Notes and Premonitions of a Coming Storm | Athens Log

Victor Stransky*

Wednesday September 19, 2018 –
Koukaki, Athens, Greece
@ 14:45

I was awoken by the alarming dark of comrade Andonis' living room, I have become accustomed to the past few days since arriving in my beloved Athens. There hasn't been a day when my utter exhaustion hasn't sedated me, leaving me comatose until early afternoon. The cool darkness of his apartment with its closed shutters recall the peculiar sensation of a bunker, or of the primordial serenity of the womb, or perhaps even the vacuum of quantized space.

The shower – now a dreary ritual, the jerk-off – a profane machination, the cigarette –an unpleasant yet irresistible indulgence. Clothes and shoes on, wallet, phone, keys and cigarettes. Lock the door down the stairs, onto the street and turn right towards Attiki metro station.

The sun was shining and the balmy heat of the city stuck into my skin while the rumba and cumbiaesque flow of the city remind me of a place I have never been to, of a song I have never heard before, but which I somehow knew intimately. I wove a hesitant path through the small, indistinguishable side streets, clinging to the shade like a lizard to a rock, crossed the train tracks much as I had done that now distant Sunday morning when I had arrived and had proceeded to find a party in Kerameikos, only today with the intent of finally visiting the old town of Athens.

On the surface level around the station, there was no obvious multitude of people, but upon entering the caverns below, I

was abruptly awash in a river of motion and excited particles – a hive, a collective mind, channeled the form and function of the urban landscape. The train was on the platform and the doors closed just as I shot in.

The train sped down the tracks, through the underground tube, until we eventually reached my destination and I got off at FIX station, where I was immediately engulfed in an urban landscape decidedly different from the ones I had grown accustomed to during my short stay in Athens. Yet it was disturbingly familiar. One could quickly absorb the subtle marks of the neighborhood – the nicely paved streets, the well-kept sidewalks, the trendy cafés, restaurants and knick-knack stores lined on the ground floor, nestled among tall trees and fine greenery abounding. I, of course, being as addicted to coffee and cigarettes as I am, searched in vain for a good 10 minutes before I could find a place with reasonably priced tiropita and coffee.

As I walked about the neighborhood my mind was quietly searching for people who were different from me in appearance, whereas in the other parts of the city I had been, the presence of different people and cultures was a staunch fact of life. That is not to say that there aren't people on the streets in this neighborhood. It seems to me that those I have seen dress similarly, have a similar anxious or arrogant air about them as they walk or talk and have the same skin color as me. What's more, my eyes have yet to catch the graffiti or the political posters upon the walls and façades of buildings. Instead, at each turn I am greeted by clean, sterile and recently renovated plaster, brick and cement – nice and pristine like the streets which lock them geometrically, which are obviously cleaned regularly by the municipal cleaning service.

Should all this mean that people in this neighborhood are happy and taken care of? Or that all is suddenly well with the world and that there are no more grievances among people?

I seriously doubt it.

There is another public ‘service’ which caught my attention very quickly, catching me quite off guard in fact, seeing how I had become happily accustomed to its utter absence. As I sit on this glitzy IKEA stool, consuming my over-priced coffee and pastry which I purchased from two markedly unfriendly workers (or perhaps they were the owners?) and as I write this cute little diary entry, there are not 1, not 2, but 3 police patrol cars parked on the street and sidewalk to my immediate right, only a few meters away.

Hill of Diateichisma, ancient Athens
@17:07

I left the café on Koukaki heading towards the Acropolis museum, planning to pass through the old quarter, circle around the citadel and find my way to the Pnyx, from where I would go on my way back to our beloved Exarchia.

A little way down up the road, the elite neighborhood of Koukaki gave way to the bustle of the touristic foothills of the Acropolis with its impressive southeastern fortification towering above the modern city and a huge Greek flag raised to the heavens from its bastion. Now the urban design was even more refined and maintained. The tramline and cobblestone streets, the marble, granite and limestone, white façades and the expensive souvenir shops, restaurants and cafés became ever more chic and bourgeois with each passing step and the human currents became more mixed, now with faces and voices from all corners of the world – most dressed crisply and smart, while others, those working cleaning the streets, cooking in the kitchens, minding the stalls, begging for money and so forth had an air that was in particularly stark contrast with the transient guests who flowed through the streets of the capital of the Greeks, whom on their part can

be seen chatting idly, going about their daily routines, well at ease in their urban domain.

The fine esplanade then gave way to the tight alleyways of an old merchant quarter, with one- or two-story buildings whose parterres brimmed with the commercial activity of luxury souvenirs dealers, gold jewelers, cosmetics dealers and fine restauranteurs. Faces of every color and voices of every continent can be seen and heard as one meanders about the channeled veins of this human organism – the neighborhood, all the while appearing eerily similar, despite a deceptive diversity. The style, the accessories, the contrived manner, the content of their conversations, the anxious walk, the uneasy glance over the shoulder all paint a picture of a people who to my mind seem ubiquitously out-of-place.

I eventually wound up at the Roman forum, whose ruins were less than spectacular, as I have come to recognize is the case for most of those found in the ancient city of King Thyssius, mere shadows of their former glory. Walking through shoddy enclosures, archeological digs and along dirt paths in the archeological park reserve, I couldn’t help but wonder at the fleeting nature of all things, just as many before me have surely contemplated, without finding much comfort.

The stone columns and foundations strewn about the sloping hillside, I feel, stare remorselessly into my soul, intent on reminding all mortal fools such as myself of the violent and unyielding passage of time, that lays waste to and renders even the greatest of cities unrecognizable. As one goes through the trees, up and down the hills, one catches glimpses of stone temples and pine and olive woods, all to the spectacular backdrop of today’s sprawling metropolis, in all of its arrogant and unapologetic modernity, stretching as far as the mountains and the sea will allow.

I now sit on a stone bench atop a terrace outcrop of the Hill of Diateichisma with a daunting frontal view of the Acropolis

as the sky makes its slow descent into the Western horizon. I will now make my way to the Pnyx, as I have resolved to confront a certain Socrates. There are questions I burn to know the answers to.

I fear our time and space to maneuver may be running out.

The Hill of the Pnyx, ancient Athens
@18:20

I now sit upon the stone incline of the Pnyx, the hill where Athenian democracy's experiment ran its course during its tumultuous first years in the time of Socrates. I find it fitting that I myself should be atop this rocky hill, pondering similar questions as the ancients might have. There was an infamous moment in history when the demos, despite its exclusion of women, slaves and migrants – the vast majority of the poor citizenry, managed to seize power from the autocrats, the oligarchs and the aristocrats of old and establish a new order – an order and an idea which would change the course of human history.

I do not mean to fetishize or glorify the achievements of antiquity or ages past but I have lately been unable to shake off a feeling of despair that has drowned me, my comrades and the movement at large, I feel. Athens was a democracy for a time, yet Athens was also an empire at this time, too – an empire of the mind, of the ship, of the merchant and of the sword. It was an empire of brutal patriarchy, of despicable slavery and exploitation, of exclusion and conquest, of divide et imperia, and it was run democratically no less. The Acropolis at which I now gaze for the final time before my departure bears testimony to this legacy of contradiction, of harmony and antagonism.

What are we to do today, in my time, in the age of global corporate capitalism? What are we to do in an age of empire

and oligarchy? What are we to do in an age of reckless, human abandon and environmental catastrophe? What are we to do to not only prevent our impending doom but to push towards a promising project of peace, prosperity, brotherhood, equality, discovery, sustainability and abundance? How may we topple the gods, our lords and masters and seize power from tyrants and oligarchs just as the people of Athens did nearly two and a half millennia ago? Will we, the people of the human race, succeed in changing the course of history? Will we succeed in bringing about a new age or will we succumb to darkness, violence, death, cruelty, stupidity, all-consuming wrath, waste and self-destruction? 'What are we to do?', I have asked, every day for as long as I can remember now.

And if we are to achieve a new, radical, local, regional and international democracy, what is to become of it? Will we once again succumb to the folly of empire building? Or to the despicable tragedy and waste that is human warfare? Will we succumb to the idiocy of the ill-informed, superstitious and vengeful mob, such as the one which unjustly sentenced the greatest mind of Athens to his death?

O, Socrates, how much you must know of the folly of human existence! How little must we have changed over the many thousands of years! Behold! See through my eyes how different the world is and how very little has changed! I gaze upon the time-ravaged ruins of your city and I gaze up at the same Moon in the clear September sky as you surely once did!

It is 19:00 and the church bells once again ring through the city, casting a lulling spell upon my restless mind.

Bar Karagiozis, Exarcheia, Athens
@20:43

A chilly breeze swept the Pnyx as the light began to fade and flushed the mountains, the valley and the sprawling city with

rose and pastel tones. My flight down the hill from the ancient gathering place brought me further and further into the old town, with ever more merchant stalls and restaurants lining the sloping gradient of the cobblestone road.

The road eventually brought me Thyseio station, an unassumingly small, surface level train station. It was there that the tracks run between the wooded archeological complex and the urbanized central city districts on their way to Monastiraki and the pulsating heart of modern Athens. Nothing but overpriced restaurants, tacky or trendy, lined the ground floors of the low buildings along the train tracks and the tourists stumbled along, verbally prodded from time to time by zealous maître-d's. They coaxed us to come sit in their establishment, much as any rancher would try to corral his unruly cattle after a day's grazing, while dozens of sly cats lie about, perched idly like spirit world sentinels upon marble columns and epitaphs, almost as if preying patiently upon the tourists as well.

It didn't take long before this rolling, open-air shopping mall of a street lead to Monastiraki square and what's left of Hadrian's majestic library jutted out from below us behind a wrought iron fence. This glorious building gave way to the left to an open plaza, blazing with the harmonious chaos of an ant colony.

It was the third time in my life I had found myself in that boiling cauldron of a public square and I couldn't help but remember my previous visit, as well as the precarious and protracted personal and mental breakdown I had been going through at the time. I was swept with the urge to go down the road to the left and end up around the gay bars in Kerameikos. I managed to keep course and sail straight through the stormy urban nexus and then I caught a southerly wind up the forbidding and dark avenue that led up to Omonoia Square. My ultimate destination being the anarchist stronghold of Exarcheia, which I had come to call home for the past days and

nights.

I met with comrade Ioanna and Andonis at one of the neighborhood cooperative bars and I was greeted with the usual warmth, casual gossip and political chit-chat that I've grown so fond of. We also talked about what had happened to comrade Yavor in the train after yesterday's demonstration, still somewhat flabbergasted at the idiocy of overly-eager Antifa youngsters to get into trouble and use violence against their enemies, even at the expense of mistaking a fellow comrade for a right-wing provocateur.

I cannot help but be overwhelmed with conflicting thoughts and feelings these past few months, as the daily drudgery of life and the complexities of revolutionary struggle under capitalist society have been ever more prone to taking their toll on my mortal body. I think again of Socrates, of those that came before him, of those that came after him. I think of the revolutions and the bloodshed and of the brutal repression of the State, of Capital, the barbaric tendencies of our societies. At the same time, I think of the noble and courageous struggles of everyday people through the ages, striving for life, freedom, equality and in pursuit of a fleeting happiness in a tomorrow that may never come.

Yesterday, as our large and diverse group spent our final night together at the bar, I couldn't help but stare out at nowhere in particular as my comrades danced frenetically around me, the music blasting favorite songs from times gone by, and I couldn't help but wonder about the future of Exarcheia neighborhood with all its problems and promising prospects. Will the enemies of revolution ultimately succeed once again in destroying any hope for an alternative to this slow, rolling, dystopian nightmare we are living in, or will we ourselves succumb to the dark abyss by virtue of our spectacular and all-too-human imperfections? What will become of all the people and places I have come to know and love and what is our place in these times of historic importance? What

decisions, what actions, what sacrifices and what bloody price must we pay on the day of reckoning?

I feel for those that I love and cherish. I feel for the untold masses whose only crime was being born into this world. This beautiful, beautiful world, bestowed with lives so precious that the folly of human avarice only makes their loss a tragedy all the more grotesque and unbearable.

I have met people from three continents during my stay here and I feel blessed to have been able to connect with each one, from the vendors on the street, to the beggar I gave some coins to, to the many inspiring comrades and everyday people who aspire to great change and sacrifice. But perhaps what struck me most was my acquaintance yesterday with a young, handsome man from Afghanistan named Kazem. We talked during the whole ride on the fully packed and sweltering bus to Keratsini for the demonstration marking the five-year anniversary of the murder of Pablo’s Fissas by members of the neo-nazi Golden Dawn party.

Kazem was one of the great number of migrant comrades attending the demonstration, who risk deportation and thus their lives by attending such marches together with their brothers and sisters from other parts of the world. I was much impressed by a similar situation at this year’s radical pride march in Madrid where a similar context can be observed. Comrade Kazem had had an utterly different life compared to my own and he has gone through so much hardship. The war, the poverty, the discrimination and racism, the hardship of crossing borders, the brutality of the State, the cruelty of society and finally the torture and humiliation of imprisonment – solely guilty for the crime of being born as he is and in his homeland. He is half a year younger than me, at the age of 22.

On the train to Thessaloniki
@00:03

The train glides with a soft rumble through the heart of Athens, passing by empty platforms through deserted stations. This time around I've been allocated a seat in a newer coach and I hope the 11-hour trip to Sofia will be less harrowing and unpleasant than the one on the way over.

I will miss Athens and the people I have met terribly. Exarcheia is a peculiar case. I don't think I can recall ever feeling so… *comfortable*, for lack of a better word, in any particular neighborhood in the world; not even in my beloved Madrid nor even in my hometown Sofia. It is truly one of the most remarkable places in the world at the moment, even with all its problematic tendencies, its troubled past and its uncertain future.

It would be beside the point to relay a list of all the occupied squats, the social centers, the migrant assistance centers, the communal garden, the anarchist bars, restaurants, shops, cafés, libraries, the assembly halls and public spaces, almost all of which are collectivized or at least run to high democratic standards. I am sure there are many stories and much data that have been dedicated to this amazing place. It is, however, the distinct feeling as one walks the streets – be it by day, or by night. It is the unique social contracts at play, known or unbeknownst to me. It is the dizzying kaleidoscope of cultural, social, ethnic and political diversity. It is the staunchness of a collective resistance so profound and it is a revolutionary fervor that permeates the air. It is the diligence and the consistency in people's behavior, a state of constant mobilization where every word, spoken or written and every action can be rich with meaning and can be a token of the power of one's will and the will of an entire community.

Exarcheia is a powder keg.

It is a black cat waiting to pounce on the poor fools who dare disturb the hornets' nest and it will never go down without a bitter fight to the finish. Exarcheia is a neighborhood where the State's repression agents such as the police do not formally or usually step foot in and it is where raids on their part have been met with riots, mass civil disobedience and militant resistance. It has been a stain on the vanity and arrogance of capitalist society and it has been a thorn in the side of the ruling class for a great many years now.

