



IV515 - December 2017

Energy and Roses

31 December 2017, by **Cinzia Arruzza**

On November 11, hundreds of people from Mexico's [National Assembly of Energy Users](#) (ANUEE) came together for an event on the new feminist movement in the auditorium of the [Mexican Electrical Workers Union](#) (SME). This is a building with a long militant history, featuring a colossal mural by José David Alfaro Siqueiros, who worked on this "Portrait of the Bourgeoisie" between 1939 and 1940, until he was forced to flee the country after participating in an assassination attempt on Leon Trotsky.

In 1936 the SME won a major victory against its employer, the British-Canadian Mexican Light, through a strike that shut off all power in Mexico City. After the nationalization of the energy system in 1960, the union became a point of reference for radical and politically independent unionism, and in recent years promoted the creation of the New Workers' Confederation (NCT) and of a new political coalition, the People's and Workers' Political Organization (OPT), currently involved in the presidential campaign for a Zapatista-backed indigenous woman, [MarÁa de Jess Patricio MartÁnez](#).

In 2009 the SME called energy users to mobilize against the privatization of the energy sector, which had already caused price hikes in electricity bills that became impossible to pay. In 2010 ANUEE was created in response to this call. The struggle for public and

accessible energy goes back to the 1990s, when Salinas de Gortari's government privatized 40 percent of the generation of energy, opening Mexico's energy market to transnational companies based in Spain.

As workers' opposition to privatization grew, so did elites' desires to defeat opposition and clear the way for their "modernization" projects. In 2009, in an attempt to destroy the union, Felipe Calderón's government liquidated the public energy company Light and Power, sending the army and police force to seize the plants. He left dozens of thousands of workers without a job.

In 2013, Peña Nieto's government pushed through further energy reforms, including a constitutional amendment legalizing the privatization process. The main beneficiaries of these measures are the Spanish multinational companies Iberdrola, Unión Fenosa, and Endesa, who reap 70 percent of the private energy sector's profits. However, since the negotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the United States have also played a key role in pressuring Mexican governments into privatizing strategic sectors.

This is the context in which ANUEE was launched and has grown. The idea behind its creation was to combine the

workers' fight at the point of production with mobilization within social reproduction. The organization now boasts a membership of more than one hundred thousand households and small businesses and has organized hundreds of actions, becoming a major player in the movement to re-nationalize the energy system. It has also promoted forms of civil disobedience, inviting the population not to pay energy bills and blocking the provider's attempts to disconnect the energy supply to insolvent users.

Over the years, its positions have evolved from asking for debt forgiveness and fair rates to reclaiming access to energy as a human right and linking this demand to a more encompassing critique of neoliberal capitalism. This year, through a forty-six day occupation in front of the Federal Energy Commission (CFE), the movement achieved a major victory in their struggle against price hikes.

Among the gains was the government's pledge to forgive the outstanding debt, which in some cases has reached as much as \$15,800, and to allow the consumers to sign a contract with the company of their choice for continued service. This would allow ANUEE members to be served by the Mexican Electrical Workers' Union new cooperative, which has an agreement with them to

charge a preferential “social rate” to protect citizens’ right to access to energy. Until the time of this writing, however, the government has not fulfilled its promises and has begun a campaign to criminalize the movement.

During the weeks of the occupation, ANUEE activists organized marches and teach-ins as well as a week-long educational activity devoted to the history of women’s struggles in Mexico. Just a couple of months before, ANUEE had mobilized a four-thousand-person-strong contingent for March’s International Women’s Strike.

This is key, because it is women who have shaped ANUEE’s radical trajectory.

Transformed Through Struggle

Women make up the majority of the participants in the protests, and an increasing number of working class and poor women are assuming leadership of the organization. Alejandra, a young woman who joined ANUEE in 2012, explained that the majority of the movement is made by women, because it is women who are in the homes. They are the ones responsible for doing the work of care and social reproduction within their families, and for making ends meet. Energy access determines their day-to-day conditions.

For many of them, this was their first political experience, and one that transformed them. Juanita, an activist from Hidalgo who joined ANUEE seven years ago, described how this experience changed her life:

ANUEE helped me to free myself of my fear and to fight. I have children and I’m fighting for them, to give them a roof, education, food. It’s not easy, but I’m feeling proud to belong to ANUEE. My daughter now understands me, my children resisted at the beginning, but now they understand that we have to fight for our rights, for our future. We are fighting for those who will come after us.

