

Catalonia: The Issue is Democracy



Boaventura Sousa Santos

In the capitalist societies in which we live, there is always more than one reading of the relations between the juridical and the political. What is different about such readings is what distinguishes a Left from a Right position regarding a unilateral declaration of independence. A Left position on the relations between the juridical and the political would be grounded on the following assumptions.

- First, the relationship between law and democracy is dialectical and not mechanical. Much of what we consider democratic legality in a given historical moment started as illegality, as an aspiration to a broader democracy. It is imperative to evaluate the political processes in terms of their overall historical dynamics. In no case can they be reduced to conformity with the laws of the day.
- Second, the rightist governments have no democratic legitimacy when they declare themselves as defenders of legality because their practices consist in systematic violations of the law. I am referring, in the case of Spain, to the violations of the law referring to the crimes by the Franco dictatorship, to the recurrent violation of the statutory regions' autonomy concerning financial transfers. The Left must be careful to show no complicity with this conception of legality.
- From a Left perspective, civil and political disobedience must be conceived of in dialectical terms, not in terms of what it means under today's legal frameworks, but rather in terms of what it means as an aspiration of a better future. This evaluation has to be made not only by those who disobey, but also by those who can benefit from such an act in the future. In other words, the question to be asked is the following one: can it be hoped that the dynamics of disobedience will lead to an overall more inclusive and more democratic political community in its totality?
- Fourth, the Catalonia referendum represents an act of civil and political disobedience and, as such, it cannot produce directly the political results it intends.

Which is not to say that it cannot have other legitimate political results. It may well be the condition sine qua non to reach in the future the intended objectives after the necessary political and legal mediations have been put in place. Stating that the referendum is illegal does not prevent it from being a legitimate act of civil disobedience and that, even without juridical effects, Catalonians have every right to demonstrate freely in the referendum.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos¹

Fearless Cities: Remunicipalisation



Oscar Reyes

The collaboration between citizens' groups, cooperatives and municipalities is at the heart of many of the attempts to return public services to public ownership. That's a trend that has escalated, with 'more than 800 cases of re-municipalisation in recent years, involving over 1,600 cities' according to Olivier Petitjean, co-editor of a new book on *Reclaiming Public Services*. There are many reasons why cities and regions want to take services back under public ownership, but reducing cost (especially for poor people), improving the quality of services, and increasing financial transparency are recurrent themes. Efforts to create better conditions for workers are another key driver. In the energy sector, which accounts for around a third of the cases where services have been returned to public ownership, the shift is often driven by efforts to tackle climate change.

In Stuttgart, for example, the city council remunicipalised the electricity and gas networks in 2014. Its municipal utility company is now at the centre of a strategy to become a 'zero emission' city by 2050 – an ambitious goal for a city of over half a million people that is home to several large manufacturers. The new utility company partnered with a local energy cooperative with a reputation as one of the pioneers of green energy supply in Germany, allowing it to learn from citizens' initiatives. Remunicipalisation extends across the whole range of tasks that have traditionally been undertaken by local councils, and it has fostered novel forms of collaboration with citizens and workers. A number of French municipalities have taken back control of school meals from corporations to protect local agriculture and improve the quality of meals. In the small city of Mouans-Sartoux in southern France, the municipality bought farmland and now employs a local farmer to provide schools with 100 per cent organic produce.

¹ Extracted from a text by Santos, *The left and Catalonia*, September 2017.

Redesigning democracy

Increasing citizens' control is not just about taking over existing institutions, but building new democratic processes that involve citizens in the day-to-day decision making of their cities. Sometimes that means using the local state as a lever to counter national policy failings. Brad Lander, a Progressive Caucus councillor in New York, explains how the city recently set up an Office of Labor Relations to amplify the power of workers in a context where trade unions and labour rights have been under attack for decades. The Office has already helped to settle dozens of labour disputes, and forced employers in the city to provide mandatory sick pay (which US federal law does not require). In other cases, it involves changing how citizens interact with the city government. In Messina, Sicily, the governing citizens' platform is creating 'participatory redevelopment' plans, with popular assemblies tasked with deciding directly how particular areas are to be redeveloped.