Thus, it has been subjected to the hybrid warfare of the capitalist State, where key services and infrastructure have been purposefully scaled down or outright neglected and where opportunistic drug dealers (most often undocumented migrants) find comfortable refuge from the many facets of repression they face from the State and society, bringing with their work a complex plethora of issues and social ills. Undercover cops, snitches and foreign agents abound in this revolutionary community under siege from within and from without, itself being not a fortress, but a porous ecosystem without physical barriers in the heart of central Athens, a mere stone's throw away from Greece's parliament, with its more-than-tarnished reputation and its even shakier political foundation. The people I had the honor to be alongside these past few days and nights, and whose names I have spared for the most part, are exceptional people.

That feeling of kinship, regardless of skin color, of ethnicity, of sex, of age, of gender, of orientation, of ability, of mind, that feeling of knowing and seeing the person in front of you and knowing what you are both about, will stay with me for the longest time, even if death should come to each of us personally, or to our comrades, or to our projects, or to the idea of a global eco-social, democratic, and anti-authoritarian revolution itself.

Should I happen to not live through a revolution or a crisis, God forbid, and I didn't get the chance to visit Exarcheia

again, it wouldn’t be an exaggeration to think of it as a fraction of a glimpse into what human society could look like and how it could be organized, were it not for the fascistic exploitation of private Capital or the repression and domination of the State. Not to mention the tyranny, indentured servitude and environmental catastrophe that they imply.

What say you then, o, Socrates, patriarch of Western thought?!

What say you, who has no kind words for democracy nor for the stupidity and destructiveness of the masses, such as those who sentenced you to be murdered? What say you to the enlightened gods and emperors, to the tyrants, oligarchs and autocrats who rule this world? What say you to their faithful followers? What say you to these modern philosopher Kings of ours?

They and their children sit atop mountains of gold stacked upon mountains of corpses while rivers of blood gush down the slopes and the stench of misery and suffering drench the foul, polluted air of the entire globe! This is our day and age!

O, Socrates! What good is a life of reason if humanity should by chance make life on this planet no longer possible? What good are philosopher kings if even the greatest philosophers have led painfully imperfect, oh-so-painfully human lives?

To all of this, Socrates, I do not have the answers, nor, I think, do you. But there is, perhaps, one thing we can count on – the folly of mankind. Therefore, we must take appropriate action and we must plan accordingly.

Finished September 20, 2018
near Lamía, Greece
@ 02:09am

*Bulgarian activist, member of free social space “Fabrika Avtonomia” in Sofia

---

Interview with Antifascist Fans of Lazio

Questions: **Yavor Tarinski**

[Η συνέντευξη στα ελληνικά ΕΔΩ]

When most people hear about SS Lazio they immediately think of neo-nazis and fascists. But then there is your group -Laziale e Antifascista (LAF). Tell us few words about your group and its activity?

The group was born to destroy the stereotype that all Lazio supporters are fascists. This stereotype is a powerful propaganda tool for Roman neo-fascist groups to indoctrinate younger boys with racist and fascist ideals. They use the curve of Lazio to promote their values, to do political proselytism and business. The values of S.S. Lazio, those demonstrated with facts in history, are the opposite. For a few hundred fascists, especially thanks to the mainstream media, there have been constructed this stereotype that discredits Lazio and continues to feed the ranks of fascists, not just at the stadium, but in society.

All activities we do are meant to destroy this stereotype, to make it clear that Laziale does not mean fascist in Rome, in Italy and around the world. The number of LAF membership, in various capacities and independently, is constantly

increasing. In Italy there are a hundred, mostly in Rome but also scattered throughout the country, and another hundred around the world.



Posters of LAF in support of foreign Lazio players. On the left & middle: Ogenyi Onazi (Nigeria) / On the right: Miroslav Klose (Germany)

The club has been heavily stigmatized by far-right imagery. But was that always the case?

It is so since 1987 with the advent of the Irriducibili who have conquered the curve with the help of criminal organizations. Before them, Lazio's supporters were apolitical; there were right-wing groups, left-wing groups, mixed groups.

Lazio was founded upon egalitarian, solidarity and social values; if you studied the history of Lazio would understand that it is the opposite of a vision for a fascist life. Lazio was created in 1900 by nine Roman boys who decided to found a society of equals. This was decades before the birth of fascism. Now the misinformation makes people around the world believe that Lazio was the team of fascism when in reality Lazio was the only Roman team to oppose the attempts of the Fascist regime in 1927 to fuse all local teams into AS Roma.

During World War II Jews and partisans have been hosted and hidden in the club’s structures. The colors chosen were those of Greece to symbolize and honor the Olympic Spirit: sports practice as a means of unifying of peoples. They chose the eagle as a coat of arms because it is a Roman symbol.

The largest fan group in the history of Lazio was the Eagles Supporters. They were a “mixed”, apolitical group. They dissolved when the Roman fascist parties and the criminal organizations decided to support the Irreducible to conquer the curve.

In the 70s in Rome there were the so called “Years of Lead” – a period of social and political turmoil in Italy that lasted from the late 1960s until the early 1980s, marked by a wave of both left-wing and right-wing political violence. In Stadio Olimpico there were fascist groups like the Viking, but also communist groups like Tupamaros and Commandos Aquile S.Basilio Talenti (C.A.S.T.). C.A.S.T., from the Roman districts San Basilio and Talenti, was actually the first group in Curva Nord. Others, like the anarchist Gruppo Rock existed until the early 90s. However no one had hegemony except of the Eagles who gathered many groups together.



Eagles Supporters

How is your group being accepted inside and outside the stadium?

People’s feedback has been very positive, filled with enthusiasm. We have the support of many fans from Italy to South America who understand the value of the work we are doing. Anyone who believes in a world free from prejudice and discrimination should support us beyond the football faith.

Are there other antifascist and/or non-racist groups related to Lazio today?

Inside the stadium there is not a unitary group but many groups scattered in various sectors that to date do not expose their own banners. But in the city of Rome there are thousands of anti-fascist Laziali, and our goal is to help them unite and get organized.



Gruppo Rock was one of the anti-authoritarian subgroups of the Eagles Supporters

Do you have relations with antifascist supporters of other teams from Italy and abroad?

We are not being an ultras group so we do not have “official” friendships with ultras groups, but we have many ultras friends from various teams. In Italy we have comrades from Genoa, Perugia, Juve, Empoli and Cosenza; in Europe there are St Pauli, Celtic and Marseille; while around the world we have friendships with Palmeiras, Gremio, Corinthias, CD FAS – Hinchada Del Rojo.

Recently the dominant far-right supporter groups of Lazio demanded women to stay away from the ‘sacred space’ of Curva Nord. Were there reactions against this sexist attitude?

They issued a sexist leaflet that asked to not bring women to the first 10 rows (supposedly reserved for the hardcore ultras), not in the whole Curva. The best answer was given by

the thousands of women that support Lazio who, with their protests, forced the group to apologize.

Is your group or individual members collaborating with any political organizations and social movements?

We are more involved with social movements than with political parties. In Rome there are many antagonistic realities, and our initiative being a movement with autonomous and independent cells is present in many of them. There is no single thought in the LAF, nor a political ideology. There are anarchists, communists, socialists, liberals: each active in their own private life, people united by anti-fascism and passion for Lazio.



Photo of the left-wing Commandos Aquile S.Basilio Talenti (C.A.S.T.)

Can you give us a brief overview of the far-right influence in Italian football today?

The situation is alarming. Since the 70s the Italian neo-

fascist parties have focused their recruitment efforts on the football stadiums. It is a political strategy that has been going on for the last 40 years. They indoctrinate young people who go to the stadium only to support their team with party-line, racist, intolerant values. Boys who do not have adequate cultural bases to defend themselves are being attracted by these values. In Italy today the ultras world has been almost totally hegemonized. Nowadays the fascists are more organized, because they are financed by neo-fascist parties that do business with organized crime.

What do you think is the potential of football for social change? Why there is such struggle for control over stadiums by both the left and the right?

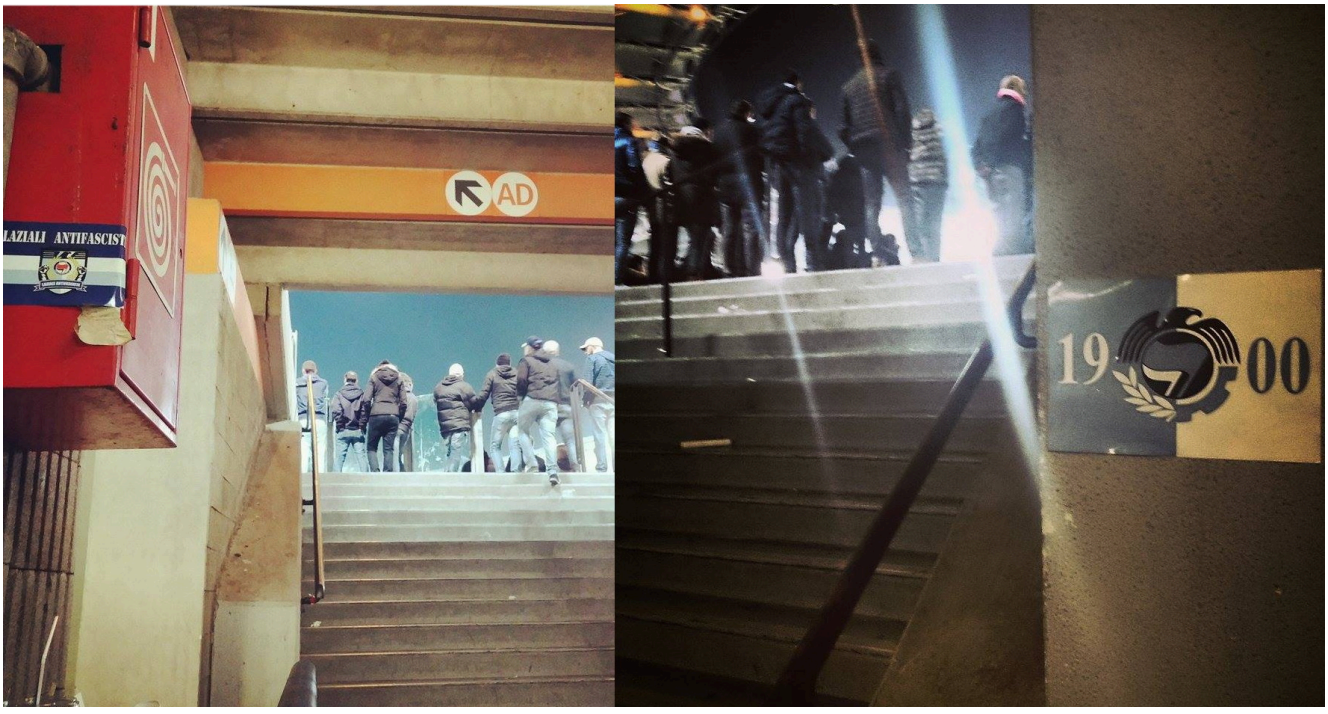
It can improve things, but unfortunately can also make them worse. The stadiums convey values. Nowadays we see a nationalist drift in the curves of many European countries. For years, fascist and neo-Nazi parties and movements have been striving to occupy these spaces, throwing up their propaganda and making political proselytism. They try to change the values that sport should seek – brotherhood, equality and respect are replaced with intolerance and nationalism– in order the youth to internalize their neo-fascist, racist, homophobic positions.

Concluding words?

The situation is so hard that we have to do what we do!



Flag of the far-right Irriducibili taken by LAF



LAF stickers inside Curva Nord



LAF scarves and t-shirts



The recent close relationship with West Ham United has provoked much resentment among the far-right supporters of

S.S. Lazio, because of the multiethnic character of the English team’s ultras (such as the infamous dark-skinned WHU ultras leader Cass Pennant-on the photo)

Cover photo: *Demonstration by members of LAF in front of the Coliseum in Rome (March 2016)*

Report on the Chemnitz Pogrom

First-hand report by a German activist

Maybe you‘ve heard of it, maybe not. This is a brief report on recent happenings in Chemnitz / Saxonia.

Chemnitz is a former industrial city of about 250.000 citizens situated in Saxony. This German state is known for its pretty right-wing state apparatuses and a strong fascist street movement (Pegida). Chemnitz, too, has a strong fascist movement and for some time it even was home to the Neonazi terror group, National-Socialist Underground‘ (NSU), known for having executed nine immigrants and a police officer.

There is, however, also a left-wing, antifa and anarchist scene in Chemnitz with two housing projects, an autonomous youth center, a feminist group, a local group of the anarchist union FAU and antifascist activists.

In the night of Saturday to Sunday, August 25th/26th, two groups of men got into trouble during the Chemnitz city festival. An Iraqi and a Syrian national reportedly stabbed two Russian Germans and a Cuban German, the latter, Daniel H., dying as a result of his injuries.

On Sunday morning, when the public learned of the killing, the right-wing footbal hooligan group Kaotic Chemnitz called on facebook for a protest in the streets. In the evening about 1000 right-wing hooligans, fascists, and so-called ‚concerned citizens' gathered and started to march through Chemnitz. Police was not able to control them at all. At some point the mob started chasing and beating up immirants.

A local fascist fringe party, Pro Chemnitz, that also has deputees in the city council, called for a march on the following day. Now antifascists from Chemnitz and neighbouring cities such as Dresden, Leipzig, Jena, Erfurt and others started to mobilise, too. On Monday evening 1000 antifascists of all stripes faced a mixture of 8000 hooligans, fascists and right-wing citizens. Police deployed only 600 officers and, hence, was not able to control the fascists. Durig and after their march several street fighting squads left the fascist rally aiming to attack the antifascists. On the way from the antifascist rally to the train station, to their cars or back home several antifascists were attacked. They got off lightly, though. Only one remained with a broken nose.

Monday was a wake-up call, not only for the radical movement but for the public, too. It was clear that something had to be done. On Thursday, Saxony's Minister-President Kretschmer was to join a citizens' dialogue in Chemnitz and fascists would organise a counter-rally and on Saturday there would be two marches, organised by Pro Chemnitz and AfD. At the end, it was agreed to call for an antifascist rally to be held in Chemnitz on Saturday.

On Monday, about 900 right-wingers held a rally against Minister-President Kretschmer, the ‚lying press', the ‚political establishment' and so forth. No specific incidents.

On Saturday, fascists and antifascists from all over Germany went to Chemnitz. 4500 fascists and 3500 antifascists were reported. Pro Chemnitz held a first march and then joined the

march that was organised by the AfD as a ‚silent march' allegedly to commemorate the victim of the stabbing. At some point, the march could be blocked by hundreds of antifascists. After that police kettled hundreds of antifascists, keeping them for hours and checking their ID's. At the same time, fascist groups started attacking counter-protesters again. Several people were injured.

In some West-German cities there were big antifascist rallies. In Hamburg up to 10.000 people took to the streets, in Berlin, too. That's nice but it doesn't change the situation on the ground. Still, it shows that it's not just fascists conquering the streets but that we're witnessing some kind of polarisation.

On Monday, September 3rd, a concert ‚against the right' and ‚against hatred' and with the slogan ‚We're more' was organised in Chemnitz by different artists, some mainstream (like ‚Kraftklub', ‚Die Toten Hosen'), others openly antifa (such as ‚Feine Sahne Fischfilet' and ‚Egotronic').

