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Summary: Neither the old hierarchical organizational model nor the spontaneous self-organization one have found a form of philosophy and organization that can bring us to a positive, humanist alternative to the system. Based on a speech to the July 2016 Convention of the International Marxist-Humanist Organization, Chicago; first published in [Logos: A Journal of Modern Society & Culture, Summer 2016](#) - Editors

Deep Contradictions Facing the Global Movement for Human Emancipation: In the Middle East, China, and Europe

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Prologue

We live in a time marked by the revolutionary upsurge that began in the Arab world in 2011, followed swiftly by Madison, Madrid, Occupy Wall Street, and then a bit later, by Gezi Park in Turkey, the defense of Kobane, Black Lives Matter, and the Sanders and Corbyn phenomena. During this whole period, tiny Greece has also fought on in the face of many contradictions.

A number of these struggles continue, and new ones are sure to emerge in a world marked by economic stagnation, deepening racism, and ecological danger. A new generation of radical youth has entered the scene, and unlike in the late twentieth century, Marxism is no longer a dirty word to them. The politics of identity may also be retreating somewhat, as the prospect of anti-capitalist unity across racial, gender, and geographic lines is asserting itself.

At the same time, huge defeats and setbacks have also occurred. This has certainly been the case in the Arab world. It is as important to learn from these defeats and setbacks, as it is to learn from the creativity of the mass movements of today. Most radicals ignore our defeats, moving on to the next big thing.

Marxist-Humanists have fought against this attitude. Facing defeat or retrogression can lead to advances in theory that can place the movement on a sounder basis when it revives.

Marxist-Humanism in the US emerged from the writings of Raya Dunayevskaya, who, in the face of the great betrayal of the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939, worked out a new perspective for Marxism, the notion that we had entered a further stage of global capitalism, beyond the monopoly stage, which she and her then-colleague CLR James conceptualized as state-capitalism. This new stage emerged out of the transformation into opposite of the Russian revolution of 1917 under Stalin and the defeat of the German workers movement, which paved the way for the Nazi seizure of power. State-capitalism as a stage crystallized after the Spanish revolution was defeated by fascism, as the Western powers looked on and Stalin's Russia ultimately betrayed the revolution. Overall, the counter-revolutionary outcomes in Russia and Germany paved the way for the loss of tens of millions in World War 2.

As Hegel wrote in the founding text of modern dialectics, the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, we should not turn away from difficulty, but engage instead in the “seriousness, suffering, patience, and labor of the negative” (1977, p. 10). Let us do some of that, first by examining the Middle East five years after the Arab revolutions of 2011.

Tunisia and Egypt Five Years Later

In Tunisia, where the Arab revolutions began, a new constitution supports women's rights, including legislative

parity, and bans some forms of religious demagoguery. These hard-won gains were the fruit of several years of struggle by leftists, feminists, and liberals against the local Islamists, who initially seemed poised to assume power after the fall of the vicious but secular Ben Ali dictatorship. Additional gains are occasionally being made, as seen in the February 2016 court decision legalizing Shams, an organization campaigning openly for the decriminalization of homosexuality, a rarity in the Arab world. At the same time, the new democratic order is under attack from radical Tunisian Islamists tied to ISIS, who have launched a number of terrorist attacks on civilians. In response, the state has curtailed civil liberties, equally a danger for democracy.

Such democratic rights, even if maintained, cannot by themselves create a new human society. As the young Marx intoned concerning the difference between merely political and fully human emancipation: “Political emancipation is not the completed contradiction-free form of human emancipation” (“On the Jewish Question,” in Marx, *Early Political Writings*, edited by Joseph O’Malley, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 34). Thus, in their street demonstrations, the Tunisian revolutionaries of 2011 called for “Bread, Water, and No Ben Ali,” hardly limiting themselves to the political sphere alone.

