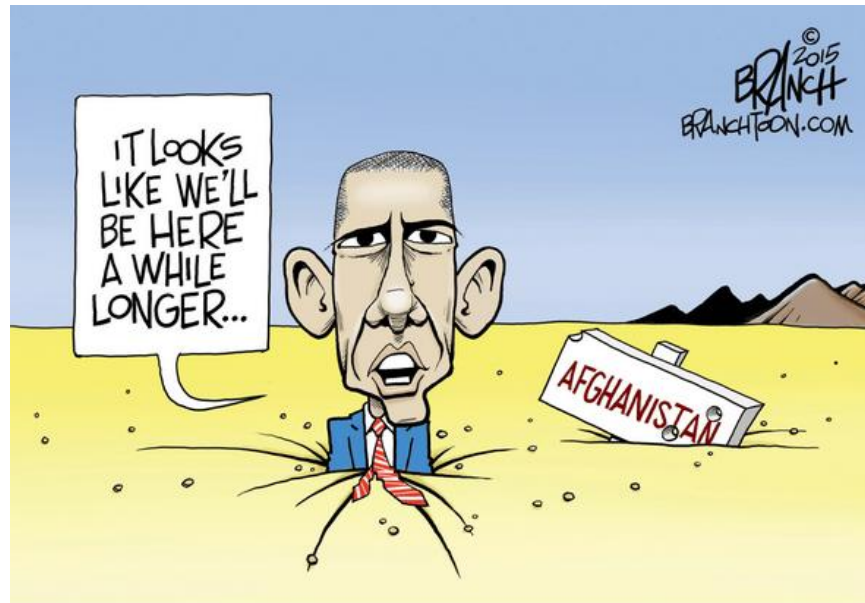


## Military Resistance 13J9



**“Cracks” Emerging In  
Bond Market Bubble:  
“Companies Could Have  
Trouble Repaying Their  
Obligations”  
“An Increase In U.S. Corporate  
Defaults”  
“The Market For Riskier Debt Has  
Become Snarled”**

# “Credit-Rating Firms Are Downgrading More U.S. Companies Than At Any Other

Comment: T

The point here is that for weeks the Wall Street Journal has been running articles very carefully and very quietly screaming alarm about the possible collapse [that’s what “snarled” means] of bond markets, and with that economic nightmares unimaginable. For example, massive defaults on trillion dollars of debt, worldwide.

Only one problem is that overseas bonds issued in commodity exporting countries outside the USA are a disaster area. Overseas corporations in those countries which borrowed in dollars are already the walking dead, because their home currencies have collapsed with their sales, and they can’t afford to buy the dollars to pay off what they owe on the bonds they issued. Those banks and funds unfortunate enough to have bought masses of their corporate bonds have already lost that money.

That’s only *one* problem, as the article below very carefully and very quietly screams oops points out.

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According to one metric, the ratio of debt to earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization for companies that carry investment-grade ratings, meaning triple-B-minus or above, was 2.29 times in the second quarter. That’s higher than the 1.91 times in June 2007, just before the crisis, according to figures from Morgan Stanley.

Oct. 12, 2015 By Mike Cherney, Wall Street Journal

**Falling profits and increased borrowing at U.S. companies are rattling debt markets, a sign the six-year-long economic recovery could be under threat.**

Credit-rating firms are downgrading more U.S. companies than at any other time since the financial crisis, and measures of debt relative to cash flow are rising.

Analysts expect profits at large companies to decline for a second straight quarter for the first time since 2009.

**The market for riskier debt has become snarled, raising fears that companies could have trouble repaying their obligations following several years of record debt issuance, low corporate defaults and persistently low interest rates.**

Reflecting those concerns, investors are now demanding more yield to own corporate bonds relative to benchmark U.S. Treasury securities.

The softening U.S. corporate fundamentals have been largely overlooked as investors focused on sharp declines in the shares, bonds and currencies of many emerging-markets nations.

Many analysts say the health of China remains the largest source of uncertainty in the global economy.

**But rising downgrades and an increase in U.S. corporate defaults indicate “some cracks on the surface” of the domestic-growth outlook, said Jody Lurie, corporate credit analyst at financial-services firm Janney Montgomery Scott LLC.**

Many investors closely monitor debt-market trends as an indicator of U.S. economic health.

**In August and September, Moody’s Investors Service issued 108 credit-rating downgrades for U.S. nonfinancial companies, compared with just 40 upgrades.**

**That’s the most downgrades in a two-month period since May and June 2009, the tail end of the last U.S. recession.**

Standard & Poor’s Ratings Services downgraded U.S. companies 297 times in the first nine months of the year, the most downgrades since 2009, compared with just 172 upgrades. Meanwhile, the trailing 12-month default rate on lower-rated U.S. corporate bonds was 2.5% in September, up from 1.4% in July of last year, according to S&P.

About a third of the downgrades targeted oil and gas companies or firms in other commodity-linked industries, following a plunge in oil prices in the second half of 2014, said Diane Vazza, head of global fixed-income research at S&P.

**Corporate finances are on the decline in other sectors, too.**

Wireless provider Sprint Corp., hotel and casino operator Wynn Resorts Ltd., insurance company Genworth Financial Inc. and pet-supplies company PetSmart Inc. were among the companies downgraded by S&P this year, highlighting the breadth of industries affected.

Those companies are in the junk category, meaning they are rated double-B-plus or below, but even higher-rated companies like McDonald’s Corp. and Mattel Inc. have been downgraded this year.

**Bond prices have suffered.**

A Sprint bond maturing in 2025 fell from about 96 cents on the dollar to about 77 cents in September after Moody’s downgraded the company. A 2024 McDonald’s bond dropped from about 104 cents in April to about 99 cents in June after an S&P downgrade in May, according to MarketAxess data.