About 65.000 people reportedly attended the concert.

The concert didn't change the balance of forces on the streets, though. On Friday, September 7th, there was another march organised by Pro Chemnitz. 2000 fascists and about 1000 antifascists took to the streets. This time, no clashes were reported. As it seemts, things are calming down now.

Some notes from an anarchist perspective. On Monday, the second day of the pogrom, there were only 600 police and the fascists' march went totally out of control. That was not, as liberals and democrats assert, government failure. Everybody knew that thousands of fascists would flock to Chemnitz and that things would get extremely violent. It must have been a conscious decision by some higher echelons in the police and state apparatuses to deploy way too few police and, thus, let the situation escalate.

In the pogroms of the past years it‘s been the same, in Freital / Saxony in January 2015, in Heidenau /Saxony in August 2015 and in other places, too. It seems to be the strategy of a part of Saxony‘s (and Germany‘s) state apparatus to encourage and tolerate fascist street violence and terror – **as a means to combat leftists, to discipline the immigrant population, and to legitimise calls for the further buildup of the police and secret services.**

On Saturday, September 1st, we‘ve seen an alliance of fascists across political divisions: right-wing football hooligans, local fascists of Pro Chemnitz, national-socialists of Dritter Weg, fascists of the party Die RECHTE, the Identitarian Movement, the right-wing populist movement Pegida, the right-wing populist party AfD. This marks a new stage in the history of the fascist movement since 2012. The fascists are growing ever stronger and the level of street violence is increasing.

Also on the antifascist side, somehow organically, **a unity front has been formed**, stretching from the social-democratic party SPD to autonomous antifas and anarchists. Thuringia‘s SPD, for example, sponsored busses to bring counter-protestors from Erfurt, Jena, and other cities to Chemnitz and almost all antifas, radical leftists and anarchists from those cities took those busses. There is a huge debate on how closely or if at all we should cooperate with politicians and authoritarian leftists and in the past years many of us categorically denied any cooperation. During the pogrom, however, the question was not even raised. This should give us reason for reflection.

Democratic politicans of all stripes (from the conservative CDU to the left-wing party) were quick to condemn the fascist street violence. What‘s their motive? Some of them were pretty clear about that. They‘re concerned that fascist violence might cheapen the image of Chemnitz, frighten off investors and enterpreneurs and endanger the integration of immigrants as a cheap and flexible workforce into the German economy. At the same time, there are only very few politicians to condemn

state violence against immigrants, e.g. vexatious police controls or deportations, to the same extent. Furhermore, those ‚antifascists' felt compelled to distance themselves from left-wing and radical antifascists, lumping them together with the fascists as ‚extremists'.

The objective of their antifascism, i.d. state antifascism, hence, is to maintain a certain equilibrium of forces in order to keep capitalist exploitation and the wielding of state authority going smoothly.

The AfD is the third strongest party in Germany. In the 2017 federal elections it won 12,5 per cent of the votes. In some states, such as Saxony, it won around 25 per cent, thus becoming the second strongest party. In Saxony, where state elections are going to be held in 2019, according to this election outcome, the only government possibly to be formed would be a coalition government of the conservative CDU and the fascist AfD. Their strategy, as laid out by AfD leader and right-wing intellectual Björn Höcke, is to transform the democratic system into an authoritarian regime. This is to be done by a national opposition made up by three fronts: the AfD as parliamentary force, the Neonazis as street movement, and, thirdly, disenchanted segments of the state apparatuses, i.d. cops, judges, state attorneys, military. This strategy is proving to be successful. The AfD is already the third strongest party.

The street violence scenes of Chemnitz showed the increasing strength of the fascist movement. And there are a lot of cops, military, judges and other state officials in the AfD or in touch with the AfD. To give just one example of these days. In the midst of the Chemnitz events a correctional officer leaked the arrest warrant of the suspected murderer of the Daniel H. to fascists who then published it. Before leaking it, he discussed the move with around a dozen colleagues in a WhatsApp group.

Fascism, however, is not an endeavour of the new right.

We should not forget that it‘s conservative, social-democratic, green, in some states such as Berlin and Thuringia even left-wing politicians who are organising today‘s deportation regime – not the AfD. During the Chemnitz pogrom it was the Saxon police, i.d. of a state led by a conservative-social democratic government, that gave free rein to fascists and attacked anti-fascists. After the Chemnitz pogrom it was Saxony‘s Minister-President of the CDU and the head of the German intelligence service, the ‚Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution‘, who doubted and even denied that there was any mob violence against immigrants in Chemnitz – not the AfD. Even Sara Wagenknecht, a politican of Die Linke, not the AfD, who defended the right-wing mob by stating that not all protesters were fascists, that many of them were socially discontent citizens.

All in all, this is a sinister situation and many of us feel pretty concerned about the future.

Interview with Kristin Ross | May ’68: Beyond the Artificial Commemorations and Remembrances

*Interview with **Kristin Ross** by **Yavor Tarinski** for Babylonia Journal.*
*You can find the interview in Greek **here**.*

Kristin Ross gave an interview for Babylonia journal,

analyzing the meanings and significance of May ’68. She will be among the keynote speakers at this year’s B-Fest (25^{th}-26^{th}-27^{th} of May in the Fine Arts School in Athens). *Ross is a professor of comparative literature at New York University and author of many books like “May ’68 and Its Afterlives”, “The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune” and “Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune”.*

Yavor Tarinski: This year marks the 50th anniversary of the rebellious May ‘68, when the Parisian youth took to the streets, challenging established social hierarchies and dominant myths. What is, according to you, the relevance that this date bears for us today?

Kristin Ross: The categories you use—“Parisian youth” and even “May ‘68,”—are precisely the narrative categories that I tried to put into question and actively dismantle in my book, *May ’68 and Its Afterlives*. Perhaps what your question shows is the tenacity that certain tropes and images hold in organizing our vision of the recent past. I don’t perceive “youth” *per se* to be the political subject of ’68; I don’t see the events as occurring in the French capital; and the worldwide set of political insurrections and social turbulence to which we have given the name of “68” was certainly not limited to the month of May.

So, if what we call May ’68 bears any relevance for us today, we would have to look for it outside the parameters of your question, as I will discuss when I come to Athens: in western France, perhaps, or on the outskirts of Tokyo; in the fruits of the unexpected meetings between very different kinds of people—workers and farmers, for instance, or French students and Algerian immigrants—and the political subjectivization sparked by those encounters; in the great “protracted wars” like the Lip or Larzac in France for example, which traversed the long 1960s (a political sequence that extends, in my

view, from the late 1950s through the mid-1970s), and which thus have a duration that far exceeds the month of May.

Y.T.: This period is seen by many as a pivotal one in the evolution of revolutionary thinking and praxis. On the one hand it shattered the idea of predetermined revolutionary subject, i.e. the working class, while on the other it challenged the privileges and leadership of "enlightened" experts (even of those that claim to hold expertise in revolution and social change), proposing instead radical forms of direct democracy. Many on the Left, however, have come to view this democratic decentralization as the ultimate reason for the revolt's failure, since it prevented the social movements of that time from seizing state-power. You on the other hand seem to disagree with this narrative. What really made the rebellious events of May '68 fail in their effort at radically transforming society, if you agree that they have failed?

K.R.: I am not a political theorist and try never to put myself in the position of gauging the success or failure of an insurrection or social movement. I don't think the logic of failure/fulfillment gets us very far in our consideration of past movements, but it is a strikingly persistent logic. I'll give you an example. A couple years ago, I had a discussion with Alain Badiou during which he insisted on the Paris Commune as an example of failure. I was tempted to ask him what, in his opinion, a successful Commune at that time would have looked like! I have always found it very difficult to know what counts as success and what has failed. There's a saying in English: how many swallows make a summer?

The events that have preoccupied me—May '68 and the Paris Commune—are a paradise for what I call back-seat drivers, those after-the-fact experts who second-guess the historical actors and make an inventory of their errors. Why didn't the Communards march on Versailles? Why weren't they better organized militarily? Why did they waste their precious time

(presuming, of course, they were aware of the imminent demise that would render their time so precious) quarreling in the Hôtel de Ville? Why didn't they seize the money from the bank? Why did French workers during '68 end their strike?

What is amazing to me is how unshakeable the desire to either teach the past a lesson or to have the past's "failures" teach us a lesson (which comes to the same thing) can be. With Badiou I tried several ways of avoiding the pedagogical paradigm he was adopting toward the past. I spoke about how, for those who lived the Commune, a real sense of liberation and network of solidarity were achieved. I spoke of the ideas unleashed, for us now to consider, precisely by the inventive nature of the event. (Of course, both of these statements hold true for '68 as well). And despite all that, Médiapart (the host of the discussion) still entitled the interview "The Lessons of the Commune!"

What this shows, I think is how much progressive thinking about emancipation still operates as though there were an agreed-upon blueprint of ends to be attained, and as though these ends could be precisely determined and then objectively measured as having been achieved or not achieved according to time-worn standards or to criteria drawn up in 2017. I think people enjoy being in the position of establishing, after the fact, what was possible, impossible, too soon, too late, outmoded or unrealistic at any given moment. But what is lost when one adopts this position is any sense of the experimental dimension of politics.

In order to view the Commune or what occurred in any number of places during the '68 years as laboratories of political invention, and to see the capacities set in motion when ordinary people work together to manage their own affairs, I had to try to completely disengage from any traces of the kind of balance-sheet logic I've been describing.

Y.T.: In your book "May '68 and its Afterlives" you say that

the anonymous militants that were active in the everyday neighborhood grassroots politics of May ’68, have been replaced in the “official” memory by leaders and spokesmen that appeared afterwards. A similar pattern you observe in another revolutionary moment in another book of yours – “Communal Luxury: The Political Imaginary of the Paris Commune”. Why is that happening and how can the oppressed reclaim their history?

K.R.: My books were each written to intervene into specific situations. In the late 1990s I began thinking about ’68 and the way it had been remembered, debated, trivialized, and forgotten over the years. The reason for my fascination with that question at that moment had nothing to do with a commemoration or other artificial date of remembrance.

Instead, what motivated me was the way in which the 1995 labor strikes in France, followed by anti-globalization protests in Seattle and Genoa, had awakened new manifestations of political expression in France and elsewhere and new forms of a vigorous anti-capitalism after the long dormancy of the 1980s. It was this revitalized political momentum that led me to write my history of May’s afterlives. The workers’ movements had dislodged a sentiment of oblivion, if not triviality, that had settled over the ’68 years, and I felt the need to try to show the way the events, what had happened concretely to a staggeringly varied array of ordinary people throughout France, had not only receded from view, but had in fact been actively “disappeared” behind walls of grand abstractions, fusty clichés and unanchored invocations. The re-emergence of the labor movement in the 90s jarred the 60s loose from all the images and phrases put into place in France and elsewhere by a confluence of forces—the media, the institution of the commemoration, and the ex-gauchistes converted to the imperatives of the market.

At that time only a few faces—I’m talking about men like Bernard Henri-Levy, Andre Glucksmann, Bernard Kouchner, Daniel

Cohn-Bendit, and Alain Finkelkraut—were visible, and only their voices could be heard over the French airways, recounting what was taken to be the official account of the movement. These self-appointed and media-anointed spokesmen (we have their equivalents in the United States), all of whom could be relied upon to re-enact at the drop of a hat the renunciation of the errors of their youth, were those I called in my book the official memory functionaries.

The labor strikes of the winter of 1995 not only succeeded in forcing a government climb down over the issue of changes to the pensions of public sector workers, they also wrested control of the memory of '68 from the official spokespeople and reminded people what all the combined forces of oblivion, including what we can now see as a kind of Americanization of the memory of French May, had helped them to forget: that May '68 was the largest mass movement in modern French history, the most important strike in the history of the French labor movement, and the only "general" insurrection western, overdeveloped countries had experienced since World War II.

In any mass political movement on the left, there is always the danger of what I call "personalization" to take place—that process whereby people involved in a leaderless social movement on a massive scale allow the forces of order or the media to concentrate the task of "representing the movement" and speaking for it, in just a few central figures. But this kind of monopolizing of the memory of an event by official spokespeople did not really occur to anywhere the same extent in the case of the Commune as it did with '68. After all, many Communards were dead at the end of the Bloody Week, the survivors were scattered throughout Europe and even the United States. Despite all sorts of censorship on the part of the French government, survivors were able to publish their memoirs and accounts, mostly in Switzerland.

Historians writing in the wake of the Commune do, of course, tend to concentrate their attention on the same figures:

Louise Michel, for example, or Gustave Courbet. In my thinking about historical processes, I find that it is always interesting to shove these kind of leading men and leading women to the back of the stage—if only to see who or what becomes visible when one does so.

Y.T.: Your work encompasses another pivotal revolutionary moment – The Paris Commune. In "The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune" you write that the Commune was not just an uprising against the acts of the Second Empire, but perhaps more than all, a revolt against deep forms of social regimentation. One patter, for example, that seems to be shared by both is the urge from the grassroots towards dismantling bureaucratically imposed social roles and identities. Can this and other parallels be drawn between these two urban revolutionary experiences?

K.R.: Yes, I believe that deep forms of social regimentation were under attack in both moments—during the Commune and during May '68. Artists and artisans under the Commune managed to dismantle the central hierarchy at the heart of 19th century artistic production—the hierarchy that gave "fine" artists (sculptors and painters) vast financial privilege, status, and security over decorative artists, craftspeople and artisans. And one way of looking at '68 is as a massive crisis in functionalism—students no longer functioned as students, farmers stopped farming, and workers quit working.

There's a nice quote from Maurice Blanchot, of all people, that sums up the situation quite accurately. The specific force of May, he wrote, derived from the fact that "in this so-called student action, students never acted as students, but as the revealers of a total crisis, as bearers of a power of rupture putting into question the regime, the State, the society." The same could be said about farmers at that time—they acted as farmers but as far more than farmers as well; they were thinking about their situation and the

question of agriculture politically and not just sociologically.

Y.T.: In 1988 you wrote that if workers are those who are not allowed to transform the space/time allotted them, then revolution consists not in changing the juridical form that allots space/time but rather in completely transforming the nature of space/time. Such traits we saw in both May ’68 and the Paris Commune. Do you see such revolutionary potential in the contemporary age, in which political apathy, mindless consumerism and generalized cynicism seem to reign?

K.R.: May ’68 holds absolutely no interest at all for me except to the extent that it can enter into the figurability of our present and illuminate our current situation. If it doesn’t, we are right to consign it to the dust-heap. As a group of radical historians put it in the wake of ’68, “Think the past politically in order to think the present historically.” Their message was a two-pronged attack. First: think the present both as scandal and as something that can change. And second: history is much too important a matter to be left to historians.

Any analysis of an historical event, and especially the 1960s, conveys a judgment about the present situation. When confronted with any attempt to represent the 60s, we have to ask ourselves what is being fought for in the present, *what is being defended now.* These are the questions I intend to pursue in my lecture in Athens.