In early 2016, youth unemployment in Tunisia stood at a shocking 30%. This oppressive situation led to protests, looting, and clashes with police in January 2016 in the very communities where the revolution broke out in 2010-11. The relatively small Marxist left has been involved with some of these protests, leading President Beji Caid Essebsi to call the Marxists as great a danger as Islamist terrorists (Carlotta Gall and Farah Samti, "[Tunisian Government Sets Nationwide Curfew Amid Growing Unrest](#)," *New York Times*, 1-23-16).

The aging Essebsi has rehabilitated corrupt officials from the old regime, has created a split in his own party by grooming his son as his successor, and has tried to shore up his support by courting the moderate Islamist Ennahda Party. This has led not only to a split within the ruling Nida Tounes Party, but also to a horizontally organized campaign by revolutionary youth to put up "wanted" posters for old regime officials whom Essebsi has been allowing back into the corridors of power (Frédéric Bobin, "[En Tunisie, un pastiche de western contre les caciques de l'ancien regime](#)," *Le Monde*, 6-10-16).

If the left still has some breathing room in Tunisia, the opposite is the case in Egypt, where, for the past three years, General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has carried out a crackdown that goes beyond that of even the harshest days of the Mubarak regime. With continuing military aid from the

imperialist U.S. and lavish funding from the subimperialist power Saudi Arabia, Sisi has achieved solid support internationally, at least for now.

As in Tunisia, the 2011 Egypt uprising grounded itself in both economic and political demands, and did so by taking over a large public space, Tahrir Square, forming kind of an alternative society for a few weeks. After the popular uprising spurred the military to oust Mubarak with the promise of a democratic constitution to follow, two years of competition/cooperation ensued between the military and the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's second large conservative force. One of its leaders, Mohamed Morsi, was elected president with the support of leftists and nationalists. During this period, many of the young revolutionaries, women as well as men, kept demonstrating on the streets against Morsi, who immediately broke his promises to form an inclusive government once in power.

The Sisi regime is the product of a twin tragedy. First, a mass movement of millions came onto the streets in 2013 to call for Morsi's ouster, which the military carried out. As General Sisi repressed the Muslim Brotherhood and set up his dictatorship, some leftwing nationalists lent their support. In this sense, the Sisi dictatorship is the product not only of reactionary and retrogressive forces that wanted to turn the clock back, but also of the opportunism of a part of the revolutionary movement itself.

As Marxist scholar Gilbert Achcar put it on the fifth anniversary of the Egyptian revolution: “The problem is that even those forces that I regard as progressive have been oscillating between the old regime and its religious fundamentalist opposition. Ultimately, both the old regime and its religious opposition were deeply opposed to the revolutionary process, and yet the progressive left and liberal forces went switching from an alliance with the latter (the religious opposition) against the former (the old regime) to an alliance with the former against the latter. This oscillation is disastrous” (“Q&A: The terrible illusion of the Arab Spring,” *Al Jazeera* interview with Achcar, 1-28-16).

If the first tragedy of the Egyptian revolution is a product of the failure of the left to create an independent alternative, and of the naiveté and opportunism of parts of it, Egypt’s second tragedy was rooted in a problem that plagues almost all genuinely — as opposed to statist-authoritarian — revolutionary movements today, the lure of spontaneous forms of organization as a panacea. During the magnificent Tahrir Square occupation of 2011, leftist and independent forces applauded the spontaneous grassroots democracy of the Square, but did not succeed in thinking out the philosophical and organizational issues involved in creating a real revolutionary organization that could become a pole of attraction to challenge the twin forces of reaction, the

military and the Islamists. Nor has much progress been made on that score since then.

The Egyptian writer Mahmoud Hussein goes so far as to argue that such occupations can express negativity and rejection, but not a real alternative to the given state of affairs:

“A public space can express a rejection of the principle of autocracy. It can, in crystallizing a massive popular will, provoke the actual fall of an autocrat. It is very true that in two and a half years, Tahrir overthrew three successive autocrats, Mubarak, then [General] Tantawi, then Morsi. But it could not by itself offer the country a concrete alternative form of power.... No force emanating from Tahrir Square, and organizationally linked to it, was developing a utopia, a concept [*pensée*], a collective experience, or an organizational force that would allow it to strive to give direction to the country” (“[Cinq ans après, n’oublions pas la révolte de la place Tahrir](#),” *Le Monde*, 1-23-16).

