is a “synthetic” criterion that contains many different variables. Unfortunately, there is no single method of measuring profitability, and no matter which method is applied, managers easily found ways to show their profitability high.<sup>72</sup>

It is clear from this that it was not possible to include “more market” without undermining the economic system of the Soviet Union, as the internal logic of the bureaucratic system of domination rejected it. On the other hand, a different type of production organization involving a real worker democracy was also rendered unthinkable. Thus, the Soviet Union was locked in a position where it could not continue socialist construction, but also could not make a “soft transition” to capitalism by including markets to its economic body in a controlled fashion.<sup>73</sup>

At this point, it is necessary to ask why the alternatives were always put forward in the market direction. It is easy and straightforward to connect this to the effect of bourgeois ideology, but this is not sufficient. The question is, how bourgeois ideology could be so effective? Why did the Soviet elite lose “belief in communism”?

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69 Davies, p. 79.

70 Conquest, pp. 75, 76; Davies, pp. 77, 78; Hanson, pp. 58, 59.

71 Nove, pp. 383, 384; Wilczynski, pp. 40, 49-53; Hanson, pp. 103-105.

72 Wilczynski, pp. 41, 101.

73 In 1979, two East European dissidents, Ferenc Fehér and Ágnes Heller, were thinking that for the Soviet Union both the passage to an intensive growth model and collapse from within were impossible. According to the writers, the Soviet leaders were day dreaming, trying to “reach the productivity of the American economy by Russian bayonets and the KGB spies everywhere.” *Doğu Avrupa Devrimleri [East European Revolutions]*, trans: Tarık Demirkan, İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1995, pp. 21, 24, 25.



Alec Nove summarizes the reasoning of the Soviet economy directors (he also thinks the same way): since the plan and the market are in opposition to each other, it is imperative to move towards the market when planning no longer works. In fact, some authorities who are inclined to think dialectically take a step further and talk about the “dialectical unity” of the plan and the market! Thus, reform efforts have always been in the direction of “more market”.<sup>74</sup>

Soviet economists increasingly turned to bourgeois economics, neo-classical economics. Someone who visited any Soviet economic institute in the 1970s could see that Samuelson was very popular. “In several countries of Real Socialism, the preferred economics textbooks became Paul Samuelson’s *Economics* and even those of Milton Friedman and followers. The irony was most marked at the Karl Marx University of Economics in Budapest where the text used was Samuelson.”<sup>75</sup> Where did this addiction to western science come from? In fact, even in the 1930s, important socialist economists like Oskar Lange preferred neo-classical techniques. The reason for this is the (real or assumed) convenience of neo-classical economics in measuring and thus comparing two different systems. Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, who had never praised neo-classical economics, tried to compare two systems (capitalism and “socialism”) in the 1950s and 60s. This can only be a quantitative comparison of productive forces. Because, the problem has always been defined on the basis of productive forces (industrialization), from the beginning.

The results of the transformation of socialist construction into a development project are seen more clearly here. The reference has always been the productive forces. Comparisons with the capitalist world were always done by economic-quantitative or (as a reflection of it) military criteria. For this reason, especially in the post-World War II period, an ideological gap and a confusion of targets emerged for the Soviet Union. The problem was not the inadequacy of the leaders. The declarations of Khrushchev, such as “We will catch up the US soon” or “We will bury you!”, or “We will reach communism in 1980”; or economic competition with the most advanced capitalist country, were absolutely wrong in ideological terms, but they were the inevitable results of the Soviet model. Space race, arms race, etc., really meant a great deal as concrete targets for the Soviet citizens, for some time.

In the period up to the early 1970s, the USSR actually reached a position beyond its own economic possibilities in a bipolar world. The secret of this hormone-injected growth was the extensive growth model.

Though the Soviet Union had a national income roughly half the size of the United States, it had to spend a much higher rate in order to compete militarily. At the beginning of the 1970s, the Soviet Union fell into a crisis, while world capitalism was entering a major crisis again after a long expansion. The extensive growth path of the Soviet economy clearly got short of breath. Relative decline

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<sup>74</sup> Nove, p. 397; Wilczynski, pp. 56-60.