Interview with Redneck

Revolt: Arms Possession & Social Anti-fascism in U.S.A.

*Interview with Redneck Revolt by **Yavor Tarinski** and **Kostas Savvopoulos** for Babylonia Journal. You can find the interview in Greek here.*

On this year's B-Fest in Athens we have with us people from the RedneckRevolt movement from the U.S. (25^{th}-26^{th}-27^{th} of May in the Fine Arts School in Athens). Redneck Revolt was founded in 2016 as an anti-racist, anti-fascist network of community defense formations.

Redneck Revolt are fighting for social emancipation against any kind of oppressive regime or system, by highlighting the common struggles between people of color, the working class and the under-privileged in general. In the states of the U.S.A. where it's legal to carry and operate firearms they are organizing protests and actions which they guard on their own, exercising their right to carry firearms. They propose a different look on the concept of gun ownership and use. They also operate a number of gun clubs and shooting ranges where they help their members to learn how to protect themselves and others against police brutality and the recent rise of the far right.

Their political ideologies are less important in the face of common and collective action. Through their actions they are providing the necessary space for oppressed people to express and assert themselves against the systemic and everyday inequalities and struggles.

Babylonia: What is Redneck Revolt and where does it draw it's influences from?

Redneck Revolt: Redneck Revolt was founded in 2016, as an anti-racist, anti-fascist community defense formation. The history of the term redneck is long and complex. One of the earliest recorded uses of the term comes from the 1890's, and refers to rednecks as "poorer inhabitants of the rural districts…men who work in the field, as a matter of course, generally have their skin burned red by the sun, and especially is this true of the back of their necks".

In 1921, the term became synonymous with armed insurrection against the state, as members of the United Mine Workers of America tied red bandanas around their necks during the Battle of Blair Mountain, a two week long armed multi-racial labor uprising in the coalfields of West Virginia.

We are influenced by the ethos of direct action embodied by John Brown as he and eighteen comrades, including former slaves, raided a Federal arsenal in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, on October 15, 1859, in an attempt to seize weapons to be used in a massive slave uprising. Brown's raid failed. But their courage and complete dedication to the freedom of all people serves as an example and testament: a refusal to submit to oppression and fear and to organize and act for the liberation of all with insurrectionary zeal burning hotly against the brutal institution of slavery.

We trace the radical, action-oriented racial solidarity of Brown's company into the class conscious organizing efforts of the Rainbow Coalition in the late 1960s. The group formed in Chicago with members of the Black Panther Party, The Young Patriots—"dislocated hillbillies" or white working class youth—and The Young Lords, a militant Chicano gang-turned-political movement. Though targeted by the FBI with massive repression and direct violence, the Coalition defined new territories of anti-racist and community defense organizing.

B.: Standing by the 2nd amendment and claiming that the use of weapons is something good or –worst case scenario- something

neutral (depends on who's using it) is something that traditionally, left wing(we're not talking about the Democrats or the liberals of course) and leftist radicals stand against. In fact the forces that stand behind the 2nd amendment and the NRA in the US are more or less in the right wing spectrum. How do you view the concept of weapon carrying and what are the differences between you and the opposing forces in this matter?

R.R.: We stand for the right of all people to live free and to defend themselves by any means necessary. Within the context of the United States we insist on exercising our right to arm ourselves and organize for our collective defense under the guarantees of the 2nd Amendment in the Bill of Rights. We emphasize, however, that we place people's right to defend their own liberty and autonomy over the provisions of any law. In the United States, the right wing privileges the law over people and we refuse this inversion of abstract power against living freedom.

We also challenge this idea that "left radicals" are against the use of weapons. Perhaps it is useful to place this idea within histories of white supremacy, specifically in the post-Civil Rights era of the 1970s and the rise of armed Black militancy such as the Black Panthers. It is in this moment that a white, liberal reactionary position based on an absolutist insistence on non-violence began to take hold to the point where inflexible pacifism has become the guiding tenet in left wing catechism in the U.S.

This fetishization of non-violence has led to the erasure of histories of armed self-determination and resistance, including during the Civil Rights era of Dr. Martin Luther King. This erasure, we contend, is part of a pattern of whitewashing by liberal, bourgeois white people who would rather preserve State monopolies of power and defang the working class and people of color by making pacifism the only

“legitimate” means of dissent and thus coercing people’s behavior and tactical possibilities in the face of government and far right attacks.

Negroes with Guns by Robert F. Williams outlines strategies of armed community defense undertaken by African Americans in North Carolina during the 1950s and 60s amid maelstroms of white supremacist arson, violence, and murder. A more recent historical account of this same era, *This Nonviolent Stuff’ll Get You Killed* by Charles E. Cobb, Jr., depicts the ways firearms and those who carried them were carefully incorporated into widespread struggles for self-determination and community safety throughout the American South and in so doing, dismantles the ubiquitous liberal myth that the Civil Rights struggles was a completely pacifist undertaking. Instead, this history insists that a diversity of tactics is crucial in building sustainable and victorious campaigns for justice and freedom.

Redneck Revolt rejects the alienating individualism central to modern, right wing interpretations of the 2nd Amendment. The right wing embrace of firearms is one of single-minded desperation and is ultimately a fetish of hyper-individualism. We believe firearms are a tool to be learned and used within ethical parameters carefully developed by communities to serve their needs.

The great danger of firearms is an addiction to the limited power they represent. Guns are a tool of destruction. The use or deployment of weapons must be tactically specific and limited within larger strategies designed to provide spaces of security where people can work together to build up the societies they desire, free from fear. Redneck Revolt only carries firearms in carefully-defined situations and at the request of other members of the communities we come from. We are not a self-appointed militia of “the people”. Instead, we are accountable to the people we live among. Our tactics and

our ethics are shaped by the communities we are responsible to.

B.: Concerning the latest events in the Florida shooting the debate of whether guns should be banned or not has been rekindled. Where do you stand in this, and secondly what do you think the main reasons behind the long history of mass shootings in U.S.A are? (if we assume that the main reason is the relaxed laws for weapon purchasing and usage)

R.R.: Redneck Revolt does not believe the people should be disarmed. People have the right to choose the means for their own best communal defense, especially while the police in the United States continue to murder with impunity and at accelerating rates—over 3,300 people have been killed by police since 2015. This body count far exceeds those lives lost in mass shootings. While these kinds of mass shootings are a spectacle of horror and produce a social panic, the media focus on mass shootings distracts from the larger, fundamental crises provoked by capitalism, imperial militarism, patriarchy, white supremacy, and a society intent on controlling and disciplining youth within an unequal schooling system.

Mass shootings are symptomatic of these larger issues that go unspoken and unchallenged within conventional, political discourse. People who are faithful to the State anxiously ignore or elide confronting these deep, societal problems. These people are still entranced by the false promise of symptomatic solutions through government legislation, such as banning a particular kind of gun. The statistical data about the limited effects of gun control is widely available for any curious and critical reader and we encourage people to think in complex ways—against reductive media narratives—about how they perceive the imbalances of power between the State and its people and the fracturing, volatile pressure people are subjected to within such a poisonous capitalistic society as they struggle with debt, poor health, food insecurity,

loneliness, and endless war. We are not interested in debating new laws for firearms, knowing that in a capitalist and white supremacist society, any law is likely to be applied most severely against people of color and the poor.



B.: It seems that you are taking a different approach from many radical left-wing, anarchist and antifa organizations, regarding the way you interact with society. While often such groups descend into sectarian ideological purity, thus placing themselves and their actions against society, you tend to successfully intervene in your local context by embracing and reframing social traditions with emancipatory potential. In the description of what is RedneckRevolt you write that "In this project, political ideology is less important to us than our ability to agree on our organizing principles and work together". What made you choose this approach that some can call social anti-fascism?

R.R.: Redneck Revolt is not interested in sectarian contention. Writing in 1860, the African-American Abolitionist

Frederick Douglass understood that ideological and theoretical debate indulged by so many on the left “gratifies their intellectual tastes, pleases their imaginations, titillates their sensibilities into a momentary sensation, but does not move them from the downy seat of inaction.”

We take heed and choose action instead.

We are compelled to move, to create, to plan, to engage in our homeplaces: our neighborhoods, our communities, our villages, towns, and cities.

We abandon “the downy seat of inaction.” (We leave that cursed perch to the armchair anarchists, do-nothing communists, and especially to the anxious paralysis of the State-loving liberals.) Nothing substantial gets done by endless debate and a reluctance to actually attempt constructive efforts at making the small, social changes we require. It is important to confront fascists in the streets and in the courts and government buildings. But we also insist on the powerful effect of building up communities and to help them resist fear and oppression through autonomous action. Redneck Revolt is comprised of people from across the political spectrum and we are unified in our antifascist and antiracist goals and our focus on the local ground we share with our neighbors. Solidarity is forged through shared action.

B.: Because of your social approach you have encountered and collaborated with people from various backgrounds. How are local communities accepting your anti-racist messages for social liberation and do they also influence your group?

R.R.: Reception of our mission varies, but its simple and straightforward assertions, coupled with a belief that we need to meet people where they are and listen to the analysis they already bring has meant that we are able to build open relationships full of rich dialogue. We don’t need nor want to convert anyone—we have no party platform people need to

conform to. Instead, we are able to amplify and enhance the critiques working people *already have about the world they inhabit.* People are experts in their own lives and they don't need outsiders coming in to tell them what's wrong with those lives. Redneck Revolt seeks to take the struggles people are already experiencing and bring them into conversation with broader struggles against racism and capitalism.

B.: What is the potential that social anti-fascism holds for one future that seems to be filled with multidimensional insecurity, encompassing racial, economic, ecological and other issues?

R.R.: Asking about the future potential of Redneck Revolt's strategy is the provocative but unanswerable question. Each member of Redneck Revolt has their own dreams, stitched together with the resilient thread of mutual aid and communal dedication to our shared survival and freedom. Local contexts and individual experiences, skills, and capacity shape how our project manifests and mutates. Certainly we attempt to hold all these social, political, and environmental struggles before us and to analyze the intersections and complex textures they produce. By letting go of the need for a programmatic plan and centralized strategy, there is the uneven and unpredictable flow of micro-energies from communities and regional affiliations that develop practical models and a focus on immediate needs.

We want to grow powerful social possibilities, make friends, strengthen our comrades, figure out how to solve one another's problems, keep each other healthy and fed, preserve our freedom, and defend our lives. We work together in consensus to try to build the world we all desire while understanding that the dangers we struggle against are constantly shifting and are deeply woven into the fabric of the lives we lead. We don't have things figured out. Theory is always in the service of practical action. Like so many of our comrades dedicated to fighting fascism and white supremacy, we are experimenting,

playing within the social field, resisting in the ways that are needed in the moment but never imagining we have a perfect method or even that we fully understand the complexity of the issues we contend with. In humility, we are always open to critique.

This is a global moment for courage and radical love. Uncertainty abounds. Risk is always with us. We trust one another and yearn together for the ebullient world of freedom we dream of.

We fight to win!

B-FEST 7: Πρόγραμμα Ομιλιών-Συζητήσεων | B-FEST 7: Programme of Discussions & Speeches

(English below)

Το Διεθνές Αντιεξουσιαστικό Φεστιβάλ της Βαβυλωνίας B-FEST επιστρέφει με καλεσμένους διεθνούς φήμης ομιλητές, καλλιτέχνες και ανθρώπους των κινημάτων.

B-FEST 7 | RECLAIM THE FUTURE
25-26-27 Μαΐου 2017, Ανωτάτη Σχολή Καλών Τεχνών, Πειραιώς 256, Αθήνα

ΠΡΟΓΡΑΜΜΑ ΟΜΙΛΙΩΝ-ΣΥΖΗΤΗΣΕΩΝ:

ΠΑΡΑΣΚΕΥΗ 25/05

18:00 Είναι ο Φεμινισμός το Κίνημα της Εποχής; Συζήτηση για την Ατζέντα που Διαμορφώνουν το #metoo & τα Κινήματα Πολιτικοποιήσης της Έμφυλης Βίας
Λίνα Θεοδώρου (ομάδα Κιουρί@)
Parvus Princeps (ακτιβιστής)
Ελιάνα Καναβέλη (διδάκτωρ κοινωνιολογίας, περ. Βαβυλωνία)

18:30 Πολιτικός Λόγος & Ποδόσφαιρο: Το Πείραμα της Αυτοδιαχείρισης
Μάκης Διόγος (αθλητικός δημοσιογράφος)
Μέλος του Αδέσποτου Αθηνών (αυτοοργανωμένη ομάδα ποδοσφαίρου σάλας)

19:00 Πόλεμος & Τέχνη | Ροζάβα: Ιστορίες των Κατεστραμμένων Πόλεων
Mirko Turunc (Salonicasolidarity Afrin)
Önder Çakar (σεναριογράφος της ταινίας)
Ακολουθεί προβολή της ταινίας “Stories from Destroyed Cities”, παραγωγή: Rovaja Film Commune + Ζωντανή τηλεδιάσκεψη από Ροζάβα με μέλη της Κινηματογραφικής Ακαδημίας της Ροζάβα.

20:30 Redneck Revolt: Αντιφασισμός & Οπλοκατοχή στις Η.Π.Α.
Μέλος των Redneck Revolt
Κώστας Σαββόπουλος (περ. Βαβυλωνία)

ΣΑΒΒΑΤΟ 26/05

18:00 Πετρέλαια, Εξορύξεις, Φράγματα: Ενέργεια για Τι & για Ποιον;
Συμμετοχές από κινήματα για την ενέργεια και το νερό.
Μέλη από την Ανοιχτή Συνέλευση στα Γιάννενα ενάντια στις Εξορύξεις Πετρελαίου
Τάσος Κεφαλάς (Δίκτυο «Μεσοχώρα-Αχελώος SOS)
Στέφανος Μπατσής (περ. Βαβυλωνία)

18:00 «Imprimatur και Ιεροί Λογοκριτές» | Γιατί τα Μέσα που δημιουργούν τα fake news κηρύσσουν σταυροφορίες εναντίον τους;
Μαρίνα Μεϊντάνη (Ασύνταχτος Τύπος)
Λουκάς Σταμέλλος (omniatv)

Γιώργος Παπαχριστοδούλου (περ. Βαβυλωνία)
+ προβολή βίντεο, γραφικών & ντοκουμέντων

18:30 Αυτοματοποίηση, Έλεγχος & το Κίνημα Make Amazon Pay!
Christian Krähling (εργαζόμενος της Άμαζον)
John Malamatinas (ακτιβιστής)
Γρηγόρης Τσιλιμαντός (περ. Βαβυλωνία)

19:30 Η Αρχιτεκτονική του Πολέμου: Πόλεις, Βία & Εντοπισμός
Eyal Weizman (αρχιτέκτονας, Goldsmiths, παν/μιο του Λονδίνου)
Χριστίνα Βαρβία & Στέφανος Λεβίδης (Forensic Architecture)
Σπύρος Τζουανόπουλος (περ. Βαβυλωνία)

20:30 Ο Μάης του ‘68 & η Συνέχειά του: Πού Πηγαίνει η Δημοκρατία;
Kristin Ross (παν/μιο Νέας Υόρκης)
Αλέξανδρος Σχισμένος (περ. Βαβυλωνία)

ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ 27/05

18:00 Ελευθεριακή Παιδεία: Παρουσίαση του Ελευθεριακού Νηπιαγωγείου «Το Μικρό Δέντρο»
Μέλη από τη συνέλευση δασκάλων και τη συνέλευση γονέων του Μικρού Δέντρου.