**“We’re seeing more widespread weakness across more industry sectors in the U.S.,” Ms. Vazza said. “It’s become broader than just the commodity story.”**

**U.S. companies have increased borrowing to levels exceeding those just before the financial crisis, as firms pursue big acquisitions and seek to boost stock prices by buying back shares.**

**According to one metric, the ratio of debt to earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization for companies that carry investment-grade ratings, meaning triple-B-minus or above, was 2.29 times in the second quarter. That's higher than the 1.91 times in June 2007, just before the crisis, according to figures from Morgan Stanley.**

**"The metrics that you measure health and credit by have peaked a while ago," said Sivan Mahadevan, head of credit strategy at Morgan Stanley. "They are beginning to deteriorate."**

Many investors and analysts say the concerns are overdone.

They note that the U.S. economy is still expanding and that many large firms continue to raise money at historically low rates. They say the U.S. unemployment rate, which held at 5.1% in September, is the lowest since 2008, despite unease over slowing economic growth overseas.

While "there are some areas of weakness," Ms. Lurie said, "there are many other points to show positive economic growth."

Corporate finance chiefs have been willing to absorb downgrades because a stellar rating has become less important, with little price difference between some bonds with ratings a few notches apart.

And until recently, companies had little trouble selling debt regardless of their rating.

**But lately some companies, including the U.S. arm of Spanish bank Banco Santander SA, have had to pull bond deals and others, like chemical producer Olin Corp., had to pay higher interest rates than initially expected.**

Bankers lowered the price and increased the interest rate recently on a loan being sold to investors for insurance brokerage Integro Ltd., according to S&P Capital IQ LCD.

Another cause for concern: the earnings outlook is starting to dim, as slower growth in China and low commodity prices begin to hit firms' revenue.

In the third quarter, earnings for S&P 500 companies were expected to decline 5.1% over the same quarter last year, according to data as of Sept. 30 from FactSet. That follows an earnings decline of 0.7% in the second quarter compared with the year ago period.

Big U.S. companies with global footprints, like Caterpillar Inc., Monsanto Co. and Hewlett-Packard Co., have all announced layoffs in recent weeks. Analysts and investors say a strong U.S. dollar compared with currencies in other countries will hurt some U.S. companies' revenues in the coming months.

**Worries about companies' financial health have pushed the difference in yield—called the spread—between corporate bonds and ultrasafe U.S. Treasurys to its highest level in more than three years, according to Barclays data.**

**A bigger spread means investors want more interest relative to Treasurys to compensate them for the added risk of buying corporate bonds.**

**The spread for investment-grade firms recently hit 1.71 percentage points, up from 0.97 percentage point in July 2014, a move that analysts warn has foreshadowed broader economic troubles in the past.**

**“We are less dependent on global growth than many other developed countries, but we are not immune to the weakened economic fundamentals outside the United States,” said Gary Cloud, a portfolio manager who helps oversee the \$463 million Hennessy Equity and Income Fund.**

**MORE:**

## **Wall Street Journal Yells Quietly Again: Labels Bonds “Risky Assets” (!)**

**Oct. 23, 2015 By Saumya Vaishampayan, Dan Strumpf and Ira Iosebashvili; Wall Street Journal [Excerpt]**

**Government-bond prices declined, sending the yield on the 10-year Treasury note up to 2.081%. Yields rise when prices fall.**

**Still, the central-bank stimulus and the latest downgrade to Europe's inflation outlook renewed concerns about global economic prospects.**

**Many analysts and traders said they doubt the prices of riskier assets such as stocks, bonds and commodities can continue to rally on the strength of central-bank help alone without an upturn in growth.**

### **YOUR INVITATION:**

**Comments, arguments, articles, and letters from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Write to Box 126, 2576 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10025-5657 or email [contact@militaryproject.org](mailto:contact@militaryproject.org): Name, I.D., withheld unless you request publication. Same address to unsubscribe.**

## FORWARD OBSERVATIONS



**“At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. Oh had I the ability, and could reach the nation’s ear, I would, pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke.**

**“For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder.**

**“We need the storm, the whirlwind, and the earthquake.”**

**“The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppose.”**

**Frederick Douglass, 1852**

<p><b>He is whipped oftenest, who is whipped easiest. -- Frederick Douglass; My Bondage And My Freedom</b></p>
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**“The US Administration, Even  
When It Started Saying That Assad  
Should Step Down, Always**

**Emphasized That The Regime  
Should Remain In Place”  
“Washington Agrees Even On This  
True Goal Of Moscow’s Intervention –  
Preventing The Collapse Of The  
Assad Regime”  
“This Is Why Putin’s Intervention Was  
Seen Rather Favorably In Washington”**

**And this regime has alienated the population even more over the last two decades with its acceleration of neo-liberal reforms leading to the impoverishment of broad sections of the population, especially in the countryside, and a sharp rise in unemployment and the cost of living.**

15 October 2015 Ilya Budraitskis interviews Gilbert Achcar; LeftEast [Excerpts]

**Gilbert Achcar:** The initial official reason for the intervention was designed in order for Russia to get a Western, and especially American, green light.

Since Western countries are bombing ISIS in Syria they were certainly not in a position to object to Russia doing the same.

It is under this pretext that Putin sold his intervention to Washington before implementing it, and Washington bought it.

At the very beginning, before Russian planes started bombing, the statements from Washington were welcoming Russia’s contribution to the fight against ISIS. This was completely illusionary, of course – a pure deception.

But I would really be surprised if, in Washington, they really believed that Russia was deploying forces to Syria in order to fight ISIS.

They couldn’t have possibly ignored that the real goal of Russia’s intervention is to shore up Bashar al-Assad’s regime.