This second tragedy, of course, is not Egypt’s alone, but that of the rest of the revolutionary movement around the world today, from Occupy to Gezi Park, where spontaneous forms of organization have become an *idée fixe* that crowds out clear thinking about what a real alternative to capitalism entails. (I leave aside here all statist and hierarchical

solutions put forth in the name of socialism, which are in fact retrogressive in the twenty-first century.)

The Sisi regime remains nervous about even the slightest dissent, as seen in the lockdown last January on the fifth anniversary of the uprising. Small rumblings of dissent can still be heard on occasion. The most recent example was the Sisi's ceding of two small Red Sea islands to his Saudi backers. In April 2016, after calls from secular leftists, several thousand took to the streets in protest under the slogan, "Freedom for the Brave." The regime cracked down hard, sentencing 150 people, most of them in their early twenties, to prison terms ranging from two to five years. All evidence suggests that public opinion was on the side of the demonstrators. This in turn suggests that the Sisi regime remains brittle despite all its armed strength.

China: Crackdown by a Jittery Regime

Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russia's Vladimir Putin have pushed deeper toward authoritarian strongman rule, and the new Trump-like president of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte, is doing so as well. Such rulers feed off national or economic anxiety and fear of chaos. To be sure, these kinds of regimes are ultimately brittle and fragile, but they can hang on for decades even as their social base narrows, as we saw in Iraq under Saddam and still see in Iran.

A similar trend is also seen in China, which in 2015 experienced its slowest economic growth, 6.9% of GDP, in 25 years. While this is way above growth rate of most other major economies, it has had profound effects in a country whose economic model has depended upon a much higher rate of growth. This has resulted in a wave of economic anxiety and in persistent labor strikes. In 2015, 2700 strikes and labor protests took place, double the number of the previous year (Javier Hernandez, “More Protests by Labor Vex China Rulers,” *New York Times*, March 15, 2016).

Even more importantly, the past few years have seen the tenuous beginnings of links between workers, on the one hand, and intellectuals and students on the other. In 2014-15, law firms that fought for workers’ rights within the limits of Chinese law also helped to give a measure of coordination to these strikes, which gained on occasion the support of students as well. Moreover, this took place in the Pearl River delta, the country’s economic powerhouse. This recalled how a small band of intellectuals formed the Workers’ Defense Committee in Poland in the 1970s, forging links that sprouted on a mass scale during the Solidarnosc workers’ movement of 1981.

The most prominent of these labor lawyers, Duan Yi, has spoken of “a savage capitalism that holds sway in China. First, the workers are exploited to the limit, then a few improvements are made before throwing them away like

Kleenex,” the latter referring to the mass layoffs amid robotization, which is occurring as workers have won some modest wage gains (Stéphane Pambrun, “Chine: tempête sur la rivière des Perles,” *Jeune Afrique*, 5-20-14). For over a decade, Duan Yi advised workers during numerous struggles in which they gained wage increases, protected severance pay, and withstood threats of layoffs. Even some of his legal activist colleagues criticized him for being “half-lawyer, half social activist” (John Ruwitch, “Labor movement’s ‘concertmaster’ tests Beijing’s boundaries,” Reuters, 12-6-14).

In the winter of 2015-16 the authorities staged a massive crackdown on activist lawyers, who have been put on trial, disbarred, and given severe warnings. Prison is certain to follow.

Amid these economic and social strains, the regime has engaged in a type of cult of personality around Xi not seen since the days of Mao’s rule from 1949-76. As the *New York Times* reported recently, “*People’s Daily* has become a publicity machine for Mr. Xi. On one day in December, his name appeared in 11 of the 12 headlines on the front page” (Edward Wong, “China Leader’s News Flash: Journalists Must Serve Party,” *New York Times*, Feb. 23, 2016).