18:00 Πόλη & Νέα Αστικά Κινήματα
Συμμετοχές αστικών κινημάτων από του Φιλοπάππου ως τα ρέματα της Αττικής.

19:00 Σύγχρονα Κινήματα & Στιγμές Εξέγερσης: Μάιος ‘68, Δεκέμβρης ’08, ZAD
Μέλος των Lundimatin (Γαλλία)
Φιλήμονας Πατσάκης (περ. Έρμα)
Πέτρος Τζιέρης (Αντιεξουσιαστική Κίνηση)

20:00 Η Υπόσχεση της Άμεσης Δημοκρατίας & το Παράδειγμα των Κούρδων
Debbie Bookchin (Αμερικανίδα δημοσιογράφος, συγγραφέας – με ζωντανή τηλεδιάσκεψη)

Sven Wegner (Διεθνιστικό Κέντρο Δρέσδης)
Yavor Tarinski (TRISE, περ. Βαβυλωνία)

_____

B-FEST 7 | RECLAIM THE FUTURE
International Antiauthoritarian Festival of Babylonia Journal
25-26-27 May 2017, Athens School of Fine Arts, Greece

DISCUSSIONS | CONCERTS | CINEMA | THEATRE | BOOK & PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION | CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES | COMIX | WORKSHOPS | DJ SETS

Programme of Discussions and Speeches:

FRIDAY 25/05

18:00 Is Feminism the Movement of our Era? Discussion on the agenda that is being created by #metoo and the movements for politicization of gender violence
Lina Theodorou (Kiouri@)
Parvus Princeps (activist)
Eliana Kanaveli (PhD in sociology, Babylonia journal)

18:30 Politics & Football: The experiment of self-management
Makis Diogos (sports journalist)
Member of Adespotos Athinon (self-organized football team)

19:00 War & Art in Rojava: Stories of Destroyed Cities
Mirko Turunc (Salonicasolidarity Afrin)
Önder Çakar (Script writer of the movie)
It will follow projection of the movie "Stories from Destroyed Cities", produced by Rojava Film Commune + Livestream from Rojava with members of the Rojava Film Commune

20:30 Redneck Revolt: Antifascism & Possession of Weapons in U.S.A.
Member of Redneck Revolt
Kostas Savvopoulos (Babylonia journal)

SATURDAY 26/05

18:00 Oil, Extractions, Dams | Energy: why and for whom?
Participation of movements for energy and water
Members of the Open Assembly of Giannena against the extraction of oil
Tasos Kefalas (Network “Mesohora-Aheloos SOS”)
Stefanos Mpatsis (Babylonia journal)

18:00 “Imprimatur and the Holy Censors”: Why the media that produce fake news preache crusades against them?
Marina Meidani (Asyntachtos Typos)
Loukas Stamellos (omniatv)
Giorgos Papachristodoulou (Babylonia journal)
+projection of videos, graphics & documents

18:30 Automatization, Control & the Movement Make Amazon Pay!
Christian Krähling (worker from Amazon)
John Malamatinas (activist)
Grigoris Tsilimantos (Babylonia journal)

19:30 Architecture of War: City, Violence & Detection
Eyal Weizman (architect, Goldsmiths, university of London)
Christina Varvia & Stefanos Levidis (Forensic Architecture)
Spiros Tzouanopoulos (Babylonia journal)

20:30 May ’68 and its Continuation: Where Democracy is Heading?
Kristin Ross (New York University)
Alexandros Schismenos (Babylonia journal)

SUNDAY 27/05

18:00 Libertarian Education: Presentation of the Libertarian Kindergarten “The Little Tree”
Members of the assemblies of teachers and parents of “The Little Tree”

18:00 City & New Urban Movements

Participants from urban movements of Filopappou until the streams of Attica

19:00 Contemporary Movements & Moments of Insurrection: May ’68, December ’08, ZAD
Member of Lundimatin (France)
Filimonas Patsakis (Erma journal)
Petros Tzieris (Antiauthoritarian Movement)

20:00 The Promise of Direct Democracy & the Kurdish Example
Debbie Bookchin (American journalist, writer – live connection)
Sven Wegner (Internationalist Center Dresden)
Yavor Tarinski (TRISE, Babylonia journal)

_____-

Πολιτιστικό Πρόγραμμα **ΕΔΩ**

“The war in Syria only benefits the counter-revolutionary forces” | Interview with Joseph Daher

Η συνέντευξη στα ελληνικά **εδώ**.

Interview-introduction: Lina Theodorou, Antonis Faras

The Syrian Civil War continues for 7th year, but it is still not clear when it will end. During the war, over half a million people died and about 10 million people, about half of the Syrian population, was displaced. On the occasion of the

bombing of Syria, targeting the military bases of the Damascus regime, by US forces, the UK and France, the debate was renewed; anti-war strikes were organized and demonstrators even attempted to throw the statue of Harry S. Truman in Athens, Greece.

However, in the anti-war movement against the Syrian war, the hegemonic narrative within the Left has an approach to anti-imperialism, which, more or less, limits the position of imperialist exclusively to the United States. This view, which is an important analytical tool for interpreting the world outside of the West, takes one geopolitical character that neglects the social element as a factor of change, and on the other hand it implies a structural orientation in the way the Left treats politics, when talking about "others".

Trying to shed more light on the debate, which is obscured rather than clarified by *ad hoc* confrontations, we asked Joseph Daher to answer a series of more comprehensive questions about the Syrian civil war. Daher is a Swiss-Syrian Marxist and scholar, whose books have been published in English, such as "*Hezbollah: Political Economy of the Party of God*" (2016, Pluto Press).

We want to take a closer look at what have happened these seven years. Briefly: What led to the uprising specifically in Syria? What were Assad's relations with the Syrian left and anarchist space before the uprising? What was his relationship with sectarian extremism? Can you describe how the rebels organized during the first years of the uprising and what went wrong? How islamists prevailed, If they have, in the rebel's groups?

Syria was a despotic regime, ruled for the past 40 years by one family, and it is also a bourgeois patrimonial regime that went through a process of neoliberalization and privatization, accelerated considerably with Bashar al-Assad's arrival to power. Sixty percent of the population was living under or

just above the poverty line in 2011. Syria was subjected to the same form of crony capitalism that is prevalent in the region. For example, in Egypt it was the Mubarak family that benefitted mostly from the privatization and neoliberalization; in Tunis it was the Trabelsi family, of the wife of the dictator Ben Ali; and in Syria it is Makhlouf, the cousin of Assad. In the end what we have are neoliberal and authoritarian systems, and Syria is no different in this regard.

The absence of democracy and the growing impoverishment of important sections of Syrian society, in a climate of corruption and growing social inequalities, have paved the way for the popular uprising, which has been waiting for nothing more than a spark. Which was initially external with the fall of the dictators in Tunisia and Egypt and then internal with the torture of the children of Dar'a. These elements will trigger the process.

At first, the Syrian grassroots civilian opposition was the primary engine of the popular uprising against the Assad regime. They sustained the popular uprising for numerous years by organizing and documenting protests and acts of civil disobedience, and by motivating people to join protests. The earliest manifestations of the "coordinating committees" (or tansiqiyyat) were neighborhood gatherings throughout Syria. A number of youth progressive and democratic networks and groups emerged throughout the country. The regime specifically targeted these networks of activists, who had initiated demonstrations, acts of civil disobedience, and campaigns in favor of countrywide strikes.

> *The regime killed, imprisoned, kidnapped and pushed to exile these activists.*

From the first days of the revolutionary process, the regime dealt with the demonstrations with great violence and this

increased with the massive interventions of Iran, Russia and Hezbollah. This situation led to a rising number of defections among conscript soldiers and officers refusing to shoot on peaceful protesters, while at the same time initial unorganized and punctual armed resistance was starting to emerge towards the end of May and beginning of June 2011 in some localities against the security services. In the following months, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) was established, as well as a myriad of other brigades. Armed resistance against the regime was nearly generalized at the end of 2011, creating new dynamics in the uprising. The militarization was mainly the result of the violent repression on the local Syrian population opposing the regime; sections of it resorted to weapons to defend themselves. The first constituted armed opposition groups often had a purely local dynamic and served to defend their hometowns and areas from aggressions by the armed security services. The FSA was never a single and united institution, but rather a network of independent military groups fighting under its umbrella. The various forces of the Free Syrian Army have been increasingly and considerably weakened throughout the years.

The members of FSA units generally originated from the majority component of the uprising: marginalized (informal and formal) workers of the cities and countryside members of the popular classes who had suffered from the acceleration of neo-liberal economic policies since the arrival in power of Bashar al-Assad and of the repression of the regime security forces. The armed opposition was made up of defected soldiers from the Syrian army, but the vast majority were civilians who had decided to take up arms. Some brigades were loosely gathered under some common umbrella, such as the FSA, but most were locally organized and only active in their hometowns. Lacking unity and centralization, they coordinated on specific battlefields, but rarely on political and strategic decisions. They were generally gathered along village or extended family lines, with little ideological cohesion.

Tragically throughout the year, each defeat of the democratic resistance strengthened and benefited the Islamic fundamentalist and jihadist forces on the ground. The rise of Islamic fundamentalist and jihadist movements and their dominations on the military scene in some regions has been negative for the revolution, as they opposed its objectives (democracy, social justice and equality). With their sectarian and reactionary discourses and behaviors, these movements not only acted as a repellent for the vast majority of religious and ethnic minorities, and women, but also to sections of Arab Sunni populations in some liberated areas where we have seen demonstrations against them, especially among large sections of the middle class in Damascus and Aleppo. They attacked and continue to attack the democratic activists, while they often tried to impose their authority on the institutions developed by locals, often bringing resistance from local populations against their authoritarian behaviors.

Why we should continue talking about revolution in Syria – Isn't it an old flame that went out? Which forms of struggle and organization evidence the continuity of revolutionary subjects? Could you elaborate on the self-governing local councils across Syria?

Nobody denies that we are no longer in March 2011 and that the situation of democratic and progressive forces is very weak today in Syria. Revolutionary processes are long-term events, characterized by higher and lower level mobilizations according to the context. They are even characterized by some periods of defeat, but it's hard to say when they end. This is especially the case in Syria, when the conditions that allowed for the beginning of these uprisings are still present, while the regime is very far from finding ways to solve them.

However, these conditions are not enough to transform them into political opportunities, particularly after more than seven years of a destructive and murderous war accompanied by **a general and important fatigue in the Syrian population, just**

seeking for its great majority to return the stability in the country. The effects of the war and its destructions will most probably weigh for years. Alongside this situation, no structured opposition body with a significant size and following offered an inclusive and democratic project that could appeal to large sectors of society was present, while the failures of the opposition bodies in exile and armed opposition groups left important frustrations and bitterness in people who participated and/or sympathized with the uprising.

The other element that could also play a role in shaping future events is the large documentation of the uprising that has never been seen before in history. There has been significant recording, testimonies and documentation of the protest movement, the actors involved and the modes of actions. In the seventies, Syria witnessed strong popular and democratic resistance with significant strikes and demonstrations throughout the country with mass followings. Unfortunately, this memory was not kept and was not well-known by the new generation of protesters in the country in 2011.

> *The Syrian revolutionary process that started in 2011 is one of the most documented. This memory will remain and could inspire and inform future resistance. The political experiences that have been accumulated since the beginning of the uprising will not disappear.*

They are however still some pockets of isolated resistance in some areas, but they are very much weakened, in addition some attempts in exile are being worked to build democratic and progressive networks.

Regarding the number of local councils, they have diminished considerably after the fall of Eastern Aleppo in December 2016 and of Eastern Ghouta in March/April of this years because of the military advances of pro-regime forces capturing

opposition held territories, and also as a result of the attacks of Islamic fundamentalist and jihadist armed groups that replaced civilians councils with their own.

Regarding local councils that played an important role in the opposition held areas, we must be clear that their very important experiences did not mean that there were no shortcomings, such as the lack of representation of women, or of religious minorities in general. Other problems existed as well such as some forms of disorganization, undemocratic practices, over-representation of some influential families in some areas, etc. Civil councils were also not always completely autonomous from military groups, relying often on military groups for resources. While numerous council members were generally elected, nearly half of them, there were also a number of councils undemocratically appointed rather than elected, based on the influence of local military leaders, clan and family structures, and elders. Another problem that was encountered in the selection of the council's representatives was the need for particular professional and technical skills.

Despite these limitations, local councils were able to restore a minimum level of social services in their regions and enjoyed some level of legitimacy.

Is the rise of ISIS a fundamental element of the counter-revolution in the Middle East? If so, which are the other political and economic factors enabling the growth of fascist and fundamentalist forces. What role does religion play in Syria?

Explanations that want to find in the Quran and in Islam the reasons for the phenomena of ISIS are wrong, but above all reinforce racist and Islamophobic amalgams while wanting to characterize an intrinsic violent nature to Islam and Muslims more generally. Although ISIS claims to act in the name of Islam, the religion does not explain their behavior and

actions. These groups and individuals take their source in the present time and not 1400 years ago, just as their actions.

Do we analyze the US invasion of Iraq by the religious beliefs of Bush (who had reported hearing God in a dream telling him that he had a mission and had to invade Iraq) or according to imperialist motives (political and economic reasons)? Will we find the reasons for the US invasion in the Bible? Will we analyze the US invasion based on the behavior of Christian 2000 years ago? Similarly, during the massacre perpetrated in Norway on July 22, 2011 by Anders Breivik, who claimed to act to preserve Christianity against multiculturalism, have we sought the reasons for his act in Christianity or the Bible?

The Arab writer Aziz Al-Azmeh, stated that "the understanding of Islamic political phenomena requires the normal equipment of the social and human sciences, not their denial" Not acting in this ways, will lead us to an essentialisation of "the Other", in much of the current cases today of the "Muslim".

> *Each religion does not exist indeed autonomously of people, in the same way that God does not exist outside of the field of intellectual action of man.*

On the contrary religion, as the supernatural power of God, is a mystic popular expression of the contradictions and material realities in which people live.

We have to understand that ISIS's expansion is a fundamental element of the counter-revolution in the Middle East that emerged as the result of authoritarian regimes crushing popular movements linked to the 2011 Arab Spring. The interventions of regional and international states have contributed to ISIS's development as well. Finally, neo-liberal policies that have impoverished the popular class, together with the repression of democratic and trade union forces, have been key in helping ISIS and Islamic fundamentalist forces grow.

In this perspective, brute military force alone only ensures that other militant groups will take its place, as al-Qaida in Iraq demonstrates. Real solutions to the crisis in Syria and elsewhere in the region must address the socio-economic and political conditions that have enabled the growth of ISIS and other extremist organizations.