**The fact is, however, that Washington agrees even on this true goal of Moscow’s intervention – preventing the collapse of the Assad regime.**

**Since the early phase of the uprising in Syria, the US administration, even when it started saying that Assad should step down, always emphasized that the regime should remain in place.**

**Contrarily to what simplistic critics of the US believe, the Obama administration is not at all in the business of “regime change” in Syria – it is rather the contrary.**

They just wanted the Assad regime without Assad himself. This is the “lesson” they drew from the catastrophic US failure in Iraq: in retrospect, they believe that they should have opted for the “Saddamism without Saddam” scenario there, instead of dismantling the regime’s apparatuses.

**This is why Putin`s intervention was seen rather favorably in Washington.**

And there’s a lot of hypocrisy in the present complaint by the Obama administration about the fact that most Russian strikes are directed against the non-ISIS Syrian opposition.

**They are blaming Russia for not striking enough at ISIS: had the proportion of Russian strikes against ISIS been higher, it would have made them more comfortable in their collusion.**

They would have objected much less to the strikes consolidating the Assad regime.

**And yet, Washington’s hope is that Putin will not only prevent the regime’s collapse and consolidate it, but also help in reaching some kind of political settlement of the conflict. For the time being this is more wishful thinking than anything else.**

The key goal of Russia’s military intervention in Syria was to shore up the regime at a time when the latter had suffered very heavy losses since last summer. Assad himself acknowledged in July the regime’s inability to keep holding parts of the territory it had been holding until then. Moscow’s intervention aims at preventing the collapse of the regime and enable it to reconquer the territory it lost last summer. This is the basic and primary goal of the Russian intervention.

There is a second goal, however, which goes far beyond Syria, and translates in the fact that Russia sent to Syria a sampling of its air force and launched cruise missiles from the Caspian Sea.

**“This Is, Of Course, A Major Breakthrough For Russian Imperialism In Its Competition With US Imperialism”**

**This looks like the “Gulf moment” of Russian imperialism. I mean that Putin is doing at a reduced scale what the United States did in 1991 when it showcased its advanced weaponry against Iraq in the first Gulf war.**

That was a way of saying to the world: “See how powerful we are! See how efficient is our weaponry!” And it was a major argument for the reassertion of US hegemony at a crucial historic moment. The Cold war was finishing – the year 1991 turned out to be the Soviet Union’s last year, as you know well. US imperialism needed to reassert the function of its hegemony in the global system.



What Putin is doing now with this show of force is saying to the world: “We Russians also have an advanced weaponry, we can also deliver, and actually we are a more reliable ally than the US”.

Putin’s macho bullying contrasts a lot with the Obama administration’s timid attitude in the Middle East over recent years. Putin is winning friends in the region. He developed relations with Egypt’s counter-revolutionary autocrat Sisi, and with the Iraqi government. Iraq and Egypt are two states which were regarded as being part of the US sphere of influence, and yet both of them are supporting the Russian intervention, both of them are now buying weapons from Russia and developing military and strategic relations with Moscow.

**This is, of course, a major breakthrough for Russian imperialism in its competition with US imperialism.**

**From this angle, Russia’s ongoing intervention should be seen as part of an inter-imperialist competition.**

More than 15 years ago, I analyzed the Kosovo war as part of a New Cold War. This characterization was criticized at the time; we are fully in it now, it’s obvious.

### **“Washington Issued Many Hypocritical Statements Condemning The Russian Action, Even Though They Green-Lighted It In The First Place”**

Washington issued many hypocritical statements condemning the Russian action, even though they green-lighted it in the first place.

The main reason for that is that they don’t want to appear openly as supporting the rescue of the Assad regime, and thus alienate the region’s Sunnis as they see it.

*Ilya Budraitskis: So what is the real nature of the Assad regime now and how did it change during the years of war?*

Let me start with the constant description by Putin and Lavrov of the Assad regime as the “legitimate” government.

Well, that’s rooted in a very limited conception of legitimacy. You could say, of course, that Assad represents the legitimate government from the point of view of international law, but certainly not from the point of view of democratic legitimacy.

It may be the “legal” government by UN standard but it is definitely not “legitimate” as it was never elected democratically.

**This is a regime that is the product of a coup d’état that took place 45 years ago. It is still in power after a transmission of the presidency by inheritance within the quasi-royal dynasty that rules the country by means of security services and military dictatorship.**

**Syria is a country where there have been no fair elections and no political freedoms for half a century.**

**And this regime has alienated the population even more over the last two decades with its acceleration of neo-liberal reforms leading to the impoverishment of broad sections of the population, especially in the countryside, and a sharp rise in unemployment and the cost of living.**

The situation had become intolerable, and that's why the popular uprising happened in 2011.

Naturally, this most brutal dictatorial regime would not cope with the mass demonstrations, which were very peaceful at the beginning, in any democratic way like organizing truly free elections: this was out of the question.

So the regime's only response was brutal force, which they escalated gradually, killing more people every day and building up a situation that led to the uprising turning into civil war.

In addition to that, it is well known that the regime, in the summer/autumn of 2011, released the jihadists it held in its prisons.

That was because it wanted them to create armed jihadist groups – the inevitable outcome of their release in a situation of uprising – in order to confirm the lie that the regime spread from the beginning: that it was facing a jihadist rebellion. This proved indeed to be a self-fulfilling prophecy, and the militants whom the regime released from jails are now leading some of the key jihadist groups in Syria.

**It is important to be aware of the fact that whatever one can say about the reactionary character of a big section of those who are fighting the regime, it is the regime that has produced them in the first place.**

More generally, by its cruelty, the regime has created the resentment that bred the development of jihadism, up to ISIS. ISIS indeed is a barbaric response to the regime's barbarism, in what I call a "clash of barbarisms".

There is another aspect to that.