Of course, Xi, who grew up in the pampered atmosphere of the ruling Communist Party compound in Beijing (although he did suffer briefly during Mao’s Cultural Revolution), has

neither the revolutionary nor the nationalist credentials of a Deng Xiaoping, let alone a Mao. Therefore his regime also exhibits a certain brittleness.

Syria and Turkey

Returning to the Middle East, we find the most violent contradictions coming to the fore in Syria and Turkey. With the massive deaths in the Syrian civil war, with the persistence of Islamism among the Syrian rebels, and with Erdogan riding high again in Turkey, one part of the global left has simply turned away in despair. A second group has started to back the Assad-Russia-Iran alliance in Syria in the name of anti- (U.S.) imperialism and anti-fundamentalism. It is important to avoid both of these simplistic, undialectical perspectives and instead view Syria and Turkey as imbued with both emancipatory and reactionary forces and ideas.

In Syria, contradictions of all sorts abound: between the murderous Assad regime and the democratic uprising; within the uprising among various factions, some but not all of them religious fundamentalists; among the Assad regime, the uprising, and the Kurdish movement for self-liberation; and among imperialist and subimperialist powers in relationship to all of the above. As Marxist-Humanists, we need to look at the situation with both the harsh realism and the eye for emancipatory forces that one finds in both Hegel and Marx.

The violence of the Syrian civil war dwarfs any other conflict on the planet today, with the overwhelming majority of that violence emanating from the Assad regime and its allies Russia and Iran. According to the respected Syrian Center for Policy Research, the overall death toll has reached nearly 500,000, double the usual estimates, and another estimate has 60,000 perishing just in Assad's brutal prisons (Anne Barnard, "Death Toll in Syria War at 470,000, Report Says," *New York Times* 2-12-16; "En cinq ans, 60,000 personnes sont mortes dans les prisons du régime syrien," *Le Monde* 5-22-16).

The death toll's pace has increased in recent months due to the Russian air attacks on cities and neighborhoods opposed to the regime. Russia has in fact directed little of its fire at ISIS, the supposed target of its intervention. This, plus the tens of thousands of fighters sent by Iran has bolstered the Assad regime in the past year. But even Russia seemed a bit taken aback when Assad declared on June 7, 2016 that he was going to recover "every inch" of Syria's territory (David Sanger and Rick Gladstone, "Resisting Peace, Assad Pledges to Retake 'Every Inch' of Syria," *New York Times* 6-8-16). So much for the idea of some type of negotiated settlement, which the U.S, Russia, and other powers have been pushing!

In fact, though, both the U.S. and Russia have goals that are not that dissimilar. As Gilbert Achcar noted in 2015, after

the results of the complete destruction of the old regimes of Libya and Iraq, both powers now agree on “preventing the collapse of the Assad regime,” even if the U.S. would like Assad himself to step aside, or at least have some limitation placed upon his power (Ilya Budraitskis, “Interview: Gilbert Achcar on the Russian Military Operation in Syria,” *Left East* 10-15-15). But these powers also fear the war’s continuation, which is doing the same thing, plus sending a sea of refugees into Europe.

At the same time, two sets of emancipatory forces have persisted inside Syria, despite everything. In this regard the most surprising but little-noted event was the emergence on the streets on March 4, during a brief cessation of hostilities, of mass demonstrations by Syrian democratic forces. Thousands took to the streets of some 90 cities, chanting, “The revolution continues,” as well as the old slogan from the 2011 uprisings across the Arab world, “The people want the fall of the regime.” While this was a sign that the original demands of the revolution remain in the hearts of the people, these demonstrations did not approach the mass character of those five years ago (Benjamin Barthe, “En Syrie, le répit dans les combats relance les manifestations anti-Assad,” *Le Monde* 3-6-16). But it was curious indeed that for one day at least, fundamentalist militias that dominate the armed resistance seemed to recede. There is also some evidence that the revolutionary committees

formed back in 2011 maintain some influence, as against Islamists, in places like the Damascus suburb of Ghouta (Benjamin Barthe, “Syrie: dans l’univers fracassé de la Ghouta, la vie s’est organisée,” *Le Monde* 2-3-16).