<sup>75</sup> Lebowitz, p. 156 footnote (209 footnote 71); Hanson, p. 97, footnote.

shook both the public and the bureaucratic trust in the system. In the years 1981-82, at the end of the Brezhnev period, the Soviet rulers had serious concerns about a popular uprising.<sup>76</sup> The imperialist camp undoubtedly had similar observations, and in the late 1970s, while launching neoliberal aggression against labour, also accelerated the arms race against the USSR and ended military equality between the two camps.<sup>77</sup>

The rest of the story really doesn't need much explanation. By the mid-1980s the Soviet Union was exhausted both politically, ideologically and economically. For a moment, everyone had the impression that the system could continue even more strongly with the reforms of Gorbachev. But the Soviet Union collapsed like the toppling of a tree decayed from the inside.

One of the clearest manifestations of inner decay was that no objection was heard when the door was opened to the establishment of outright capitalist enterprises under the name of "cooperative" in 1988. The economist Philip Hanson wrote the following bitter sentences:

If Marxist-Leninist doctrine had mattered deeply to any large part of the population or to any significant elite group, the law on cooperatives would have created an uproar. It did not. Appearances had been preserved. The word 'cooperative' sounded vaguely socialist. Lenin had spoken warmly of cooperatives. So the term was used to cover the new private firms, and all was well.<sup>78</sup>

Incidentally, it must be recalled that "private" small commodity production was not actually excluded in the USSR model. The "shadow economy" such as the black market, illegal secondary markets, home services etc. that developed in the cities was overlooked. In the 1930s, members of the kolkhozes were also permitted to market the products they cultivated on their own soil. Thus, in both cities and the countryside, small producers supplied some of the consumer goods and services. These markets have always been important in providing the basic consumption needs of the Soviet people. In most of the post-World War II period, the kolkhoz member villagers satisfied a substantial portion of their food consumption from, and earned some income by selling in the kolkhoz markets, the produce of their private gardens. It is estimated that the (legal, semi-legal or illegal) private sector in the 1970s and 80s produced one-tenth of the national income of the USSR. According

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76 Hanson, pp. 135, 151; Lewin, p. 403.

77 Georg Fülberth, *Büyük Deneme: Komünist Hareketin ve Sosyalist Devletlerin Tarihi [The Great Experiment]*, trans: Mehmet Okyayuz, Ankara: Doruk Yayınları, 1999, pp. 224, 225.

78 Hanson, p. 204. "Asked in September 1990 what would happen if the state legalized private property, Artem Tarasov, vice-president of the Union of Co-operators, answered: 'Nothing. We would simply get rid of the camouflage and call things by their names [...] My co-operative would become a company with private capital.'" Cited in: David Mandel, "The Struggle for Power in the Soviet Economy", *Socialist Register*, 1991, p. 124, footnote.

to another estimate, more than one-fifth of the working population (30 million people) in the late 1980s were active in the shadow economy. In some services such as car repair, and construction-maintenance jobs, half of the “sector” was in the shadow economy.<sup>79</sup> The market relations that always existed semi-secretly and became permanent over time, exploded with the reforms of the 1980s. During the period of dissolution, many private businesses were established in the cities under the name of “cooperative”.

### Internationalist solution

In the Soviet Union experience, it is clear that the organization of relations of production involved some fundamental problems. The overlapping of socialist construction with capitalism-specific tasks created the first structural problem. This is also the cause of the birth of the bureaucracy. Bureaucratic domination has been able to create a success story by providing extensive growth for some time, but when this path was blocked, existing relations of production became an obstacle.

The becoming obstacle of relations of production is about labour productivity, in other words, the passage from extensive to intensive growth. According to a socialist journalist, two to three times more workers were employed in a Soviet plant than its Western counterpart; but there was a labour deficit of 25 percent in industry and 45 percent in the machinery sector. USSR was the first in the world in steel, metal, tractor, wheat, harvester, shoe production; but all the goods were scarce! 20% of the annual grain production, 60-70% of the vegetable-fruit, 10-15% of the meat was rotting. Legal working time was 7 hours, actual working time was 4.5 hours, but overtime work was also very common.<sup>80</sup>

These objective problems are not only specific to the Soviet Union. The Eastern European countries, China and Cuba, which were later included in the socialist construction process, faced similar problems. Perhaps, except for Czechoslovakia and East Germany, the “socialist bloc” was actually made up of countries that had not undergone capitalist industrialization. Therefore, industrialization emerged as a problem in all of them.