The Left must understand that only by ridding the region of the conditions that allowed ISIS and other Islamic fundamentalist groups to develop can we resolve the crisis. At the same time, empowering those progressive and democratic forces on the ground who are fighting to overthrow despotic regimes and face reactionary groups is part and parcel of this approach. Clearly, no peaceful and just solution in Syria can be reached with Bashar al-Assad and his clique in power. He is the biggest criminal in Syria and must be prosecuted for his crimes instead of being legitimized by international and regional powers.

There's a leading leftist narrative regarding the war in Syria suggesting that given the recent developments, the bombing of military bases in Damascus, the cause of anti-imperialism call us to support Syria people, and consequently Bassar al Assad's regime. What do you think about that?

It is important to remember that, even though conflicting interests exist between international and regional powers that are intervening in Syria, none of these actors care about the uprising or the revolutionaries. Instead, they have attempted to undermine the popular movement against Assad and successfully worked to strengthen sectarian and ethnic tensions in the country. These intervening forces have, for example, helped stabilize the Assad regime in order to oppose Kurdish autonomy (in Turkey's case) and to defeat extremist groups such as ISIS (in the case of the United States).

The intervening powers are united in their opposition to popular struggle. They seek to impose the status quo at the

expense of the interests of the working and popular classes. This is precisely why viewing the Syrian revolution only through the lens of imperialist competition and geo-political dynamics will not suffice.

> *This lens inherently obscures the political and socio-economic frustrations endured by the Syrian population that sparked the uprising.*

We need to rebuild anti-war movements, true ones, by starting a critical assessment of the past experiences, an honest one. This in the perspective of building an internationalist and progressive alternative for all that oppose all forms of authoritarian regimes and all foreign interventions while clearly supporting the self determination of popular masses and their struggles.

In other words revolutionary humanism.

Some sections of the Left and the anti-war movements have refused to act in solidarity with the Syrian uprising under the pretext that “the main enemy is at home.” In other words, it is more important to defeat the imperialists and bourgeoisie in our own societies, even if that means implicitly supporting the Assad regime or the Russian state.

Among these sections of the Left, communist thinker Karl Liebknecht is frequently cited. Liebknecht is famous for his 1915 declaration that “the enemy is at home,” a statement made in condemnation of imperialist aggression against Russia led by his native Austria–Germany. In quoting Liebknecht, many have decontextualized his views. From his perspective, fighting against the enemy at home did not mean ignoring foreign regimes repressing their own people or failing to show solidarity with the oppressed.

Indeed, Liebknecht believed we must oppose our own ruling class’s push for war by “cooperating with the proletariat of

other countries whose struggle is against their own imperialists."

Among many Western leftists, there has been neither cooperation with the Syrian people nor collaboration with like-minded anti-war movements. They also have failed to oppose the policies of their own bourgeois states in crushing the revolution in Syria.

The Left must do better. Solidarity with the international proletariat means supporting Syrian revolutionaries against various international and regional imperialist forces, as well as the Assad regime, all of which are trying to put an end to a popular revolution for freedom and dignity.

No leftist organizations or anti-war movements today can ignore the necessity of supporting people in struggle, while opposing all foreign interventions (international and regional), especially from our own governments….

As Liebknecht said: "Ally yourselves to the international class struggle against the conspiracies of secret diplomacy, against imperialism, against war, for peace within the socialist spirit." We can exclude none of these elements from our struggle to build a progressive leftist platform on the Syrian conflict.

Do you believe that the above mentioned narratives and the inability to comprehend an active political and emancipatory struggle, succumb to perception suffering from orientalism, or maybe even racism and islamophobia? Is there a paternalistic approach which we simply cannot get rid of?

I think reasons are multiple and sometimes interlinked, whether specific leftist inheritage (stalinism, campism, "Thirld Worldism") yes forms of racisms and orientalism, etc…

But moreover and more generally there is a skepticism in the possibility of mass collective action to achieve the goals of

the people, of **power from below**. This concept, which is at the heart of revolutionary politics, faces profound skepticism from some sections of the left. This should not prevent us, however, from building our solidarity on this basis.

Following the same narrative we have witnessed a call to unite under the lesser evil pragmatism of the coalition between Putin,Assad and Iran in order to ensure stability. Which is the outcome of this alliance during the recent years and against whom it has been forged?
This perception of these sections of the left is completely wrong and destructive of the "lesser evil". The solution to does not lie in the collaboration with authoritarian regimes like the Assad regime or collaboration with regional powers and international imperialist powers such as Russia, quite on the opposite.

I believe that we should analyse a State on its class basis and policies as rightly put by Pierre Frank, a French Trotskyist that wrote that: "Let us note that the greatest theoreticians of Marxism did not at all define the political nature of a bourgeois regime by the positions which the latter held in the field of foreign policy but solely and simply by the position it occupied in relation to the classes composing the nation". On this basis Syria, Russia and Iran are clearly not allies of working class people. We can see in Syria their destructive and murderous role.

The less evil is actually the road of defeat and the maintenance of an unjust system in which the popular classes in the region live. The role of revolutionaries is not to choose between different imperialist and regional powers. Our role is to oppose the different counter revolutionary forces and build an independent front from these two forms of reactions and basing it on democratic, social, anti-imperialist basis and opposing all forms of discrimination and working for the radical change of society in a dynamic from below in which the working classes the agent of change.

In conclusion, given the clashes or collaboration between the forces of reaction, let’s nor choose one form of the reaction, but support, build and organize a popular and radical alternative for the original objectives of the revolutions: democracy social justice and equality.

We Should oppose all foreign interventions. In addition, We must not imagine that the imperialist rivalries at the global level between the United States, China and Russia would be insurmountable for these powers, to the extent that these powers are in reality in relations of interdependence on many issues. All these regimes are bourgeois regimes that are and always will be the enemies of the popular revolutions, seeking to impose or strengthen a stable political context allowing them to accumulate and develop their political and economic capital in defiance of the popular classes. No regional or international power is a friend of the Syrian revolution as we have shown, just as it is not the imperialist contradictions that have been the source of the uprising in Syria or elsewhere as well in the region, but the political and socio-economic frustrations endured by the popular classes.

The regime’s refusal of any kind of opposition and the violence it has committed demonstrates that it has fascist tendencies. Were those evident and existing before the uprising and how did they interacted with the characteristics of the Syrian state and society?

The Assad despotic regime definitely has fascistic trends, demonstrated by its refusal of any kind of opposition and the violence it has committed. Regarding the nature of the Assad regime, I would argue it is a despotic, capitalist and patrimonial state ruling through violent repression and using various policies such as sectarianism, tribalism, conservatism, and racism to dominate society and mobilize a cross-class popular base linked through sectarian, regional, tribal and clientelist connections to defend the regime on a reactionary basis.

The patrimonial nature of the state means the centers of power (political, military and economic) within the regime are concentrated in one family and its clique, similar to Libya and the Gulf monarchies for example, therefore pushing the regime to use all the violence at its disposal to protect its rule.

It is therefore very far from being socialist, anti-imperialist and secular as presented by some among sectors of the western left, often ignorant of Syria.

Given the example of Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan some time ago, the USA intervention is more than catastrophic. Invasions became synonymous with US, it went to war against communism and now it leads war against islamist extremists. What is their goal in the region? How did the election of Trump affect US policies in the region, if it did? What should we expect and prepare for?

Let’s be clear we should oppose as well all the interventions of Washington in the region that are not made in the interest of the popular classes. The recent wars you mentioned or its support for different dictatorships in the region and their actions demonstrate this.

American policy is mired in a host of contradictions that flow from its weakened position after its setback in Iraq and the contradictory foreign policy between Trump and some sectors of US foreign affairs administration. Of course, the U.S. remains the most important power in the world, but it has witnessed a relative decline against international and regional rivals, particularly in the Middle East.

The failure of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the global economic and financial crisis of 2007 and 2008 were severe blows to the hegemony of the U.S. This left more space for other imperialist powers like China and Russia, but also benefited regional powers throughout the world. The relative

decline of the U.S. allowed all of these states to act more autonomously and even at times contrary to U.S. interests.

This is particularly visible in the Middle East. Russia has been able to increase its influence and play a significant role in Syria in saving the Assad regime, while various regional states like Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Israel have played a growing role in the region, intervening in the revolutionary processes in support of various actors in conflict with popular demands for democracy, social justice and equality.

US main policies in the Middle East are to defeat ISIS military and oppose Iranian influence in the region. At the same time, they want to come back to a form of stability in the region while undermining forces like Iran.

Like other imperialist and regional powers they want an end to the revolutionary processes in the region.

We are facing a complex situation but we jump easily to conclusions and side-taking. How can we serve the main struggle, in terms of internationalist solidarity, which is rather obvious: opposition to all imperialist and authoritarian actors intervening in Syria?

Yes, I agree with this conclusion.

Multiple things can be done. I think progressives should call for an end to the war, which has created terrible suffering. It has led to massive displacement of people within the country and driven millions out of it as refugees. The war only benefits the counter-revolutionary forces on all sides. From both a political and humanitarian perspective, the end of the war in Syria is an absolute necessity.

Likewise, we must reject all the attempts to legitimize Assad’s regime, and we must oppose all agreements that enable it to play any role in the country’s future. A blank check

given to Assad today will encourage future attempts by other despotic and authoritarian states to crush their populations if they come to revolt.

We have to guarantee as well the rights of civilians within Syria, particularly preventing more forced displacements and securing the rights of refugees (right of return, right for financial compensations in case of destruction of their houses, justice for the losses of their relatives, etc.).

Assad and his various partners in the regime must be held accountable for their crimes. The same goes for the Islamic fundamentalist and jihadist forces and other armed groups.

> *We need to support the democratic and progressive actors and movements against both sides of the counter-revolution: the regime and its Islamic fundamentalist opponents.*

We have to build a united front based on the initial objectives of the revolution: democracy, social justice, and equality, saying no to sectarianism and no to racism.

We of course need to oppose all imperialist and authoritarian actors intervening in Syria.

In their own countries, leftists internationally should also struggle:

-for the opening of borders for migrants and refugees and against building walls or transforming Europe for example into a fortress that would turn the Mediterranean Sea into a cemetery for migrants

-against all forms of Islamophobia and racism

-against all cooperation of Western states with despotic regimes and the Apartheid, colonial and racist state of Israel (in this latter case, support BDS campaigns)

-against more “security” and anti-democratic policies promoted in the name of “the war against terrorism.”

We must be clear on one thing, the impunity given to the continuous murderous crimes of Assad’s despotic regime with the assistance and/or complicity of international imperialist powers encourages other dictators and authoritarian regimes to repress violently their own people. This participates as well in a global international trend of authoritarianism present throughout the world, including among liberal democracies in the Western countries, with the advancement and deepening of neo-liberalism.

A coffee with Jacques Rancière beneath the Acropolis (pdf)

***A Coffee with Jacques Rancière beneath the Acropolis*, Political journal *Babylonia*, Athens, August 2017.**

The brochure of Babylonia “A Coffee with Jacques Rancière beneath the Acropolis” is now available for download in English. It contains the dialogue between Babylonia’s editorial team and Rancière, during **B-Fest 6**, 2017, on democracy, social movements, social change, the rise of the far-right and much more. Originally published in Greek in August 2017.

We met Jacques Rancière on Saturday, May 27, 2017, at the School of Fine Arts shortly before his speech at the B-Fest 6 International Anti-Authoritarian Festival, organized by Babylonia Journal, with a central slogan “We are

ungovernable”. Rancière is among the most important European philosophers alive and his work does not need further introductions.

In the cloudy morning of Sunday 28 May, we sat beneath the Acropolis to have a coffee with the big philosopher. The transcript of our conversation reflects the vigor of thought and the passion of a truly democratic thinker.

Download (PDF, 314KB)

Political Parties: Obstacle to Democracy

Yavor Tarinski

If understood to the letter, a Democracy must be a stateless society. Power belongs to the people insofar as the people exercise it themselves
Giovanni Sartori [1]

The contemporary political model, vulgarly named democracy, is undergoing deep crisis, which can be attributed to many of its systemic features and the political parties are among the main reasons for it. The Party, once encompassing massive social support and powerful movements, has become today synonymous with dishonesty, greed for power and corruption. Many have embarked on journey to recreate it in different ways that strive at mimicking the grassroots, decentralized character of

contemporary social movements and the internet.

Some party formations emerged, as they claim, from the movement of the squares that swept Europe in the beginning of 2010’s decade, like the Spanish Podemos. Others were influenced by contemporary hacker culture like the numerous Pirate parties. Some former occupy activists initiated the “Occupy the Democrats” campaign, attempting at using the logic of the Occupy movement for overtaking the Democratic Party of the US. All of these and other similar initiatives however remain with questionable results at best.

Totalitarian birth

The negative outlook that political parties have is not due to some distortion but logical continuation of the essence on which electoral politics rest. The introduction of political parties into European public life in the late 17th century should be considered not as step towards democratization of society but as continuation of the oligarchic tradition.

In England, as political theorist Hanna Pitkin explains[2], representation was introduced from above, by the King, as a matter of administrative control and royal convenience over non-royal localities. Situated between the monarchical elite and subordinated communities, representatives, with their role being institutionalized, began viewing themselves as single, continuing body, pursuing its own interests. Political representation, as foundational basis of the political party, slowly became a matter of privilege, to be fought for, rather than a burden or a mere task.

Their oppressive character is also being demonstrated by the philosopher Simone Weil for whom the Party is to a certain extent heritage of political terror[3]. Its role in the popular uprisings of Europe in the last centuries has been expression of its oligarchical nature, sabotaging democratic efforts “from below” in the name of top-to-bottom solutions

offered by the State. Weil's conclusion that totalitarianism is the *original sin of all political parties* echoes Mikhail Tomsky's famous saying: "One party in power and all the others in jail"[4].

In popular uprisings and revolutions societies express certain tendency towards spontaneous grassroots social organizing based on councils and local assemblies. This is what Hannah Arendt calls *lost treasure of revolution* – the creation of truly public space in which every citizen can freely and equally participate in the management of society[5]. This "treasure", as a break in the bureaucratic oligarchical tradition, becomes target of centralized state power and political parties, whose existance this new social direction radically challenges.

The current system, at whose core is the party politics, has nothing to do with democracy in its authentic sense. Instead of providing the means for people to directly express their views, concerns and solutions on public affairs, political parties tend to exploit popular passions, polarizing societies into majorities and minorities, using the former as a tool to serve their narrow interests.

A common and essential characteristic of all political parties, both on the Left and the Right, as noted recently by author Raul Zibechi[6], is their **obsession with power**. For if they are to succsesfuly fulfill their electoral task that justifies their existence, they must secure for themselves vast amounts of authority. Yet, as electoral politics place political parties in constant competition on national level, while foreign states and private companies are also constantly trying to interfere with the dominant discourse, power is never enough and soon becomes an end in itself. And since there is never limit for the power that each party strives at possessing, it comes as no surprise why so many thinkers has come to view the institution of the party as essentially totalitarian.