The Syrian Kurds constitute the second and better-known emancipatory force amid the carnage in Syria, one that stands openly for grassroots democracy, social justice, and women’s liberation. The Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) of the Syrian Democratic Union Party (KDP) battled ISIS successfully at two junctures in 2014. In Sinjar Mountain in Iraq, they rescued Yazidis from ISIS murder and sexual slavery when no one else, not even the U.S.-backed Iraqi Kurds, would step in. At Kobane in Syria some months later, these Kurdish Marxists dealt ISIS its first real military defeat, with women officers successfully leading some of the attacks on the most misogynist, retrogressive political force on the planet today.

Taking advantage of the weakness of the Assad regime and the disarray of the rebels, the YPG has taken over a whole swathe of territory it calls Rojava, in the northern area bordering Turkey. This has cut off much of ISIS’s supply chain through Turkey. Over the past year, the Kurds have also helped form the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a tenuous alliance with some nearby Arab and Turkoman groups. The SDF has also begun to move toward Raqqa, the ISIS capital.

Kurdish relations with the overall Syrian democratic opposition are not good, however. The opposition accuses them with some justice of having on occasion leaned toward Russia and even Assad, while the Kurds point out that the opposition, like the Assad regime, vehemently opposes an autonomous region in the north (Michael Karadjis, “The Kurdish PYD’s Alliance with Russia against Free Aleppo,” *Syrian Revolutionary Commentary and Analysis* 2-18-16; Saleh Mohamed, “Democracy Left Out in the Cold,” *New York Times* 4-11-16). At the same time, Russia openly supports Kurdish autonomy, and the U.S. does so implicitly. In such a situation, one should give the benefit of the doubt to those who are successfully fighting for autonomy, women’s emancipation, and social justice, while also sounding a note of caution about unsavory alliances. One also has to ask why a revolutionary democratic movement, like the broader Syrian opposition, does not give more consideration to the rights to autonomy of a long-oppressed ethnic minority.

The Kurdish resistance in Syria has also set off a storm inside Turkey. The 2014 siege of Kobane, right on the border with Turkey, galvanized the global left, but it affected Turkish Kurds and leftists with particular force. This led to an alliance between Turkish youth from the 2013 Gezi Park uprising and the pro-Kurdish People’s Democratic Party (HDP), which now became a broad

vehicle for the aspirations of both of these currents. The HDP is a legal party sympathetic to the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), which for many years engaged in guerrilla warfare against the Turkish state. In recent years, however, the PKK has moved toward grassroots democracy and alliance with forces based in the Turkish population.

For a brief period in 2015, it seemed that the HDP, which, in addition to Kurdish aspirations, embraced labor, ecology, feminism, and LGBT rights, had seriously undercut the increasingly authoritarian Islamo-nationalist regime of Erdogan. In the May 2015 elections, the HDP scored 13%, denying Erdogan a parliamentary majority. (See my earlier analysis, "Four Years After the Arab Revolutions: Fighting on Amid Reactionary Retrenchment," *Logos* 14: 2-3, Summer 2015.) Erdogan responded with a harsh crackdown on the Kurdish areas of the southeast and then called another election in November 2015, when he won a clear majority, as the repression kept many away from the polls. After that, Erdogan's repression became even more violent, and he moved to outlaw the HDP in 2016. He also struck out against even the slightest opposition from academics and intellectuals.

Since the summer of 2015, cities throughout the southeast have seen pitched battles on the streets between PKK youth and the Turkish military, for which they are no match. The Kurdish youth have been led by part of the PKK leadership

to believe that they can win in the near term, just like the YPG did against ISIS in Kobane (Allan Kaval, “A Cizre, ‘ville martyre’ des Kurdes de Turquie,” *Le Monde* 3-15-16). This policy has frayed Kurdish ties with Turkish youth and leftists. In addition, several terrorist attacks in Istanbul by a splinter of the PKK have served to harden Turkish nationalist support for Erdogan.

