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## EDITORIAL PERSPECTIVES

### IN THIS ISSUE

We begin this time with a brief but fascinating survey of Marx's studies and comments on Africa, by Stefan Kalmring and Andreas Nowak ("Viewing Africa with Marx: Remarks on Marx's Fragmented Engagement with the African Continent"). Kalmring and Nowak trace the evolution of Marx's views, from a relatively unmediated support for the modernizing role of capitalist penetration to a more subtle sense of the nature of colonialism and imperialism and the importance of anti-colonial struggles to the working-class cause as such. Despite the limited nature of Marx's work on Africa — and the authors do not attempt to downplay this — there is a strong combination of minute empirical observation, on the one hand, and grounding in theory, on the other. In particular, Marx's thinking always had a powerful comparative thrust, seeking both similarities and differences among historical processes in China, India and Africa.

Australian political economist Bill Dunn contributes to the general project of theorizing world capitalism in its most recent and current stages of development — a project that of course is a central and open-ended concern of the S&S community. Dunn's novel take on all this is to present, compare and contrast two important frameworks: the "monopoly capital" position of Paul Baran & Paul Sweezy and the "Monthly Review" school; and the theory of "unequal exchange," as formulated most explicitly in the work of French theorist Arghiri Emmanuel. Dunn's explication of these approaches will be very useful to readers approaching them for the first time. He also, however, goes beyond the pedagogic role to outline a critical perspective, from a general Marxist standpoint: the insights afforded by the two schools "gain greater critical purchase when incorporated into a more classically Marxist framework and understood as more provisional and testable research hypotheses."

In his study, "Materialist Dialectics and Biophysical Worlds," Salvatore Engel-Di Mauro returns to the time-honored, but ever-useful, debate about

whether — in Marx, and Engels, and arguably in reality — the dialectic is ontologically present in, and methodologically applicable to, the non-human (biophysical) world. Engels' "science of interconnections" approach is still basic; affirmation of the universality of the dialectic, however, must be reconciled with a call for precision and avoidance of semantic derailment. In the spirit of dialectics, universality and particularity exist in close interrelationship with one another, and the specificity of the human, as revealed by the dialectics of consciousness and agency, must also be addressed.

The book by S&S Editor David Laibman, *Passion and Patience: Society, History and Revolutionary Vision*, is the subject of a Symposium involving four authors: Steve Ellner, Tom Brass, Stavros Mavroudeas, and the team of Mizhar Mikati and Rupinder Minhas, plus a brief response by the author. I will step into first-person, briefly, to thank the participants for their contributions, and their criticisms. If the book — and this journal, from which much of its contents was gleaned — is in any way useful to others as we move forward with the science of human liberation, on all fronts, especially in these perilous and demanding times, I will be more than gratified.

Our Communications section has one item: "Carchedi's Dialectics: A Critique," by Kaan Kangal. This refers to work by Guglielmo Carchedi from S&S in 2008 and 2012, and resonates well with the article by Engel-Di Mauro. Kangal, in effect, points to a possible contradiction between Carchedi's endorsement of the position that is critical of a "dialectics of nature," on the one hand; and his desire to support the universality of mathematics, on the other. If mathematics is inherently dialectical, and if both nature and society are mathematical (at some level), then do we not return to some form of Engels' "science of universal interconnection"?

Finally, we offer a review article, by John Gonzalez, on a fascinating book, published in St. Petersburg, Russia in 1908: *Karl Marx (1818–1883): Twenty-Five Years Since His Death (1883–1908)*. As we approach the 200th anniversary of Marx's birth, it is, well, *fun* to find a collection that memorialized him after only 25 years. The collection, moreover, is a veritable pantheon of major figures, including V. I. Lenin, Grigorii Zinov'ev, Lev Borisovich Kamenev, Karl Brenner, Henriette Roland Holst-van der Schalk, and Rosa Luxemburg. This 1908 homage to Marx by a group of major Russian and other European figures may also serve as a sort of harbinger of the next issue of S&S, forthcoming (appropriately) as the October 2017 issue: "The Russian Revolution: One Century Later."