One more way in which representative politics hinders democratic deliberation is the former's tendency towards encouragement of antisocial, disordered-like, behaviors. Clinical psychologist Oliver James claims that psychopathy thrives in hierarchical organizations. According to him "triadic [personality disordered] behavior flourishes where ruthless, devious selfishness is advantageous and where an individual is very concerned to gain power, resources or status"[7]. Jacques Ranciere, in an interview for the Greek National Television ERT3[8], also suggests that political representation and electoralism attracts the worst of people, i.e. those that seek power for power's sake. Thus the competitive and hierarchical nature of political parties attracts ambitious, narcissistic individuals, turning them into psychopaths (or encourages them to act as such).

Political "betrayal"

By recognizing the logical connection between representative institutions (like political parties) and unlimited hunger for power we can easely debunk the widely propagated myth of "politicians's betrayal" of pre-election promises. Its worth noting that this mythical narrative most often comes from electoral candidates or thinkers that support the *status quo* and through it they strive at scapegoating individual "traitors" so as to maintain the integrity of the party system.

Cornelius Castoriadis compares would-be-representatives with merchants of junk that try to push their stuff on us, even if that means saying lies[9]. As he says, what electoral competitors are doing is **trying to deceive, not betray us.** Professional politicians are not traitors but servants of other interests. The electoral race requires competing parties to outbid each other on promises they don't intend to keep and images they will maintain as long as they bring them votes.

The notion of public interest, most often depicted as

national, is a good example for the kind of deception that is being used by political parties. It is constantly being invoked by governments and electoral candidates to serve them as cover for their quest for authority and generate them popular support. In short, politicians attempt at gaining or strengthening their own power by deceiving the essentially powerless electorate that the immense political inequality, which is constantly being reproduced by representative democracy, is of mutual benefit. Thus, it is no wonder why the language of patriotism and nationalism is among the most preferred by governments of any kind.

It is understandable, however, that people might feel betrayed by political parties. In a representative system that strips society from any meaningful means for effective self-instituting people are left with no other options in the public space but to either place their hopes (and thus their votes) on certain electoral competitor, or resort to abstention from voting. But in reality parties were not and can never truly be on the side of grassroots communities, first and foremost because they are immensely more politically privileged than them.

Nowadays this matter is being further complicated by the dual processes of globalization and financialization. In the contemporary neoliberal era elected politicians, as Jerome Roos explains[10], are being reduced to managers whose function is increasingly that of making the state apparatus work for the profits of bankers and businessmen. It is not to say that the representative institutions are stripped from their powers, but they are being separated even further from society by additional layers of multinational corporate interests.

Party membership and individuality

Contemporary representative oligarchies are making it impossible for individuals and communities to intervene in

public affairs without joining or intervening with political parties. Official tools for citizen participation like petitioning and referendums most often have non-obligatory character and are doomed to fail if not backed by any party. Citizenship today is nothing but illusory, since people are forced with the dilemma between withdrawing altogether from the public sphere or submit to party interest. Instead of citizens we have electorate whose concerns for social matters are being crushed by the party's quest for influence and power.

Unlike the pluralism nurtured by deliberative bodies for participatory decision-making like councils and popular assemblies, political parties demand the maintenance of a party line, even though nowadays they seem to appear more flexible in this aspect. By joining a party, one is expected to agree to its entire program or at least submit to it, since in crucial moments he/she will be expected to support it or leave. Even if he has not previously been familiar with it, he is supposed to endorse it in its entirity, or to not expect much from his newly acquired membership. Often different aspects of such programs appear to be contradictory with each other, since in their race for power parties sometimes take mutually exclusive positions. As Simone Weil concludes[11], whoever joins a political party is expected to submit his thinking to the authority of the party.

Although parties claim that they offer space for political participation and education to their members and supporters, the reality appears to be much different. What they do instead is spreading rigorous ideological propaganda through which the party elite to exercise control over the new reqruits and the electorate. Parties that attempt at not doing so find it difficult to achieve significant electoral victories.

As a result of this propaganda party members and supporters tend to adopt certain ideological and political "brands". This

“branding” replaces political thinking. One begins approaching public affairs as member of this party and supporter of that ideology, instead of critically evaluating social problems and individually or collectively developing solutions to them.

Parties tend to create positions in favor of or against certain option and call on the electorate to stand behind their position. Taking sides replaces public deliberation with reality being twisted by each party accordingly to its stance, instead of being analyzed in **contextual manner**. Many have suggested that this logic has spread into all spheres of human life.

Handling popular dissatisfaction

As mentioned above, political parties are bureaucratic organizations that breed oligarchy, not democracy. Their electoral hierarchical nature enforces statecraft, rather than direct public participation, while giving the illusion of being the link between the public and the institutions of authority.

The attitude political parties adopt is twofold. On the one hand, they do everything they can so as to reassert their hold on state power through making powerful allies, briberies, backstage schemes and mass propaganda. On the other hand, they have to respond to demands and matters rised “from below”, by social movements and popular resistance, either by crushing them or by introducing decorative reforms meant at reducing the pressure.

This second level of handling social dissatisfaction can be separated into two subcategories. The first one includes smear campaigns, briberies and threatenings that are being directed towards activists and community organizers so as their movements’s social credibility and integrity to be hurt. This approach is often used by governments on the Right, as recently demonstrated clearly by Donald Trump’s

administration[12]. The second one is compounded by the cooptation of social movements through offering positions of power to influential activists and inactment of reforms that create the illusion of specific issues being resolved, as was the case with some *Pink Tide* governments of South America[13]. This is preferred strategy by the Left when in power.

Institutions beyond parties

It is important to note here, that the problem with political parties is not that they are institutions, as some of their most vigorous critics would insist, but that they are **bureaucratic organizations**. Real, direct democracy, where emancipated citizens directly decide on all issues of public life and are actively involved in the implementation of the taken decisions, requires institutions with participatory character, that are however embedded in and nurturing one radical imaginary, that makes the values and goals of democratic life thinkable and possible.

Unlike the above mentioned grassroots institutions, political parties participate completely in the imaginary of heteronomy. Their form, structure, organization and ideology are essentially bureaucratic and strengthens oligarchy, whether in more or less liberal outlook. Their very existence is a potential obstacle to democracy, constantly suggesting that people are not mature enough to participate in the public sphere as citizens and instead guardians must be nominated to govern them.

A society without institutions, as Castoriadis suggests[14], cannot exist. Thus the efforts at dismantling the state apparatus and other contemporary bureaucratic institutions that enforce inequality and oppression cannot be proceeded without the establishment of parallel grassroots institutions that nurture equality and emancipation. Their creation and maintenance certainly will have its difficulties as no social activity, including that of autonomous organizations and

movements, can go unaffected by the dominant order. No one can completely separate himself or his group from the overall of society, but only this necessary step of **exercising democracy** can allow transformation towards forms of social organization and civic culture. And this necessarily includes popular grassroots organizing beyond institutional forms of oligarchy, such as the political party.

Conclusion

Political parties are part of the problem, not the solution. The high levels of alienation and passivity in our contemporary societies are essentially product of capitalism and representation. The electoral spectacle offered by competing political parties seems to resemble to a big degree the one, created by the neoliberal market. The hopes of many on the Left that the former could potentially restrain the latter are naive, to say the least. What they essentially are is different forms of heteronomy, I.e. determination of people's life by outside sources, beyond their reach or control.

Democracy, because of its popularity and potential, is being used by the ruling elites and their intellectual supporters, to mask the oligarchic nature of the contemporary party system. This has mislead many into blaming popular passions for the oppression, theft and exploitation being done by one government after another. Thus the far-right, with its call for diminishing freedoms in the name of security has grown in popularity.

It is not democracy to be blamed, but the complete lack of it. The absence of broad public participation allows to competing ruling elites to get hold on power and do as they please. For them popular deliberation is undesirable as it will end their reign over society and thats why they replace it with party electoralism. The dominant institutions, on which their authority is being based are constructed so as to embody this

“hatred of democracy”, to borrow the phrase developed by Jacques Ranciere[15].

For significant social change to take place, a mere imitation of politics, a simulation of public action, like the one exercised by political parties, will simply not do. What is desperately needed is what Hanna Pitkin calls real experience of active citizenship. And this necesserily goes through the reinvention of democracy beyond political parties.

Notes:

[1] Amadeo Bertolo: *Democracy and Beyond* in “Democracy and Nature” Vol.5, No.1, 1993
[2] https://www.athene.antenna.nl/ARCHIEF/NR08-Parlement/Pitkin-REPRESENTATION.html
[3] Simone Weil: *On the Abolition of All Political Parties*, New York Review of Books 2013, p.15
[4] Op. Cit. 3
[5] Hannah Arendt: *On Revolution*, Penguin Books 1990, pp215-282
[6] https://freedomnews.org.uk/venezuela-state-power-when-the-left-is-the-problem/
[7] https://new-compass.net/articles/will-disordered-always-rule-us
[8] Interviewed for the series Τόποι Ζωής (Topoi Zois) of the Greek National Television ERT3 (available online here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zmzJxlw2GM)
[9] Cornelius Castoriadis: *The Castoriadis Reader* (ed. David Ames Curtis), Blackwell Publishers Ltd 1997, p.41
[10] https://roarmag.org/essays/autonomy-revolution-movements-democracy-capitalism/
[11] Simone Weil: *On the Abolition of All Political Parties*, New York Review of Books 2013, p.43

[12] https://newrepublic.com/article/144592/trump-creating-propaganda-state
[13] https://isj.org.uk/latin-america-new-left-governments/
[14] Cornelius Castoriadis: *Figures of the Thinkable*, Stanford University Press 2007, p.124
[15] Jacques Ranciere: *Hatred of Democracy*, Verso 2014

Ecological Thinking and the Crisis of the Earth

John Clark*

Facing the Crisis

If a visitor from another galaxy were sent to Earth to report on the latest news here, it seems rather obvious what the alien observer would take back to the home planet. Our extraterrestrial investigator would certainly report that our planet is going through one of the six periods of mass extinction and biodiversity loss in its entire four and half billion-year history, and that other major disruptions in the biosphere are interacting to cause a major crisis for life on Earth.

In short, the big story from Planet Earth would be that we have entered a period of **massive planetary death**. In fact, among the many names that have been suggested for the emerging era or epoch of life on Earth, the most precisely appropriate would be the ***Necrocene***, the "new era of death."[1] Strangely, this rather shocking news is met with either denial or disavowal among the members of our own species, who are living

in the very midst of this crisis. The deniers among us simply reject the clear evidence of global ecological crisis. The disavowers, on the other hand, accept the truth of the evidence but fail to undertake actions that are even vaguely proportional to the gravity of our predicament.

Information on the severity of the ecological crisis has hardly been a well-kept secret. For example, researchers at the Stockholm Resilience Centre and their colleagues have in recent years formulated a conception of "planetary boundaries" defining the limits in various areas beyond which there is likelihood of ecological disaster. They summarized their findings in three concise articles that are readily available to the public.[2] The authors concluded that "transgressing one or more planetary boundaries may be deleterious or even catastrophic due to the risk of crossing thresholds that will trigger non-linear, abrupt environmental change within continental- to planetary-scale systems."[3]

The boundaries were identified as lying in the areas of climate change, ocean acidification, stratospheric ozone depletion, biogeochemical nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, global freshwater use, rate of biodiversity loss, land-system change, chemical pollution, and atmospheric aerosol loading. They found that at least three boundaries had already been passed and that most others are in danger of being transgressed soon. In the most recent article, the authors concluded that "two core boundaries—climate change and biosphere integrity—have been identified, each of which has the potential on its own to drive the Earth system into a new state should they be substantially and persistently transgressed."[4]

It is not only scientists who have sounded the alarm about ecological crisis in rather clear and not uncertain terms. Recently, *The Guardian*, a major British newspaper, announced the gravity of the biodiversity crisis in almost alarmist language, saying that the "biological annihilation' of

wildlife in recent decades means a sixth mass extinction in Earth's history is under way" and that "it threatens the survival of human civilization, with just a short window of time in which to act."[5]

Yet, this seemingly inflammatory article was not at the top of the stories for the day, and if one reads the numerous readers' replies to it, one finds very little sense of direction about how to respond to this developing global catastrophe. Furthermore, such news somehow quickly fades from the popular consciousness. One might therefore conclude that there is simply not enough good "environmental thinking" going on in today's world. It might seem that the public is just not prepared to understand adequately the meaning of global ecological crisis, and is therefore incapable of facing it with full seriousness. Thus, there are injunctions that we need to work harder on creating good environmental education so that the public can engage in more effective environmental thinking.

Granted, this would be a very good thing. However, one of the problems with conventional ideas of "environmental thinking" or even "ecological thinking" is that it assumes that correct thinking will in itself have a significant transformative effect, or more to the point, the kind of effect that will be necessary in order to avoid disaster. For example, it is thought to be crucial that climate deniers be convinced that anthropogenic climate change really exists. This is not at all a bad idea, but it almost inevitably ignores the fact that that the vast majority of *non-deniers* are in a state of *disavowal*, and that reformed deniers are highly likely to join the ranks of these disavowers. The disavowers are willing to admit that a problem exists, and may get certain satisfactions out of being on "the right side of history," and perhaps even from engaging in various beneficial activities that reduce greenhouse gasses. However, they are not willing to consider, and then actually work diligently for, the kind of deep,

fundamental changes in society that will be necessary to change the ecocidal course of history.

A basic problem for the problematic of "better environmental thinking" is that the needed transformation cannot result from abstract thought and the understanding of concepts, but can only come from engaged thinking that is an integral part of an engaged participation in transformative social ecological processes. We need therefore to consider how such engagement might begin to take place. But first, we might consider further the implications of our modes of thinking.

> *Part of the problem with the appeal to "environmental thinking" is the very idea of the "environment".*

The dominant conception of "the environment" assumes a certain practical ontology. According to this ontology, there is a world that consists of individual egos surrounded by "environments," and societies that consist of collections of separate egos, surrounded in turn by larger "environments." This prevailing conception of the environment is an expression of the binary subject–object thinking that is built into to the dominant social ideology. Meanings are social, not merely individual. Thus, even when this ontology is not consciously intended, or when it is even abstractly rejected, such a problematic reinforces the pervasive hierarchical dualism that is the deep ideology of civilization. Given such problems, explicitly *ecological* thinking is a great advance over *environmental* thinking.

The term "ecology," derives from the Greek terms *oikos* and *logos*. It is concerned with the *logos,* or underlying meaning, truth, and way of the *oikos*, the local, regional, or planetary household. In its emphasis on the *oikos*, ecological thinking replaces both the egocentric and the anthropocentric perspective with the perspective of the larger ecological whole. This is a whole that is never a completed or closed

totality, but rather a whole that is always in a process of becoming whole. The ecological whole is an ever-becoming-one that is also an ever-becoming-many, a dynamic unity-in-diversity.

Ecological thinking is inspired by the quest for the social-ecological equivalent of what Hegel called the "concrete universal," the universal that must always be expressed through the particular and the singular, the regional and the local, the communal and the personal. This implies that we need to contemplate how we fit into the planetary dialectic of developing parts and wholes. Our question here is how we might begin to develop a thought and practice that is in accord with such a truly social-ecological perspective, and that will open a clear pathway out of our planetary crisis.