This objective problem could only be overcome with an internationalist

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<sup>79</sup> Hanson, p. 13; Lewin, p. 453; “The services sector employs between 17 and 30 million state employees, depending on the situation; Indeed, it supplies 60% of car repairs, 50% of shoemaking, 80% of rural services”, Chauvier, p. 45. In agriculture, private gardens provided “in 1966, in all country the 63% of potato production, 41% of vegetable production, 54% of fruit and berries, 40% of meat production, 39% of milk production, 67% of egg production and 20% of the wool production ... while they cover only about 3% of the cultivated area, they provide about one thirds of total agricultural production and 40 percent of animal production (...)Most of the production from the gardens is not marketed but is consumed by the villagers ... the kolkhoz villagers supply almost 75-100 percent of the potatoes, vegetables, dairy, meat and eggs from their own gardens (...) The gardens also provide income to the kolkhoz farmers as much as their labor in the collective farms”, Conquest, pp 149, 150.

<sup>80</sup> Chauvier, p. 181, 182.

perspective and common plans. But the Soviet system has never reached the level of integration that the capitalist world has achieved. There was not a union around a single plan, separate countries continued to exist, and the economic relations between them were always below that should be. In the post-World War II period, especially since the 1970s, while productive forces of capitalism have gained a rapid development on an international scale, the Soviet system has been deprived of such possibilities. This is also the reason for the deterioration in informatics technology and etc. Relations of production organized at a national level began to restrict the development of productive forces at a certain stage.

CMEA countries were using world prices in trade among themselves. This is a sad situation, but inevitable under bureaucratic systems of national sovereignty. With the Bucharest Agreement of 1958, it was decided that, the trade between the Eastern Bloc countries would be based on the prices valid for a selected period in major capitalist markets. Moreover, in the years after 1965, steps were taken to link domestic prices to world prices in Yugoslavia, and then in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, East Germany and Poland. The jokes of Eastern European economists like “when socialism rules the world, we will have to keep at least one capitalist country out!” shows the dead end that socialist thought and practice faced.<sup>81</sup>

The internationalist perspective seems to be the only way to overcome the limitations of national structures inherited from capitalism. It is not only necessary to develop common economic plans, but also to unite in a single political whole. However, this road that was blocked by the system of bureaucratic sovereignty was not even remembered after a while.<sup>82</sup> In this context, the Sino-Soviet split is an expression of parting of the ways for different industrialization projects, limited to national frameworks.

After decades of extensive growth, the reorganization of relations of production to provide intensive growth is in fact the hardest part of the job. Therefore, it can not be said that the USSR passed the ocean but drowned in the river, stumbled in easier steps after taking care of the main issue. Because in a backward country “development” normally progresses fast in the beginning. This is the “easy” phase of development. The hardest part, the advanced stages of development, comes after this. The Soviet model was stuck in this second phase. Because the organization of relations of production and the bureaucracy as the social subject that this organization created, did not have the qualities to lead to intensive growth. The contrast between the military technological development in the USSR and the backwardness in all other areas is striking. However, in the late 1970s, military equilibrium with the United States also ended. During the Reagan era, the US clearly surpassed the

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81 Hanson, pp. 121, 156; Wilczynski, pp. 83, 93, 94.

82 “Ernst Fischer tells in his autobiography: In 1940, in Hotel Lux (the Komintern hotel) the German communists led by Ulbricht were shouting by enthusiasm “We took Paris!” In a short while, such responses became an accepted part of ‘socialist patriotism’.” Fehér, Heller, p. 17 footnote.

## Revolutionary Marxism 2017

Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union survived as long as it appeared to be able to compete with the West (primarily with the US) militarily. This was costly, and although the USSR had a much smaller economy, it tried to catch up with the United States in nuclear and other weapons. Hence, it spent a larger part of its resources on armament. It collapsed when it gave up in this area. All Soviet leaders distrusted the West; the end of Gorbachev (and of course the USSR) who took trust as the basis was disastrous.<sup>83</sup>

## Conclusion

Removal of patriarchal marriage; ending sexual, national, racial discrimination; the right to prevent pregnancy and abortion; the right of the people to self-determination; not doing military service due to beliefs; eight-hour working day; democratization of access to schools; co-education; self-management in terms of education of prisons and psychiatric institutions; free communes in agricultural settlements; cultural revolution with literacy; theater, poetry, plastic arts brought to the public, progressive movements in architecture, etc .; all of which show a true revolution, with great enthusiasm and utopia, and at the same time surprisingly far from the realities of the Russian peasantry.<sup>84</sup>