**The Assad regime is now quite worse than it was before the uprising. It is now not only a dictatorial state but a country in which murderous unrestrained gangsters, the shabbiha as they are called in Arabic, are running the show.**

**And they are terrorizing the population, which is why a major part of the recent wave of Syrian refugees fleeing to Europe came from regime-controlled areas.**

Those are the very many who can't suffer any longer to remain subjected to those criminal gangsters that the Assad regime has nurtured.

The Syrian population has no faith at all in the future of the regime. And therefore all those who could afford it, decided to flee to Europe. Many of the refugees fleeing to Europe, as you could see from television reportages, are not from the poorest parts of the population. There is a significant proportion of middle-class persons among the refugees. They often sold everything they possessed in Syria because they have no

hope in coming back! This will have a huge cost for the country's future. Those who remain in Syria are either people who can't do otherwise, or war profiteers.

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**Iranians Reclaiming Public  
Spaces And Rights Long  
Suppressed:  
“The Self-Confidence Of Ordinary  
People Is Increasing And That Can  
Be Seen Everywhere”  
“It Is In The Nature Of Such  
Movements To Migrate Into The  
Political Realm”  
“It Is Definitely A Challenge For Those In  
Power”**

OCT. 5, 2015 By THOMAS ERDBRINK, New York Times

TEHRAN — As the music ended and the crowd rose in a standing ovation, several women in the audience could be seen with heads bared, the obligatory head scarves draped around their necks.

This was no underground concert by an indie band in North Tehran, though.

Rather, it was a recital by a classical lute player in Vahdat Hall. As the opera house emptied, the women casually slipped the scarves back on and walked out. No one seemed to care, or even to notice.

Far from a protest or a political gesture, this was a fleeting illustration of a newfound self-confidence, visible across the capital — what Iranians are calling the “lifestyle movement.”

“Nobody batted an eye, because in practice most people are far ahead of the norms set by the government,” said Haleh Anvari, an essayist based in Tehran who was at the concert.

“In cars, cinemas and concerts, ordinary people are increasingly taking their space.”

Iranians have always enjoyed rich private lives, some following Western trends and fashions, but behind closed doors. The state tolerated that, but insisted that people adhere to the strict laws on appearance and behavior in public spaces that were laid down after the Islamic revolution in 1979.

**[Wrong. There was no “Islamic Revolution.” After the huge revolution that overthrew the tyrant Shah of Iran, a liberation of all but his friends and cronies, the reactionary pseudo-religious scum that rule today destroyed that revolution and the workers councils that had emerged from below, they imprisoned union leaders, intensified the oppression of women, outlawed democratic rights, and made life hell for the Iranian working class. This weakening of their predatory reactionary grip on society is good news. To call their power grab an “Islamic Revolution” is to heap filth on both Islam and revolution. T.]**

This disconnect has led to a perpetual cat-and-mouse game, with public freedoms virtually disappearing after the government’s brutal repression of protest following the widely disputed presidential election in 2009.

But now, following the election of a moderate president, Hassan Rouhani, and the signing of the nuclear agreement this summer, Iranians are increasingly taking to the streets, this time not to challenge the government but to reclaim public spaces. Though there are plenty of skeptics who say the changes are minimal and could be reversed at any time, the lifestyle movement seems to be spreading across the country.

“Few would say it out loud, but we had almost become a police state,” Hamid Reza Jalaeipour, a sociologist at Tehran University, said about the years after 2009, when the morality police were a fixture in every main square, hauling those deemed to be “badly veiled” off in vans.

For many, the atmosphere became so suffocating that they started leaving for other countries.

Mr. Jalaeipour said small changes began after Mr. Rouhani succeeded Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2013, promising a nuclear agreement and an expansion of personal freedoms, but have increased noticeably of late.

“Especially after the elections and now the nuclear deal,” he said, “the self-confidence of ordinary people is increasing and that can be seen everywhere.”

But the change is palpable in a country that once posted morality police throughout the city; discouraged dressing in anything but black and most forms of entertainment; and that, in recent years, had begun burying the remains of martyrs of the Iran-Iraq war in the middle of public squares.

In the universities, students have started wearing bright colors. Street musicians line up at busy crossings, even though music is still frequently denounced by conservative clerics as “haram,” or forbidden in Islam.

Fashion shows with models and runways, previously banned, are popping up. At night, women can be seen riding in cars without their head scarves, while billboards, long the exclusive domain of political figures, now feature celebrities like the Iranian actor Bahram Radan, who advertises leather coats.

Where previously even joking in public gatherings was considered politically risky, cafes now organize stand-up comedy evenings.

Groups of citizens have formed nongovernmental organizations around issues like animal rights and the environment.

**In the spring, more than a thousand animal rights activists gathered at the Ministry of Environment, protesting the killing of stray dogs in the city of Shiraz. The protest was fueled by social media, heavily amplified by the introduction of 3G mobile Internet. The killing stopped. [Perhaps a New York City Police Commissioner should tell the ruling oligarchs about the “Broken windows” dynamic. T]**

Many of the initiatives are the natural result of long pent-up demand, but also because the state seems to be retreating from many areas.

Analysts say that is the work of officials appointed by Mr. Rouhani, who have taken up high-level positions in the Culture and Interior Ministries. They cannot rewrite Iran’s laws: the Parliament and the judiciary will block any changes. But they have allowed ordinary citizens more space to breathe.

**Suddenly there are too many concerts to choose from, and public initiatives like campaigns to boycott Iranian carmakers to press them to raise the quality of their offerings or to save stray cats are mushrooming all over town.**

The only red line is politics, many here say. Anything with a political tinge will be stopped cold. **[Famous last words.]**

Still, that provides a lot of openings for those who, like Ehsan Rasoulof, can see them. The son of a wealthy banker, the 32-year-old looks like a typical aspiring Iranian artist, wearing a checked shirt and ripped jeans and chain-smoking Iranian cigarettes, which are half the size of Western ones. Instead of driving a Maserati, as other children of the elite in Tehran do, he uses taxis.