Finding the Way

Though it cannot be developed in any detail in this introductory discussion, the answer that seems most promising is that we begin to create a well-grounded and multi-dimensional social and political base for the regeneration of human community and the community of life on Earth. This means reorganizing our social world into networks of awakened and caring transformational communities that are dedicated to undertaking whatever actions are necessary to put an end to the Necrocene and initiate a new era characterized by the flourishing of life on Earth. We might call such a new era the ***Eleutherocene*** – the era of a liberated humanity and a liberated nature.

In this endeavor, we can find inspiration in the ancient Buddhist concept of Appamāda. "Appamāda" is a Pali word ("Apramada" in Sanskrit) that conveys the ideas of both "mindfulness" and "care." The practice of Appamāda implies that we must be awakened to the world and all the beings around us, and that in such an awakened state we become capable of responding to and caring for them effectively. In

this, it has much in common with concepts in contemporary feminist, and especially ecofeminist, care ethics, which rejects the patriarchal model of an abstract ethics of principles in favor of an approach that non-dualistically recognizes the inseparability of moral rationality, moral sensibility, and moral imagination.[6] It affirms that what we need more than anything is neither environmental thinking, which takes us in the wrong direction, nor even ecological thinking, which takes us only part of the way, but an *ethos* of Appamāda that pervades and shapes both our everyday practice and our social institutions. The practice of care involves attention to the truth of all beings, acceptance of the way of all beings, and responsiveness to the needs of all beings. It also implies engagement in the personal, social, and political practice that is necessary to establish mindful care for all beings in our purview and for the Earth itself as our overriding priority.

Such an outlook of attentiveness, acceptance and responsiveness helps us discover what we might call the "Four Noble Truths about the Earth."[7] These truths are that the Earth is suffering, there is a cause of the Earth's suffering, there is a cure to the Earth's suffering, and there is a way to achieve the cure to the Earth's suffering.[8] As in the case of the ancient Noble Truths, we find that our craving is the cause of all this suffering. This craving has a transhistorical element, but develops to differing degrees and takes on different qualities in different historical contexts. So, in order to cure our own suffering and that of the Earth, we must come to an understanding of the very particular, historically conditioned, nature of the craving that causes it. We all have knowledge of its nature at some level. If we cannot express it consciously, we do so through our symptoms and our defense mechanism. However, to authentically confront our predicament we must develop a clear, fully-conscious awareness of its nature, and the ways that it causes the suffering of the Earth, the suffering of a myriad of other

living beings on Earth, the suffering of billions of other human beings, and our own personal suffering. We must understand, for example, how the craving that causes of the suffering of the billion human beings who live in a world of absolute poverty also causes the suffering of another billion who live in an affluent world of nihilistic egoism.

We must, moreover, understand that the craving that causes so much suffering has, in turn, a cause of its own. This cause is the world in which most of us live, which is best described as the late capitalist society of mass consumption. It is this society, as a powerfully functioning yet self-contradictory social whole, that generates a certain form of selfhood that is inclined to obsessive desires, powerful addictions, and sick attachments. As Jason Moore has aptly stated it, the crisis we are facing is above all "capitalogenic,"[9] though this should not lead us to neglect the degree to which it is simultaneously "statogenic" and "patriarchogenic." There is an entire system of production that depends on the generation of such craving to operate successfully (at least in the pre-catastrophic short term). There is an entire system of consumption that feeds such craving. There is an entire culture of consumption that socializes us into believing that a world of obsessive craving is the only one possible, or, if we do not believe that this is true, socializes us into resigning ourselves in practice to the inevitability of that world, and to living our lives as if it were true.

As in the case of the ancient Noble Truths, the cure to the suffering is not merely knowing the cause of the disease, or even knowing that the cause must be removed. The teaching was that the cure can only be carried out through following the Way, which was called the Noble Eightfold Path. There was no onefold, twofold or threefold path. The cure was not effected by choosing one or more forms of practice that appealed most to one personally, or that seemed to be leading generally in the right direction, or that might "hopefully" have some kind

of mysterious “snowball effect.” This would be succumbing to mere whim or superstition. The path consisted of all the forms of practice that were necessary to carry out the radical transformation that was needed. The promise was that if the path is followed “another world is possible.”

How is this World Possible?

So, we are in need of another world—another world that we find in many ways by returning in a more awakened and compassionate way to this one. However, the means by which “another world” might be actualized (the Way) has not been given enough of the kind of diligent thought that is inseparable from effective social practice. “Another world is possible” becomes mere abstract escapist ideology unless it is expressed through transformative action that is not only prophetically “pre-figurative,” but also immediately “figurative.” Such action announces the arrival of another world and shows us the very “face” of that other world, here and now. It is in an important sense “world-making,” for no world ever exists, including the present one, except by unceasing, moment-to-moment efforts on the part of all its inhabitants to make that world.

But it is also in a very important sense *openness* to the world and to its common Logos, in opposition to the privatized or “idiotic”[10] *logoi* that are egoically generated artifacts. “Another world is possible” in part because that other world is a creative possibility. But another world is also possible because that other world has existed and still endures in the midst of the present one. We must therefore give much thought to the questions of *how the present social world is possible*, and *how it can be made impossible.* This means that we need to undertake a thorough inquiry into the major spheres of social determination that are the grounds of possibility of any world, either actually-existing or imagined.

There are four spheres of determination that are essential to

the analysis of how social reality is generated, how it is maintained, and how it might be transformed. These spheres are the social institutional structure, the social ideology, the social imaginary, and the social ethos.[11]

Since there is a dialectical relationship between these spheres, they should not be thought of as discrete realms. For example, no social institutional structure is conceivable without reference to the social ethos, since structures embody, in part, structures of social practice. Thus, mass media as an institutional structure is inseparable from forms of concrete social practice that make use of and are in turn deeply conditioned by mass media technologies.

Similarly, no social imaginary signification is conceivable apart from its relation to social ideology, since images in many ways reflect and interact with concepts. For example, the imaginary signification "rugged individualist" reflects and interacts with moral injunctions about the virtues of "hard work" and "self-reliance" that form part of the social ideology. Very significantly, the megastructures of the society of advanced consumer capitalism, the technobureaucratic militaristic state, and the technological megamachine all immediately generate awe-inspiring images of power and wealth. In short, the spheres of determination are theoretical constructs or systemic abstractions that are useful in analyzing a social whole that consists of constellations of phenomena that interact dialectically and are internally related.

It will perhaps be helpful to summarize the nature of these four interrelated spheres of social determination. The social institutional sphere consists of the objective and external structures of social determination (when abstracted from the simultaneously internal-external and objective-subjective social whole). It includes, notably, the structure of capital and its various sectors, the structure of the state apparatus, and the structure of the technological and bureaucratic

systems. It includes the external, formal structure of social practices, and the material infrastructure, since institutions consist not merely of structural principles, but of the actual structuration of material resources in accord with such principles.

The other three spheres are the internal and subjective realms of social determination (given all the qualifications just mentioned). It is important that we not look upon the relation between the "objective" institutional sphere and the three "subjective" spheres as a "base-superstructure" relationship, but rather one of mutual determination and internal relation. Thus, perhaps paradoxically, the "external" is *internally* related to the "internal."

The second sphere of social determination consists of the social ethos. "Ethos" is used in the sense of the constellation of social practices that constitute a way of life. Ethos is the sphere of social psychological reality. It can only be understood through a very specific analysis of everyday life and all the habits, practices, gestures, and rituals that it entails. Ethos consists of the way that we live and enact the social and cultural world in which we live, and which lives in and through us. The common weakness of counter-ideologies to which many give lip-service, and in which some believe very deeply, results from the fact that they abstractly theorize that "another world is possible," but the adherents proclaim and legislate through their everyday lives, through their immersion in the dominant social ethos, that "this world is inevitable."

The third sphere of social determination is the realm of the social imaginary. This is the sphere of the society's or community's collective fantasy life. It is the realm of the "fundamental fantasy," a self-image that is much more highly invested with psychic energy than any mere "self-concept,' and which is a central determinant in the life of each person. The social imaginary includes socially-conditioned images of self,

other, society, and nature. It encompasses the images of power, success, heroism, and personal gratification expressed in the prevailing myths and paradigmatic narratives of the community and culture. The study of the social imaginary explores the social dimensions of desire and demand. Because social imaginary significations are so intimately related to our quest for meaning, and, in the contemporary world, for self-justification, they are invested with intense levels of psychic energy. Much as in the case of the social ethos, this sphere has been generally neglected not only in mainstream social theory, but also in most leftist and radical social thought.

Finally, the fourth sphere of social determination is the realm of social ideology. A social ideology can mean simply a system of ideas that is socially significant and contains a greater or lesser degree of truth and value to the society. However, in the critical sense, an ideology is a system of ideas that purports to be an objective depiction of reality, but, in fact, constitutes a systematic distortion of reality on behalf of some particularistic interest or some system of differential power. Though we might be tempted to say that we need to replace the dominant institutional structure, social imaginary, social ethos and social ideology with new liberatory ones, in the case of ideology it would be better to say that we aim to replace all social ideology with a new form of ecological and communitarian reason (thus, restoring the common Logos).

What is important for liberatory social transformation is an understanding of the ways in which the spheres of social determination interact dialectically to create a social world. Among the major goals of the project of a dialectical social ecology are the following: to theorize adequately, and in a historically and empirically-grounded manner, the spheres of social determination as spheres of dialectical mutual determination; to explore the ways in which the interaction

between these spheres of social determination shapes the nature of the social whole; to explain the ways in which many elements of these spheres also contradict and subvert one another, and thus to point the way toward possibilities beyond the existing social world; and to demonstrate the relation between the modes of functioning and the dynamic movement and transformation of these spheres and the social ecological crisis of humanity and the Earth.

**John Clark* *is a native of the Island of New Orleans, where his family has lived for twelve generations. He is Professor Emeritus at Loyola University, where he was formerly Gregory F. Curtin Distinguished Professor of Humane Letters and the Professions, Professor of Philosophy, and a member of the Environment Program. He is Coordinator of La Terre Institute for Community and Ecology. Its programs are aimed at social and ecological regeneration and the creation of a cooperative, non-dominating earth community. He also works with the Institute for the Radical Imagination in New York. Author of many books. His interests include dialectical thought, ecological philosophy, environmental ethics, anarchist and libertarian thought, the social imaginary, cultural critique, Buddhist and Daoist philosophy, and the crisis of humanity and the Earth. An archive of about three hundred of his texts can be found at https://loyno.academia.edu/JohnClark. He has long been active in the radical ecology and communitarian anarchist movements, and is a member of the Education Workers' Union of the Industrial Workers of the World.*

***This text is a revised version of an article written for the 10th anniversary issue of the Journal of Environmental Thought and Education (Japan).*

_____-

Notes:

[1] This would focus quite logically on the fact that the current "new era of death" follows an era called the "Cenozoic," meaning the "new era of life." The current era is a radical break with the Cenozoic, but is continuous with the developments in the brief epoch called the "Holocene" (meaning the "entirely recent").

[2] Johan Rockström et al. "A Safe Operating Space for Humanity," in *Nature* 461 (Sept. 2009): 472 –75. Johan Rockström et al. "Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity," in *Ecology and Society* 14, no. 2 (2009), online at https://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol14/iss2/art32/; and a recent update, Will Stefens et al., "Planetary Boundaries: Guiding Human Development on a Changing Planet" in *Science* (13 Feb 2015): Vol. 347, No. 6223 (Feb. 13, 2015); online at https://science.sciencemag.org/content/347/6223/1259855.full, in which there is a new focus on five planetary boundaries that have "strong regional operating scales." The delineation of areas in which boundaries are located was also revised slightly.

[3] Rockström et al. (2009)

[4] Stefens et al. (2015)

[5] Damian Carrington, "Earth's sixth mass extinction event under way, scientists warn," in *The Guardian* (July 10, 2017); online at https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/jul/10/earths-sixth-mass-extinction-event-already-underway-scientists-warn.

[6] The most advanced form is materialist ecofeminism, which situates the ethical most explicitly in real-world practice and everyday life. It shows that the most significant sphere of ethical practice today, and our model in many ways for social-ecological transformation, remains the caring labor of women and indigenous people around the world. See Ariel

Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx, and the Postmodern* (London: Zed Books, 1997); new edition forthcoming.

[7] "Truth" should not be taken in the sense of "object of belief," but rather in the sense of a "truth-process" that encompasses both understanding and engagement.

[8] By "suffering" is meant damage to the good of a being and interference with the flourishing of that being. Suffering is manifested in all dimensions of a being's existence. The ancient teaching pointed out that the subjective manifestation of suffering is a feeling of pervasive dissatisfaction with the world. Accordingly, the Earth's objective suffering is manifested subjectively (within the Earth's self-conscious dimensions or "organs of consciousness") through an ethos of anxiety and depression and through a nihilistic sensibility and ideology.

[9] See, for example, Jason W. Moore, "The Myth of the 'Human Enterprise': The Anthropos and Capitalogenic Change" on *World-Ecological Imaginations: Power and Production in the Web of Life* (Oct. 30, 2016); online at https://jasonwmoore.wordpress.com/2016/10/30/the-myth-of-the-human-enterprise-the-anthropos-and-capitalogenic-change/.

[10] From the Greek idiōtēs, a private person.

[11] See John P. Clark, *The Impossible Community: Realizing Communitarian Anarchism* (New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). The conceptualization of "four spheres" of social determination seems the most useful theoretically. Yet, there are, of course, valid alternative conceptualizations of a social topology of such spheres. The social imaginary as discussed here encompasses the Lacanian imaginary and symbolic orders (or "registers"). Some theoretical advantages would be gained and some lost by dividing the sphere of the social imaginary into two spheres in a Lacanian manner. Furthermore, there are, of course, other useful social topologies, such as

a topology of fields, that are not discussed here, but which may further deepen and enrich the analysis.

[12] This story is summarized concisely in Clive Ponting, "Destruction and Survival" in *A New Green History of the World: The Environment and the Collapse of Great Civilizations* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), pp. 67-86, though perhaps no one has summarized it more succinctly than the anarchist Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley in his poem "Ozymandias."

[13] As subsequent discussions will show, we find powerful evidence of progress in this direction in the Zapatista communities in Chiapas, in the Democratic Autonomy movement in Rojava, and in indigenous movements in Bolivia and elsewhere.

[14] To revise and ecologize further a famous formulation of Marx that was restated in a more visionary form by Herbert Marcuse in his concept of the "liberation of nature." See Karl Marx, "Private Property and Labor" in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, online at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/epm/3rd.htm, and Herbert Marcuse, "Nature and Revolution" in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), pp. 59-78.

[15] We would thus achieve the kind of ecological sensibility expressed in Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme's *The Universe Story From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era—A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos* (New York: Harper, 1994), but the rebirth would also entail creating the material and social-ecological basis for such a sensibility to prevail historically.