In the long run, Erdogan’s rule faces dangers, however, whether from outside powers like Russia and the U.S., who see the Syrian Kurds as the only real force that can dislodge ISIS, or at home from the many sectors of society that he has irrevocably alienated. The abortive military coup of July 2016 will surely give the regime even more reasons to crack down, but also indicates some deep social fissures.

Europe, Immigration, and the Neo-Fascist Challenge

No country or region is immune to such trends toward authoritarianism, including the U.S., as shown by the Trump campaign. Thus, Austria, France, and several other European countries have also witnessed a sharp turn toward authoritarian politics in the wake of three major ISIS-inspired attacks in Paris and Brussels in 2015-16, and a heightened fear of migrants from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. This fear was also a factor, among others, in Britain’s vote to leave the European Union.

In the year 2015 alone, some one million migrants from Syria and other countries of the MENA region streamed into Western Europe, with the flow continuing into 2016. Shocking incidents in 2015, like the drowning death of 3-year-old Aylan Kurdi, a Kurdish refugee from Kobane, gained public sympathy for the migrants. Initially, Germany and a few other countries adopted fairly liberal asylum and immigration policies. In March 2016, however, as racist, anti-immigrant sentiment grew, the European Union made a deal — in a gross violation of international human rights standards — that gave \$6 billion to Turkey to block asylum seekers from reaching the rest of Europe.

Neofascist parties have played to this resentment with considerable success, especially in Austria and France. In Austria, Norbert Hofer, candidate of neofascist Austria Freedom Party (FPÖ), lost the presidential elections of spring 2016 by a hair's breadth, but these have now been rescheduled. In the first round of the spring elections, the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats were shut out, with Hofer and a very moderate former Green Party leader, Otto Van der Bellen, taking first and second place.

Unconscionably, the major parties, including the Social Democrats, refused to support Van Bellen against Hofer (Blaise Gauquelin, "L'absence de front républicain favorise Norbert Hofer," *Le Monde* 5-18-16). No matter the eventual result of the elections for the largely symbolic presidency,

the FPO is in very good position for next year's crucial parliamentary elections.

Equally serious is the fact that, as the Austrian Social Democrats — like their counterparts in the U.S. Democratic Party — have moved to the right in recent decades, they have lost much of their working class base, creating an opening for the FPO to use anti-immigrant racism and Islamophobia to win over some of those same voters. The Austrian Social Democrats have also wavered, or worse, over immigrant rights, failing to offer a real alternative to the neofascists, and in fact paving the way for them.

This is exactly the problem facing France as well. Weak and unpopular President François Hollande, elected in 2012 on a platform that attacked finance capital, has turned sharply to the right on immigration and on “law and order.” First, he enacted harsh security measures, including a state of emergency, in the wake of two murderous ISIS-inspired attacks in 2015, going so far as to attempt to undermine citizenship laws. Moreover, Hollande made virtually no effort to combat Islamophobia, thus alienating further the country's largely working class Muslim community, which is of mainly North African heritage. Second, France admitted only a handful of the 2015 refugees from Syria and other conflict zones, a tiny fraction of what Germany admitted. Third, during the December 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference, French

authorities outlawed street demonstrations and even accused ecologists of defiling Place de la République in the center of Paris, where people had placed flowers in memory of the ISIS victims.

As in Austria, the true beneficiary of this turn to the right in France over immigration has been the neofascist National Front, which has been polling ahead of all other parties for the 2018 presidential elections. Hollande's policies have bolstered the neofascists in a second way, by an anti-labor law that he is trying to push through on the grounds that it would stimulate the economy. This law would dilute the 35-hour week, make layoffs easier, and would allow firms to divide workers by reaching labor agreements at the plant level, thus undermining six decades of uniform labor contracts that have protected more vulnerable workers. Such policies show the bankruptcy of the center left, which has made its pact with neoliberalism. It has thus lost most of its working class base, which has in turn opened the road for demagoguery from right wing populists like the National Front.