Zero unemployment, the abolition of hunger and poverty, an extraordinary level of education, the creation of perhaps the most intellectual people of the world, are the undeniable gains of the USSR experience. Contrary to what Western propaganda suggests, it can not be said that the Soviet workers and peasants had a low standard of prosperity. On the contrary, in this respect, the USSR has improved better than not only the developing countries but also many developed capitalist countries. The amount that an urban family paid for house rent and needs such as water, gas, electricity, and telephone was about 3-5 percent of its average income. When compared to today's Turkey, even this itself points to a tremendous improvement.

In general, the level of welfare and consumption of the Soviet peoples increased in the post-Stalin period. In the USSR, main food items (bread, potatoes, vodka) were always in abundance and other food items were scarce. The price of many food items remained unchanged for about 40 years, from the beginning of the 1950s to the end of the 1980s.<sup>85</sup>

Perceiving socialist construction as a development-industrialization process was perhaps inevitable, but at the same time it created problems. In the model of bureaucratic industrialization which was put in place to rapidly develop the productive forces, environmental and human resources were not taken into account

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83 Hanson, pp. 31, 34.

84 Chauvier, p. 25.

85 Hanson, p. 53; Chauvier, p. 37.

carefully. False employment was very common, dissatisfaction from work was high. Resistance of workers took on forms such as slacking and alcoholism. The implicit resistance of the villagers put itself directly in low production. These forms of resistance could be overcome by improving workers' control, providing political participation, by concrete democratic projects that the people would embrace. But in this case the dominance of the bureaucracy could not be sustained.

The collapse of the Soviet system (including Eastern Europe) was the culmination of the process of the expansion of capitalist production to the whole world, that accelerated after World War II. Since then, capitalist relations of production have become dominant all over the world.

There were a handful of capitalist imperialist countries in the period up to World War II, and the rest of the world was integrated into this system through relations of circulation. In the aftermath of World War II, at least until the 1980s, the field of capitalist production expanded, but at the same time there was a large non-capitalist geography. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and China's change of path (which had started earlier, but should not be considered independently), capitalist production became dominant all over the world for the first time in history.

Today there is no new geography for capitalism to conquer. This means that, at once, capitalism-specific tasks and socialism-specific tasks will not intertwine as before, in the socialist construction experiences that will take place in the future. This is a very important advantage and it means that socialist construction will start from an advanced point. We can hope that some of the negative structural problems of the Soviet Union experience, such as the bureaucracy problem, can be more easily overcome.

The establishment of socialism is not simply a political revolution, but a transformation of civilization, an epochal change. Transition from one mode of production to another. There are no shortcuts. If the goal is to change the world, the priority cannot be in the periphery as it was once thought (during the 1960s and 70s), but in the center. Life will always be difficult in the long run for a revolution that can not win the central countries. There are no ready-made formulas except to work with patience, to take lessons from the past, and not to compromise on the internationalist line.





# Revolutionary Marxism 2017

The tragic defeats suffered by the world proletariat over a long period of years doomed the official organizations to yet greater conservatism and simultaneously sent disillusioned petty bourgeois “revolutionists” in pursuit of “new ways.” As always during epochs of reaction and decay, quacks and charlatans appear on all sides, desirous of revising the whole course of revolutionary thought. Instead of learning from the past, they “reject” it. Some discover the inconsistency of Marxism, others announce the downfall of Bolshevism. There are those who put responsibility upon revolutionary doctrine for the mistakes and crimes of those who betrayed it; others who curse the medicine because it does not guarantee an instantaneous and miraculous cure. The more daring promise to discover a panacea and, in anticipation, recommend the halting of the class struggle. A good many prophets of “new morals” are preparing to regenerate the labor movement with the help of ethical homeopathy. The majority of these apostles have succeeded in becoming themselves moral invalids before arriving on the field of battle. Thus, under the aspect of “new ways,” old recipes, long since buried in the archives of pre-Marxian socialism, are offered to the proletariat.

Leon Trotsky  
*The Transitional Program, 1938*