“I am not left, or right, I couldn’t care less about politics,” he said. “My mission in life is to take back our public space.” **[Oh sure. Nothing political about that!]**

He opened the Mohsen Gallery, now one of Tehran’s most prominent art spaces, in honor of his brother, a photographer who died in a plane crash. He has used his family money to fund rock, pop and alternative bands, publish books and produce movies. In 2013, he opened a cafe, Nazdik, in downtown Tehran that sponsors a variety of cultural events and attracts people to a part of the city most do not usually frequent at night.

He did it, he said, because “we need bases to hang out.”

**Mr. Rasoulof described an unending tug of war with the authorities over permits for concerts and other public performances.**

He said he had planned to hold a rock concert Thursday under the city's Freedom Tower and had all the permits in place. But the show was canceled after the government announced three days of mourning to commemorate the deaths of Iranian pilgrims in the stampede during the hajj last month in Saudi Arabia.

"We will have the concert later," he said. "As long as we stay away from politics, many things are possible."

He said many Iranians were intent on reclaiming freedoms seen after the election of Mohammad Khatami, a moderate who was president from 1997 to 2005 — minus the politics. That was like a dam breaking, flooding Iran's closed society with youthful ambitions.

Newspapers opened up, boys and girls started mixing and, at the height of what some called the "Iranian spring," students battled with security forces for six days after a newspaper was shut down.

But conservative opposition built up, leading to years under Mr. Ahmadinejad devoted to destroying the civil society that had emerged, including imprisoning and exiling its architects.

Nowadays the moderates are also back, but operate cautiously — as they themselves say, like a car driving through the night with its headlights off.

Sitting in a newly opened party office, Ali Shakorirad, the head of the reformist Islamic Iranian National Union Party, said he had no clear agenda: "For now we are simply trying to survive."

**Most Iranians do not care much about political change these days. Instead, the focus is on social responsibility. [More famous last words, and stupid ones at that.]**

"During the Ahmadinejad era we saw that if we stood on the sidelines we lost out," said Sohrab Mahdavi, a member of a group prodding the government to clean up Tehran's notoriously bad air. "If we want to be good citizens, we must first take responsibility ourselves," he said.

**Mr. Jalaeipour, the sociologist, said that he was not sure where the new activism was heading, or how far it would go.**

**It is in the nature of such movements to migrate into the political realm, he said, "It is definitely a challenge for those in power."**

**[He gets it. T]**

**But the inroads in public space are apparent everywhere, he said, and may not be so easy to suppress.**

“Nowadays you even see women taking out the trash without their head scarves on,” he said. “It seems difficult to send all these people back into their houses.”

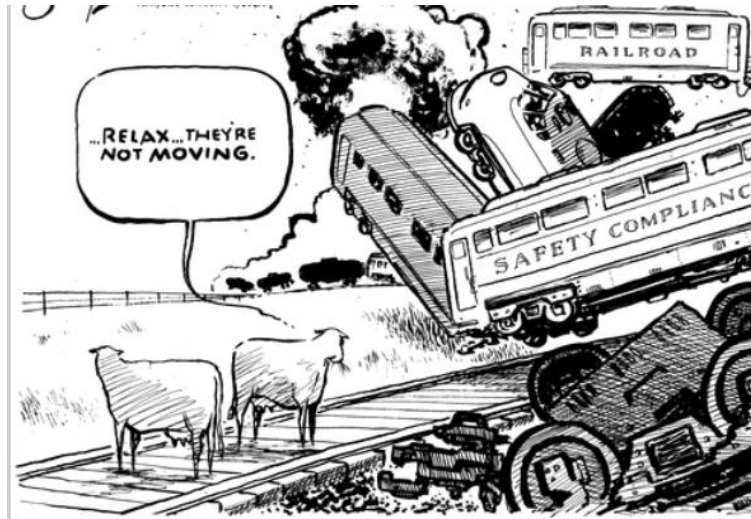
Others were more cautious, citing past outbursts of public expression that were followed by crackdowns, but still saw the changes as enduring.

“Naturally, the state will try to control the pace of these changes,” said Ms. Anvari, the essayist.

**“But, ultimately, their interest in the private space has waned over the years. This led to families changing; now we are witnessing these changes on the streets.”**

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## **CLASS WAR REPORTS**



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## **The Class War Seen From Grand Rapids: Rapids: “If You Are Poor Or Middle Class In Grand Rapids, You Are Expected To Be Quiet, Be Invisible, Or Be Afraid”**

October 24, 2015 by Larry Hanley, Daily Kos.

Larry Hanley is the President of the Amalgamated Transit Union

Go to Grand Rapids, Michigan, and the tourism bureau's sales pitch is unavoidable.

Sweeping videos advertise "A City of Art," "A City of Design," "Top 10 City for R&D Investment," "Best Place to Invest," a "Learning Lab" for transit, and my favorite, "Beer City USA."

There is good reason that Grand Rapids tags itself with such lofty monikers.

While the rest of Michigan, especially Detroit, has been obliterated to make room for austerity, Grand Rapids was made a petri dish for it instead.

When American manufacturing was dismantled, setting the stage for the long decline that continues today, western Michigan billionaire families with names like Van Andel, DeVos, and Meijer teamed up with their accomplices in elected office to repackage the city.

The formula here is similar to other small American cities trying to make themselves into destinations: promote public art, invest in shiny but redundant transit options like streetcars and gondolas, build a ferris wheel or a new arena, subsidize hip businesses to draw those elusive "millennials."

Once they finished this taxpayer-funded and billionaire-supplemented paint job in Grand Rapids, they shooed away the homeless to shelters and storefront nooks on Division Street.

Then, they lured in the conferences and investors, the craft breweries and big tickets concerts with a clear message: "Look at this pristine, Truman Show utopia we're creating!"