Oscar Reyes¹

Brazil: Resistance



Gilmar Mauro

We are facing a coup in Brazil – a political coup, that aims to take political power and apply a set of regressive measures to cancel what the working class achieved during recent years, including gains that occurred during the Lula and Dilma governments. Evidently, we did not advance in deep structural reforms, but there were important social advances that are now being dismantled [under the current administration]. It's not particular to Brazil. This is happening in various parts of the world because, in our evaluation, there is a prolonged crisis with no way out in the short term.

We defend socialism as a political and economical alternative for humanity, not just for Brazil. Nevertheless, the MST does not have the conditions to do this by itself. The MST is not strong enough to push through agrarian reform. Agrarian reform and changes in the agricultural model depends on a debate within the entire Brazilian working class and changes in the power structure. The MST is an important actor, but it is just one actor that is part of a set of actors. I think the situation is beginning to change, though; there is a politicization process underway in Brazil and I hope that we will have historic patience,

¹ Extract from an article published by Red Pepper, August 16, 2017, <http://www.redpepper.org.uk/fearless-cities-the-new-urban-movements/>. Reyes is an associate fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies.

while at the same time, initiatives to increase people's participation – to not always speak to the same people, to modify methods within the left, within our organizations that enable dialogue with the Brazilian people.

Gilmar Mauro¹

Challenges for the US Anti-War Movement



Phyllis Bennis

Today's wars are vastly more complex than U.S. interventions during the Cold War. In those years, many activists supported "the other side"—the National Liberation Front in Vietnam, the African National Congress in South Africa, the Sandinistas and the FMLN in Central America. It's more difficult to ground our movements in international solidarity when "the other side" is composed of fighters we don't support, who hold anti-democratic, extremist religious, misogynist or other reactionary views. We still have progressive counterparts—the Iraqi oil workers union, some Syrian opposition activists and more—but they're not the ones engaged on the battlefield.

Here, we can learn from the strong anti-war movement following the 9/11 attacks. The two big coalitions—United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ) and ANSWER—divided over organizing strategy and whether to criticize the Saddam Hussein government. The broader of the two, UFPJ—powerfully anti-war but willing to criticize Hussein—grew far more influential, partly because its more nuanced position encouraged engaging a wider range of domestic and international organizations. Today, we must ensure that opposing U.S. intervention in Syria does not blind us to Bashar al-Assad's legacy of torture and collaboration with other U.S. wars, just as we have to acknowledge that however progressive and indeed heroic the original protest movement of Syria's Arab Spring, the majority of those now engaged in armed anti-regime fighting are not those progressive heroes. While activists facing brutal repression in Syria or Libya or elsewhere may call for U.S. intervention, we must not uncritically accept that call.

To strengthen all our movements, we must also understand that militarism is a key cause of domestic crises: Military spending strips funds from the social safety net; excess Pentagon equipment sent to local police departments militarizes our communities; Islamophobia rises in response to wars abroad; militarism's outsized carbon footprint

¹ Extract from an interview by Brian Mier is Extramural Contributor of the Brazil Unit at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA). <http://www.coha.org/mst-and-the-fight-to-change-the-brazilian-power-structure-an-interview-with-gilmar-mauro/>

threatens us all. The Movement for Black Lives, the new Poor People’s Campaign, various environmental and economic justice organizations, and many others already recognize this.

Phyllis Bennis¹

Palestine: A crack in the Wall



Mustafa Barghouti

The triumph of Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa last July in the Palestinian Occupied Territories is a chapter in a raging and continuous battle, in which the Palestinian people are engaged, in order to end the occupation and the racist apartheid regime. It is important to learn lessons from this model that succeeded and that should be applied in other places and other stages later.

First, the Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa uprising adopted the principle of self-reliance and did not wait and see what others would do. The participants believed that “It is best to do your own thing” and did not wait for instructions from anybody and did not link their movement to those of others. The uprising also was an embodiment of the principle of self-organisation with all available means and benefitting from religious, societal and civil institutions. It challenged the occupation and its decisions clearly, evidently, determinedly and decisively. In one day, Jerusalem embraced the principles of the first three *Intifadas*: self-reliance, self-organisation and challenging the occupation.

Second, the popular movement marched in a gradual, continuous escalation without setbacks because it remained popular and wasn’t politically opposed. Maybe it started with tens then hundreds then thousands, but reached tens of thousands. It succeeded because it moved through the sheer strength of a unifying idea and the living example grounded in a sense of duty. Third, the strength of popular participation and its great influence represented the climax that every popular resistance act aspires to. However, what

¹ Extract from *In These Times*, October 5, 2017. Phyllis is at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington. http://inthesetimes.com/features/us_anti-war_movement_trump_syria.html

distinguished the Jerusalem case was the continuity of participation without reducing it to one act or restricting it to one day, as usually happened.