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## **MARXISM IN OUR TIME**

*Notes from the Editor*

### **SYRIZA: THE LEFT IN GOVERNMENT, WHEN “GOVERNMENT” AND *POWER* DIVERGE**

Last September, the Second Congress of Syriza (Greece’s Coalition of the Radical Left) was held in Athens. The party’s leader and the country’s Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras, was re-elected, with about 93% of the vote.

Everyone knows the basic story: a Syriza-led coalition forms a government, after Syriza wins a parliamentary election for the first time in January 2015, following some five years of economic crisis and financial chaos. The country’s creditors and real rulers — the “Troika”: European Central Bank, International Monetary Fund and European Commission — then impose a virtual chokehold on the country, holding its banking system hostage and enforcing a vicious austerity policy together with a massive assault against the public sector and state assets. The Syriza government responds by going directly to the people, with a Referendum on austerity, held in July 2015, resulting in a resounding 62% “*Oxi*” (“No”) vote. This is followed by a Troika ultimatum, in the form of a Memorandum (No. 3) that says, in effect: “Sign, or else we will destroy your banking system, wipe out your working people’s savings, and drive you out of the Eurozone.” Tsipras sees no choice but to sign; this provokes a split in Syriza and a period of political realignment which nevertheless results in Syriza remaining in office, and continuing to be committed to the struggle, while in office, against austerity and for economic and social renewal.

This essay is being written in December 2016; you will read it in or after July 2017. Writing for a print journal and not for the instantaneous blogosphere has its risks! But if I may assume that catastrophic events have not occurred in the interim, the “standoff” is still in place. The Greek people have thrown a lightning bolt over Europe, and the world, and that bolt has briefly illuminated and revealed a stark landscape: the growth of capitalist transnational political and economic power, under conditions of neoliberal advance and shift of the political center to the right, has undermined democracy and national sovereignty — created, in effect, a *finocracy*, political

rule by financial capital, where “financial capital” does not mean simply “banks,” but rather the concentrated strategic force of abstract capitalist power at the transnational level. All of this raises the question: Does there still exist, anywhere in the world, a formal political space available to be contested by working-class and popular progressive forces? What, under modern circumstances, becomes of Marx and Engels’ call for the working class to “raise [itself] to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy”?

To put the same question more practically: what *can* a left party do, after an electoral victory in a particular country? Well, what *has* Syriza been doing for the last two-and-one-half years? Is there anything that can be done in a single small country, without strategic raw materials or industrial resources, other than wait for some larger-scale international events — a new 1848, or 1917, for instance — to come to its rescue?

Sources for answers are scarce. But Syriza’s Central Committee did produce, in June 2016, a document entitled “Political Theses for the Second Congress.” This paper, which runs to 89 pages in English,<sup>1</sup> lays out a series of perspectives and programmatic steps, in both the international and domestic arenas, steps that were approved for action at the Second Congress in September. This is, of course, “nothing but words.” But words are all any of us have. Only much more time and testimony — not to speak of results — will determine how much of this is actually being accomplished. Nevertheless, the words themselves “speak volumes,” and acquire the status of at least one sort of actual evidence.

Answering the question, “Is it realistic and feasible to exit the crisis with a plan of social protection and productive reconstruction while you are obliged to be in a fiscal adjustment program?”, Alexis Tsipras responded:

The answer is not simple but I’m deeply convinced it’s an affirmative one. And, of course, the theoretical possibility is not the same as the practical implementation, the transformation of such a possibility into political action. However, we ought to consider what we have achieved over these twenty months of our administration. . . .