In spring 2016, another contradiction suddenly emerged in France, as a new youth movement that has been compared to Occupy, Nuit Debout [Standing Up at Night], has galvanized the left. Beginning on March 31, 2016, hundreds and then thousands of demonstrators occupied Place de la

République, transforming it from a site of national unity against terrorism to one of resistance to capital.

The Nuit debout demonstrators sought to block the labor “reforms,” but pointedly refused to issue any specific demands. This carried the scent of a total rather than a partial opposition to the system. As one participant wrote, “it is not a piece of the cake that is being demanded, but a change in the cake itself” (Nathalie Quintane, “Nuit Debout, ça existe encore?” *Le Monde* 5-29-16).

With “Banlieus Debout,” Nuit Debout also made some modest connections to the marginalized communities of suburban Paris, which include many people of North African heritage. One Black activist from the Paris suburbs, the singer Fik’s Niavo, stated: “I am a banlieusard to the core and I sometimes got the impression that the Parisians looked down on me. But finally I went down to the Place de la République, because it seemed important to me to build bridges” (Isaline Bernard and Emilie Massemin, “Peu à peu, le mouvement Banlieus debout se lève avec Nuit debout,” *Reporterre: Quotidien de l’écologie* 4-16-16).

While this was not a great success in terms of numbers, it was at least a beginning of the kind of solidarity across ethnic lines that is absolutely necessary for the future.

Trade unions, especially the formerly Communist Party-dominated General Confederation of Labor (CGT) and the smaller Solidarity Unity Democracy federation (SUD), have

also organized protest demonstrations and militant strikes against the proposed labor law, which have periodically shut down transport, communications, and energy supplies. On June 14, 2016, the ninth day of national demonstrations by trade unions against the new labor law took place, drawing hundreds of thousands into the streets; a similar demonstration was held on June 23 as well.

It is heartening to see these developments in France, even though they did not succeed in turning back Hollande's reactionary labor law. Equally important is the awareness that old forms of thinking and action on the left need to be called into question. Whether these new initiatives can withstand the conservative storm after the inhuman July 2016 Nice attack is something that remains to be seen.

Where to Now?

But, though committee-form and 'party-to-lead' are opposites, they are not absolute opposites... the challenge demands that we synthesize not only the new relations of theory to practice, and all the forces of revolution, but philosophy's 'suffering, patience, and labor of the negative,' i.e., experiencing absolute negativity — Raya Dunayevskaya (1990, p. xxxvii)

But it also seems clear, and not only in France, that neither the old hierarchical trade union/vanguard party organizational model nor the somewhat newer spontaneous

self-organization model of Nuit Debout and the like are offering a model of philosophy and organization that can really challenge, let alone demolish and replace with a positive, humanist alternative the world of stagnant capitalism, neoliberal and/or authoritarian politics, and nationalist or fundamentalist demagoguery.

Was that not the challenge in Egypt and Tunisia as well? Don't our Chinese counterparts need not only waves of strikes, but also real organization involving intellectuals with workers, albeit not on the old Maoist model? Don't the Kurdish fighters and the revolutionary movement in Syria and Turkey face similar questions?

These questions have been at the core of Marxist-Humanism for decades. We need organizations that participate in emancipatory movements while projecting a philosophy of revolution, in the best of the revolutionary dialectical tradition, from Marx, through Lenin and Luxemburg, to Dunayevskaya, and to today. In short, we need a new generation of philosopher-activists.

As Antonio Gramsci, the great Marxist thinker who met his death in Mussolini's prisons, put it: "The philosopher... not only grasps the contradictions, but posits himself as an element of the contradiction and elevates this element to a principle of knowledge and therefore of action" (1971, p. 405).

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