Fourth, the clarity and accuracy of the popular movement's objective and its steadfastness in pursuing it in spite of all the pressure exerted by the occupation and some political pressure on the local, regional and international levels. To remove what the occupation installed 14 July was the objective. And that was what was upheld. Fifth, national and religious popular leadership unity, which was an interactive leadership, would not have succeeded or would not have been obeyed if it was not reverently respectful of the popular masses' will and gave precedence to this during decisive and delicate watersheds. Perhaps this exemplary unity was what astonished the occupation authorities which was mostly accustomed to exploiting Palestinian divisions and fomenting them with every possible means.

Sixth, the masses' insistence on the peaceful nature of the popular movement, praying as a resistance tool and refusing to be provoked by the occupation or responding to its criminal violence. This insistence was in the face of the occupation troops that used all kinds of abuse, bombs and bullets, including live bullets, against unarmed civilians. The cost was huge with the death of five valiant martyrs, some of them children, and the wounding of more than 1,500.

Seventh, the Palestinian masses retained the initiative from the very first day until the last moments and afterwards. Netanyahu, his government, his police force and all those who came from overseas to assist him, remained unable to seize the initiative from the hands of the Palestinian masses. Netanyahu was obliged to acknowledge his defeat, which he could not conceal. Eighth, the transformation of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Jerusalem issue into a general Palestinian issue. Its impact extended to the Arab, Islamic and international spheres. This in turn transformed into escalating pressure on the Israeli government.

Nobody can argue that the victory of Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa was essentially made by the valiant Palestinian and Jerusalemite masses and nobody can deny their capability to triumph. The task is how to build on this model and its characteristics and develop Palestinian popular resistance on the national scale.

Mustafa Barghouti¹

¹ Mustafa is secretary-general of the Palestinian National Initiative.

Meanwhile on the Alter Planet ...

See you in Salvador



The event consists of the IC meeting and participation at the Federal University of Bahia - UFBA Congress, is intended to be an important step in our WSF construction process. Brazilian social movements will be present and we hope to be able to articulate partnerships and initiate convergences between international and local movements.

The IC meeting : October 15 and 16, at UFBA Rectory (Bairro do Canela, Salvador)

- *Analysis of Brazilian, Latin American and international present situation.*
- *Methodology of the WSF 2018:*
- *Report on the IC (secretariat, membership...)*
- *Finance*
- *Communication*
- *Mobilization: Brazilian and international*

The UFBA Congress

- Challenges for regional integration - Sovereignty and integration of peoples by another model of development Latin America and Africa);
- Democracy and communication - Alternatives to the power of large communication corporations;
- The wave of intolerance and discrimination in Brazil and in the world;
- Genders in movement
- Round of cultures of resistances;
- The fourth productive revolution and the precariousness of work;
- Lands, territories and social and environmental justice.

ACCOMMODATION

- Hotel Vila Velha (www.hotelvilavelha.com.br / vilavelhahotel@hotmail.com)
- Hotel Bahia do Sol (www.bahiaadosol.com.br / reservas@bahiaadosol.com.br)

WSF 2018 Facilitating Group and WSF 2018 Secretariat

Navigating European Left strategies

Vienna, October 17, 2017

Seminar Organized by Transform! And the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation

The economic crisis' outbreak in 2007-2008 stipulated the EU's strategy for the forthcoming years in political, economic, ideological and social terms. The crisis of political representation in the member-states as well as the increasingly authoritarian character that are being materialized in the European Union has provoked a nationalist wave all across Europe which questions European integration as such. Since the 90s, the radical Left has established itself as a real force on the European scene. However, despite the electoral progress radical Left parties have made in some countries, particularly in the European South the balance of forces remains unfavorable.

This situation poses fundamental questions to the European Left:

- How can the European Left overcome the far right reinvigorated by the political crisis in several countries and in the Europe?
- What are the possible strategies of changing Europe? Can the European Union be transformed on the basis of the existing treaties?
- And if not what follows from this strategically?
- Which would be the criteria for a Left alternative plan for Europe and do these criteria contribute also to the discussion regarding the unity of the progressive forces?