There follows a detailed enumeration: programs to address the humanitarian crisis, reduction of unemployment, extension of health insurance, reinstatement of public sector workers, opening schools on time (for the first time in a long time), defending social security successfully against implementation of the “zero deficit” principle, and specific measures against tax evasion by

1 It is striking the extent to which people on the left, who profess interest in socialist revolution and socialist transition, seem to lose touch with what is being done in places where at least some of the political prerequisites for this are in place. The situation in Greece seems to have dropped off of the radar. For those who are interested, the Syriza Theses were made available in English by the *transform!* network, and can be found at [http://www.transform-network.net/uploads/tx\\_news/SYRIZA\\_Central\\_Committee\\_Political\\_theses.pdf](http://www.transform-network.net/uploads/tx_news/SYRIZA_Central_Committee_Political_theses.pdf)

the wealthy, to name just a few. Tsipras concludes: “This is the very dividing line between a left policy of burden redistribution and a neoliberal policy that wants growth on the wreckage of labor and society.”<sup>2</sup>

The Theses document goes into much more detail, a degree of detail that can’t be easily summarized. I would like to try to give some sense of its flavor, however.

First, the document is self-critical at various points throughout. Asking the question, “How could a government of the Left operate effectively and leave a positive footprint in a small European country inside the Eurozone, in conditions of absolute neoliberal hegemony?”, it states:

. . . it was necessary that measures be taken for the restoration of the party so that it would respond to the necessities of this new period. It is the responsibility of the leadership elected at the 1st Congress that the party has failed in this duty. Although in the previous congress it was decided that the party should be reinforced with new members and that new party officials should be promoted, there was no planned policy for new membership or for matching the party’s organization with its social and political dynamics. As a result, these decisions merely remained a declaration of good intent. Moreover, we failed to develop the so necessary gender-equality culture and this, as a rule, led to silencing women’s experience in the party’s decisions and functions. (18–19.)

Further:

In this process [negotiations with the Troika], the party was not as present as it should be. The leading bodies did not operate appropriately so as to elaborate on the party’s tactic in the negotiation and see that — through the party’s organizations — it was assimilated by the members. The effect was that at every turn of the negotiation the party was taken by surprise by the ever-changing circumstances and was unable to react to the opponent’s attacks and undermining action. (21.)

Second, the need for (what I will call) *enactment activism* is stressed throughout. A few examples must suffice. After describing a series of measures that can be taken without need for external intervention — reform of the tax system, construction of a System of Social Solidarity, regulation of television and “elimination of the vested interests in the media” — the document continues:

In this respect, the government’s task is difficult and demanding since it first requires implementation of the agreed measures in a way that will minimize or offset their negative impacts by a series of *specified interventions*, within the designated fiscal

2 From a summary of Tsipras’ main report to the Second Congress; [http://www.transform-network.net/uploads/tx\\_news/Tsipras\\_Opening\\_speech\\_Main\\_points.pdf](http://www.transform-network.net/uploads/tx_news/Tsipras_Opening_speech_Main_points.pdf)

framework. It also calls for *constant vigilance and persistence* so that the measures stipulated in the agreement will be included in the context of a broader project of radical changes that will lay the foundations for a new development and production model that will go beyond the asphyxiating neoliberal framework. (25, emphases added.)

Many readers will want a sense of the document's most general political perspectives. In a section entitled "Which Left in the 21st Century?", we find this formulation:

The two currents that emerged [as a result of the First World War] — the social democratic and the communist — failed, each in its own way, to realize the vision of social and human emancipation. The collapse of "real socialism" in 1989–90 led the entire Left to a crisis. From that crisis emerged the demand and the aim to create a new Left, not only with the transcendence of the two earlier great currents but also with a new character and characteristics; through the synthesis of the ideas and values of the labor movement with those of ecology, feminism, and the other contemporary social movements. Syriza is an expression of this need to refund and reconstitute the currents of the labor movement and the Left. (38.)