That's why every ad or video has the tagline, "Experience Grand Rapids."

Honestly, it is a great experience, if you only spend time downtown.

But what is that experience like for the workers who toil there before heading back to the neighborhoods where they pay a mortgage or rent?

To start, nearly 27% of Grand Rapids residents live below the poverty line.

Many of these are the front-line service workers who live in fear of losing a job if they don't smile widely enough for the out-of-touch, big-salaried customers who play downtown and then flee to the suburbs at night.

**Yet the political class in town has decided to make the city's poorest bear the heaviest burden.**

When panhandling reached a crisis level, they did not invest in education, healthcare, or employment programs. Instead, they criminalized begging altogether. It took a 2013 ACLU lawsuit to finally overturn the law.

Asking for help from strangers when you're at your most vulnerable is not a crime; it's an act of desperation and a protected First Amendment activity.



**But the courts couldn't stop the most recent attack on the poor: an unprecedented 16.1% fare increase for bus riders supported by the Board of Directors at The Rapid, the city's transit agency.**

**While it is blasphemy to tax the rich in Grand Rapids, it is apparently fine to tax the transit-dependent.**

The Rapid's CEO, Peter Varga, told a Michigan Public Radio reporter this: "The whole purpose was to get people to buy multi ride tickets to make it easier for them to board."

I became a bus driver in 1978. I want easier boarding, too.

But the reason people buy single-ride tickets is not because they're stupid. It is because they do not have the cash liquidity to purchase multiple rides at once. They are afraid of spending too much on one need for fear they won't have enough for another tomorrow.

Moving up the economic ladder, the few middle class jobs that remain are also under attack.

The 300 bus operators and mechanics who operate The Rapid are the target du jour. They represent a cross-section of Grand Rapids: black and white, immigrant and Native American, young and old, high school and college graduates alike. Their job isn't easy.

Because the city won't address the root problems of poverty and city leaders hide out from those who suffer most, the public's rage is taken out in the form of assaults on bus drivers. Shots have even been fired through bus windows.

How does The Rapid, on whose Board sits the current Mayor and Mayor-elect, respond? By terminating the long-established pensions of these devoted civil servants.

**For the past month, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 836, which represents those workers, has been campaigning against the fare hike and pension theft proposals.**

**When they attempted to leaflet transit riders about these issues, Varga and The Rapid Board threatened to arrest and fire them, even though they were volunteering on their own time.**

The union had to file a First Amendment lawsuit against the agency and won a preliminary injunction.

**Rather than reining in a Constitution-violating public official or reviewing the financial counterpoints offered by the union on the pension issue, The Rapid Board did something that makes Congress look in-touch.**

**In one night, the Board chose to raise fares on riders, to terminate the pension and contract of workers, and to increase Varga's salary to \$203,000. They literally endorsed taking from the poor and to give to the rich.**

That brings us to the top of the economic ladder here in Gerald R. Ford territory, where anti-tax and anti-government sentiments have long ruled.

**Ideologues at places like the right-wing Mackinac Center for Public Policy don't think we should invest in a safety net for the quarter of our neighbors who fell between the cracks or that we should maintain pensions so retirees aren't forced onto government programs later.**

**Instead, they advocate eliminating the safety net for the poor and demanding that middle class families sacrifice even more.**

**Their supposedly Democratic counterparts have mostly stayed silent, afraid to poke the billionaires and their selected officials in the eye.**

If you are poor or middle class in Grand Rapids, you are expected to be quiet, be invisible, or be afraid.

If you're rich, you can bring your family, ride the new bus made just for you, see a show, and have a beer.

Fortunately, labor unions, community organizers, student groups, and bus riders have united in recent weeks and are building a movement to expose the ugly truth:

Grand Rapids isn't Beer City; it's Fear City.

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## **Montenegro Dictatorship Attacks “An ‘Unauthorized’ Pro-Democracy Rally” "Brutal Police Violence Has Brought Montenegro To The Very Brink Of Civil War”**

17 Oct 15 by Dusica Tomovic, BIRN

Police in Montenegro fired tear gas on Saturday to disband hundreds of protesters who have been calling for the government to resign and hold early elections amid allegations of corruption and election fraud.

At least three opposition leaders and several MPs were injured during the violence, which erupted when protesters tried to march toward the parliament headquarters in Podgorica.

The main opposition alliance, the Democratic Front, has claimed that its leaders Nebojsa Medojevic and Andrija Mandic were "brutally beaten".

Parliament Vice President Branko Radulovic was also reportedly injured in violent clashes late Saturday evening. Violence had also erupted earlier in the day when riot police moved in at around 6am local time to break-up the three-week protest.

Journalist Marko Milacic, activist Vladimir Dajkovic and several university professors have been arrested while protesting in front of the Montenegrin parliament.

Around 6 am on Saturday riot police clashed with protesters when they moved in to dismantle the camp set up by protesters in front the parliament, since the end of September.



Montenegrin police have used tear gas to break up a protest by the opposition. Photo: AP/Risto Bozovic.

Several people were reportedly injured in the clashes, including MPs. The leader of the opposition Democratic People's Party, Milan Knezevic was reported to have suffered severe injuries.

Police have arrested at least dozen protesters, including two MPs from the opposition alliance, Democratic Front, who staged an "unauthorized" pro-democracy rally.

Montenegro police said they have arrested 11 people, including MPs Slaven Radunovic and Vladislav Bojovic, a journalist of the daily Dan Drazen Zivkovic and editor of the web portal IN4S, Gojko Raicevic, and several opposition councilors in Podgorica's local parliament.

Police said that six officers were injured in the clashes with protesters, and in order to overcome "active resistance and acting according to the law", the police forces had used tear gas.

However, the family of the arrested editor Raicevic told local media that after the arrest he was beaten, most likely in the police vehicle, and he was transferred to the local hospital's emergency room.