Speakers from Germany, France, Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Slovakia, Turkey, Serbia, Slovenia, Austria and other countries. Program to cover:

- The Electoral cycle in 2017
- The economic landscape in Europe
- The political mosaic in the European South
- Turkish politics
- The fate of the far right and the right – populist parties in Europe
- Transforming the European Union

Information

<http://www.transform-network.net/en/calendar/event/navigating-the-left-strategies-vis-a-vis-europe-in-times-of-multiple-crises/>



Women's Freedom in the 21st Century

Roma, October 21



The main goal of this seminar is to focus in every session the debate and exchange about interpretations, experiences, resistances and alternatives: a first step that we hope will continue involving more people. With Susan George and activists from Italy, Britain, Poland, Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Turkey, Austria, France.

Information

<http://libertadonne21sec.altervista.org/category/english/>

103 evidences of the false accusation against Solon and Archondo



Pablo Solón and Rafael Archondo are accused for alleged crimes of “Illegating Appointments,” “Failure of Duties” and “Anticipation and Prolongation of Functions” was turned over to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on Monday, August 21 at 2:45 pm Pablo Solón was summoned to testify to the Public Prosecutor’s Office. In his statement, Solon issued 103 official letters or notes from senior officials and officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Ambassador Rafael Archondo Quiroga, Alternate

Permanent Representative of the Bolivian Mission to the UN. These hundred notes undoubtedly show that Archondo was the Alternate Permanent Representative and that the word “ambassador” was widely used when addressing higher officials. The notes are mostly from the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Juan Carlos Alurralde, and other Deputies of Foreign Affairs. Other communications with the same titling of “Ambassador” were underlined in the notes referring to correspondence from the Chief of Staff of the Chancellor, the State Ceremonial Directorate, the General Directorate of Administrative Affairs and the General Directorate of Legal Affairs. The dossier of notes and other proofs annexed to Solon’s declaration proved that Rafael Archondo Quiroga was indeed the Alternate Permanent Representative of the Mission of Bolivia to the UN and that Pablo Solón only introduced him to officials at the United Nations. They also show that, under common law referred in Bolivia as “usos y costumbres”, the term “ambassador” was used as a word of distinction to refer to people who exercised high diplomatic duties.

Information

<https://fundacionsolon.org/2017/08/24/103-evidences-of-the-false-accusation-against-solon-and-archondo/>

People’s Summit in Buenos Aires



From 10 to 13 December is the 11th inter-ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organization. A host of Argentinian and international organizations organizes a week of actions along with a people’s summit. The provisional program for a full week of activities is the following:

- December 7: Launch with the Mothers of the Plaza del Mayo.
- December 8-9-10 People’s Summit
- December 11-13 : Public assemblies
- December 12 : March
- December 13 : Closure by the Assembly of alternatives.

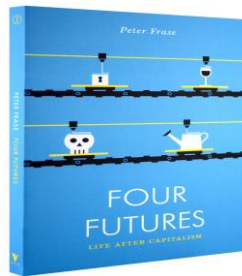
Information : <https://www.facebook.com/ConfluenciaFueraOMC/>

Intercoll is an open space for the development and confrontation of social and citizen movements. It is managed by individuals linked to those movements, and by anyone who is involved in social struggles and mobilizations. Intercoll aims to contribute to the gradual emergence of a new "international collective intellectual" from the reflection of movements and networks of research and public education. Intercoll aims to create an international and multicultural space. The website operates in six languages.

<http://intercoll.net/?lang=en>

Food for Thought

Four Future



Peter Frase, in his book *Four Futures* (2016), offers something different from other writers who postulate that the increased mechanisation of the workplace will bring about a techno-utopia. The only thing the book predicts is the end of capitalism, as we know it. *Four Futures* endeavours to tell a captivating story, which includes tales of power, scarcity and the constant throughout all four worlds is rapid improvements in technological innovation. The big question for Frase would be: who pays the costs of ecological damage and who enjoys the benefits of an even further enhanced automated society? For him, the winners and losers, in a reconstructed society, will not be determined by the new technology itself but rather by who owns the technology. *Four Futures* is a short and accessible read, filled with telling insights into the world of tomorrow through the lens of today. If you use your imagination, none of these four possible futures seems very far away. They all depend on politics and the class struggle in particular.

Dominic Brown¹

¹ Extract from a text published in Amandla no. 54 (October 2017). Dominic Brown is Media and Communication officer at AIDC.