A bit further on we encounter a statement that combines what some may find to be a rather predictable and widely shared formulation of the link between socialism and democracy, and an intriguing proposition about direct democracy:

The 20th century taught us that socialism cannot exist if it is not democratic. The abolition of capitalist property alone does not suffice for the building of the new society. . . . The democratization of the state, the public sector, education and culture needs to be combined with multiform direct-democratic institutions, so that large parts of social policy will gradually be decided through collective processes. (41.)

The heart of the Theses document is found in a list of "26 Policy Breakthroughs Syriza Proposes and Demands," beginning on page 55. Again, all I can do here is to summarize; the core message of this essay, however, is that not only the devil, but the actual argument, is in the details. When I read through this material, I get a sense of possibility: despite the formidable obstacles and the intransigent external realities, Syriza, its coalition partners, and the social movements arising outside of the formal political process with which it is interacting are addressing the nitty-gritty of social transformation — small, inconsequential item by small inconsequential item — and thereby inching toward qualitative change, in both society and themselves.

Here are a few particulars. (Within each category there are numerous bullet points identifying specific tasks.) In the realm of politics: a fair electoral system and strengthening the role of parliament; reform of public

administration; participatory local government; building the fight against collusion and corruption; “the police on the people’s side — not against them.” The struggle against neoliberalism: protection of labor and reducing unemployment; universal access to public health; the rights of refugees and migrants; solidarity and welfare; an end to discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation; “education focused on people”; culture, art and recreation, sports.

Productive reconstruction (this is a huge category): the banking system; protection of public property; developing the social economy (cooperatives, *e.g.*); supporting new small and medium-sized enterprises; environmental protection and spatial planning; radical policies for research, innovation and new technologies; agriculture and development of food sufficiency; a “new energy paradigm”; industry and manufacturing; sustainable tourism. Once more, the devil is in the bullet points.

There is a final section on foreign policy, with no obvious surprises. On Greek–Turkish relations: “Syriza supports Turkey’s European prospect on condition that Turkey complies fully with International Law, respects the principle of good neighborliness, guarantees democratic rights, and honors its international and European obligations regarding minority and religious rights of all Turkish citizens.” (The Kurds are not mentioned by name.) On the Greek diaspora: “Our aim is to enable them [overseas Greeks] to contribute with their innovative ideas and know-how to the country’s productive reconstruction, while in the long run we seek to create the circumstances that would allow them to return to Greece — if they wish — through improvement in living and working conditions brought about by the gradual recovery of the economy and the job market in our country.” And, of course, on Europe: quotes abound throughout the document. Their essence: *democratize Europe, don’t destroy it.*

Syriza is, as noted, self-critical in many areas. One does not know whether its current outlook and program will be subjected to similar criticism in the future, or what form that critique will take. The actual record will undoubtedly contain both successes and failures; it is easy to point to specific failures and “condemn” Syriza on their basis. The Theses document is fully aware of the difference between proposing a course of action and actually carrying it out, and no one would expect anyone else to take a written document at face value; the proof of the pudding, as always, is in the eating.

I nevertheless cannot help concluding that the story thus far — the January victory, the failures, the Referendum, the defeats by transnational (pan-European, U. S.) capitalist imperialism, the splits, reconstitutions, new plans and visions — does not support the widespread tendency on the international left (including, it must be said, among some of our comrades and colleagues in Greece) to write off Syriza as a complete failure, or to abandon

it in favor of appeals to “socialist revolution” in the abstract. There will always be an intimate link between the present and the future; the key to moving along the path from the former to the latter is to stay on it.

D. L.

#### FORMAT CHANGE

Readers, take note: We have shifted the contents of “Editorial Perspectives” a bit. The summary of the issue (“In this Issue”) now comes at the top, followed by any other announcements, Calls for Papers, etc. This is then followed by the editorial essay by the Editor, now under its own rubric, “Marxism in Our Time: Notes from the Editor.” This makes clear the individual authorship of that essay. We also intend to have other members of our editorial team write for this space from time to time. This way we will all be able to march to our own drummers, but hopefully in the same general direction!