The police had called the peaceful protesters to move from the square in front of the parliament building after their permit for protests expired on October 10. But the anti-government protesters, who were blocking the main streets in the capital Podgorica for days, have ignored the calls to dismantle the camp.

The organizers of the protests claim that over 1000 police special force's officers have "brutally attacked to break up a peaceful and democratic" rally.

"Brutal police violence of (Prime Minister) Milo Djukanovic, has brought Montenegro to the very brink of civil war, and sent a clear message that he is ready to use all means to defend his power," representative of the main opposition party alliance, the Democratic Front, Koca Pavlovic said on Saturday.

Earlier, on Friday, the atmosphere at the rally was festive with people carrying signs, singing songs and shouting chants. Sandwich stands and ice cream trucks were rolled out, providing food and drinks to those attending.

The protest follows months of tension over the country's new elections legislation which the majority of the opposition sharply criticised because they claimed that it would not provide for a fair vote in elections set for spring 2016.

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# **Students Of Kosovo Rise Up In Defence Of Higher Education “Reforms” Fighting Against “Defiling And Corrupted Government And Its Puppets (The Majority Of Professors, Deans And Student Organisations” “We Have To Fight For A Better Society”**

# “We’re Gonna Rise Above, We’re Tired Of Your Abuse, Try To Stop Us, It’s No Use”



9 October 2015, Pristina



Eurisa Rukovci

9 October 2015 LeftEast

LeftEast Editor’s note:

For a couple of weeks now hundreds of citizens of Kosovo have been rallying in support of greater autonomy for the University of Pristina. Gathered under the slogan ‘For University’ they joined in support of the Rector’s proposed reforms for improving the quality of higher education.

Yesterday's dismissal of the Rector by the Governing Council of the University, sparked outrage amongst his supporters from "For University", who called for a protest scheduled to start at 11:00, on 22nd of October outside the Ministry of Education in Pristina.

The Student's Political Club is one amongst a number of groups of students and individuals who are supporting the protest.

**One of their activists, Eurisa Rukovci presents here an account of the challenges in higher education which the wider student movement is fighting to overcome.**

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**by Eurisa Rukovci**

Pristina

Paraphrasing the Marxist educator, Paulo Freire in his masterpiece, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed", an authentic vision for education is that which aims to transform the social structure that surrounds academia.

Neo-liberal apparatchiks who manage our education system want to push teachers in a narrow minded focus of "audit trails" and "managing systems", as a way towards achieving efficiency in classrooms.

The same problem is present within the education system in Kosovo.

The post-war period gave way to neoliberal reforms and neoliberal management which has ruined the education system all the way from primary levels to higher education. This is especially the case with the University of Pristina, which has historically been a hot-spot for political activity that paved way to social changes and solidarity amongst students.

Worth mentioning are the leftist protests of the "National Liberation Front of Kosovo" in 1968, 1981 and 1997. This paved the way for the Liberation Army to use the university as a political hub from which to recruit a large number of soldiers.

The University of Pristina can be seen as a live embodiment of dialectics, where bad and good, just and unjust battle each other.

With these constant battles that have revolutionary character we can see that in the past years good has always triumphed over evil.

However, since the war of 1998-1999, the recent unlawful policies have tipped the scales in favour of the defiling and corrupted government and its puppets (the majority of professors, deans and student organisations).

Seeing the troublesome circumstances a group of students who have left ideals decided to gather and start the student organisation- Students' Political Club (KPS) in 2010 to combat all the corrupt and undermined structures in the University.

A common goal united us, founded on the model for universal equality and social equity. When the organisation was set in motion, its main goals were not nationalistic and it didn't intend to bring forth nationalistic propaganda fueling the easy emotions that are present in the population.

It had left tendencies from the start. In the beginning we started as a debate club where we read, listened and watched everything left. After establishing ourselves as a group, we moved on to other things.

First off, we started going out on the terrain at protests and political actions which started off by opposing the increased rates of tuition, demanding better conditions in lecture halls and dormitories etc.

After 2012 people started paying more attention and we caught the mainstream media's eye with the blockade of the faculty of philosophy.

The culmination of our activities has been marked by the protests of January and February of 2014 together with the "SKV Movement".

**"We Started Off With 50 Students And After Two Weeks We Gained The Support Of Over 5000 Protesters. The Police Expressed Violence And Even Kidnappings"**

We started off with 50 students and after two weeks we gained the support of over 5000 protesters.

The police expressed violence using force, tear gas and even kidnappings. With this we managed, as Zizek wrote, to transform the daily objective violence of the system to subjective violence. From that moment until now, the positive side to all this is that we have a larger number of activists.

**We are continuing with political activism that targets the Electricity Company, government corruption, women's rights etc.**

We continue to oppose the political societal formations where we live.

Although we have a critique against the general political situation in Kosovo, we are concentrated in the critique for higher education. We oppose the neoliberal reforms and the Bologna process that is being implemented in our university.

Considering the fact that in our country the political formation and its development are capitalist, the relations of production are exploitative. This implies that higher education as part of the superstructure operates in an exploitative manner also.

Wilkinson and Pickett in their book "The spirit level: why equality is better for everyone", have shown that countries that have more inclusive policies and a lower rate of inequality have an education system that is higher in quality. Countries with low inequality, mainly the Scandinavian countries have a more qualitative education in comparison with Greece, Italy, USA and other countries that use free market logic.

Unfortunately this “Chicago Boys” logic has devalued and commercialized our education system.

### **“The Past Rector Surrendered In The Midst Of The Student Protests”**

After the 2014’s protests, there were changes in the administration. The past rector surrendered in the midst of the student protests after it was uncovered that his academic work was published in a questionable pay-to-publish journal in India. After the fall of the corrupted rector in 2014, there was a temporary man in charge for about six months.

Following those events, a new rector was appointed, Ramadan Zejnullahu.

The University of Pristina has been broadly condemned for its relationship with corruption, political parties, and absence of literature. The new rector vowed to stop all of this and was immediately challenged by the corrupt ‘leaders’ of the University including professors and student organisations that are tied to parties and corruption that is overwhelming in our country.

**The Students’ Political club has announced to the media the incrimination of the Senate and the Board of Directors and the ways in which they are still trying to keep corruption alive, and for each one of them we have exposed their academic shortcomings, plagiarism, and their ties to the corrupt political parties.**

**They organised protests to overthrow the rector clinging to the lie that the reforms are going to harm students.**

This paved the way for the student march on October 9th, which gathered student activists and members from civil society in support of the new rector. In support of the new reforms and in support of fighting crime in our university.

Even though the call for mobilisation was made in a short time, 24 hours to be exact, we had more than 200 people that joined us. What followed was a blockade at the rector’s office from the Student Parliament that lasted two days.

**We decided that we had to radicalise our attitude and decided to graffiti slogans all over the university’s campus.**

The symbolic action of October 18th, was challenged by the police resulting in the arrest of five of our activists.

Even though they were released overnight, our activists were attacked and threatened with guns and rubber truncheons in the University of Education, the dean of which is a man with political power.

This just proves our argument and we see clearly that even the security guards that are employed to guard the university are in service to the oppressive reign and they are used as militia to push political agendas with violence.





Graffiti Action, 18th October 2015

For more details about the activity in question and the general activities of KPS we have a statement from the activist Eroll Gashi who says that, recently KPS has co-organised a march which expresses support for many progressive processes that the university is going through.

“Also, we have sought autonomy for the University and as a last demand, we stated that the budget that is being given to the education needs to become the country’s priority”, said Gashi adding that the university definitely needs to be politicised because knowledge in itself is political and that students must have an ideological-political formation. “Our critique against the student organisations that are the levers of the government and other corrupted parties lies in the fact that these parties aim to depoliticise the student and the university, and this is what they serve to. While in contrast from them we have a political critique and articulation on the university and we have ideological clarity, thus aiming to make radical transformations of all society,” said Gashi, and added that KPS will continue to make the university a political factor of society and to make society a political concern of the university.

**I often go back to the early years of my teenage life when performing was my hobby and I think back of the song “Rise Above” from “Black Flag”.**

**With it I always get reminded of the struggle that we have to fight for a better society, especially the verse “We’re gonna rise above, we’re tired of your abuse, try to stop us, it’s no use.”**

**I began this article and I’m concluding it with these verses that reflect the grave situation in our university in hopes of radically transforming it.**

**“Rise Above” from “Black Flag”.**

**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHR-rzUjCzU>**

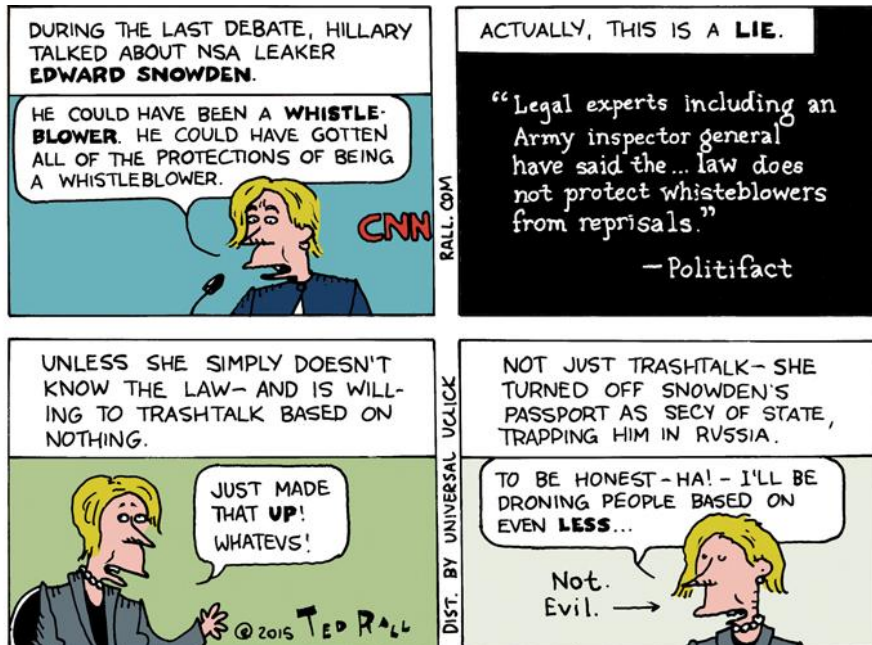
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# OCCUPATION PALESTINE



To check out what life is like under a murderous military occupation commanded by foreign terrorists, go to:  
<http://www.maannews.net/eng/Default.aspx> and  
<http://www.palestinemonitor.org/list.php?id=ej898ra7yff0ukmf16>  
 The occupied nation is Palestine. The foreign terrorists call themselves "Israeli."

# DANGER: POLITICIANS AT WORK



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# **Egyptian Facebook User Charged With “Attempting To Overthrow The Regime” Sentenced To Three Years For Drawing Mickey Mouse Ears On Al-Sisi**



20 October 2015 Middle East Monitor

An Egyptian Facebook user was charged with “attempting to overthrow the regime” in a military court last week, and sentenced to three years for drawing Mickey Mouse ears on President Abdel Fatah Al-Sisi.

Social media users took to twitter to express solidarity and outrage with Nohan, sharing the image and mocking the sentence under the hashtag Freedom for Amr Nohan (نوهن\_ل\_عمرو\_الحربية#).

Egypt currently holds over 42,000 political prisoners since the military ousted elected President Mohamed Morsi in July 2013.

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