The movement led a number of women to get out of their homes and start living a public life for the first time, attending and organizing meetings and marches. This has provoked a reshaping of family life and gender roles within the household, though not without resistance from family members. Having to face this opposition led women activists to see their participation in the movement as containing an existential and political significance reaching far beyond the struggle for public and accessible energy. Veronica, a volunteer coordinator of ANUEE, explained how her years in the movement reshaped her perception of herself:

My father was a sexist, he didn’t allow me to study or work. I have no career, I have two sons and a husband, and I’m the only woman in my family. They don’t understand my engagement, as I became a coordinator and have meetings, activities . . . Before this, I spent most of my time with my sons, but now I have to go out and my sons don’t understand.

They are beginning to understand, though, that I have to realize myself as a woman. I want to teach them that if one has the will, one also has the power, and that if one begins something, then she has to finish it. I want to teach them as men, for their idea is that women should stay at home.

In some cases the lack of support by husbands and partners led to a break-up. This is the experience of Maria, who left her partner because of his opposition to her participation in the movement:

I’m part of the struggle and I don’t want to give up. I’m fighting for the well-being of my children and the future of my grandchildren. I learned that it is possible to be on one’s own: I don’t depend on anyone who can tell me not to go to a march or to work, I depend only on myself. We are strong women, we are warriors, because we know that there will be a price to pay, as nothing is easy, but when we win, when we march together and chant “Yes, we can,” well . . . all of this is worth doing ...

For others, like Miriam, another

coordinator, taking up a leadership role and being busy in organizing meetings and protests had a therapeutic function after a break-up: “It helped me. My children support me. It taught them to fight back, now” when I go to a march or a meeting “they ask me to tell them everything about what I did and how it went.”

In spite of the number of women participating in the organization, ANUEE only decided recently to create a women’s coordinating committee, which is still not incorporated in the statute. As Rosario, a veteran feminist organizer, explained, women faced resistance not just within their family, but in the organization as well. For example, some male activists resisted the introduction of women’s rights and struggles among the topics of educational work, used sexual insults against the women who had political disagreements with them, and offered scant support to women taking up leadership roles.

Moreover, while the number of women in leadership roles has increased over the years, it still does not reflect the number of women participating in the movement. Margarita, a member of the national coordinating body, reported that some male activists ignored her leadership while she was in charge of an occupation. “They didn’t accept I had this role. We need to play our role aggressively, otherwise men don’t take us into account, don’t respect us,” she said. “My father was very sexist, but this taught me to resist, to say that I, as a woman, I’m equal to men, I’m worth the same. I have a son, and he learned to respect women.”

This fall, ANUEE organized hundreds of symbolic occupations of local energy offices and plants. This culminated, on November 16, with a twenty-thousand-person march to protest privatization and demand the implementation of the social rate ANUEE helped win.

Mobilizations like these are crucial, because while the movement has made some gains, the government’s modernization project is ongoing. Organizers think that, if realized, it

will leave millions of users without access to energy. The government is also trying to divide the movement, by offering thousands of "modernization" jobs to SME electrical workers, who

have been out of work since the liquidation of Light and Power.

But the women of ANUEE are not showing any sign of discouragement or fatigue. As Alejandra put it: "The

fight taught us to fight, beyond our demands concerning energy: we are fighting for women."

[Jacobin](#)

IV515 - December 2017 PDF

31 December 2017, by [robm](#)

IVP515 December 2017 PDF magazine available to download

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COP23: From the Gap to the Precipice

30 December 2017, by [Daniel Tanuro](#)

As we know, Paris resulted in a so-called "historic" agreement concerning the level of global warming not to be exceeded at the end of the century (compared to the pre-industrial era): "stay well below 2°C and continue efforts not to exceed 1.5°C".

Katowice will be a more important step than Bonn: the signatory countries will have to say how and to what extent they will raise the level of their ambitions in order to bridge the gap between the greenhouse gas emission reductions at present planned in their national 'climate plans' on the one hand, and on the other the reductions that would be necessary overall to achieve the global objectives put down on paper in Paris. Belgium, for its part, does not have a climate plan worthy of the name.

Every year, the United Nations devotes a special report to the challenge of the "emissions gap". According to the 2017 edition (Emissions Gap Report 2017), the gap is "alarmingly large". That is putting it mildly: the climate plans (or Nationally Determined Contributions, NDCs) of countries represent only one third of

the reductions in emissions that would have to be made to stay below a 2°C rise in temperature... and (but the report does not say so) less than a quarter of the reductions that would have to be made to stay below 1.5°C.

Now, time is running out and the timetable is becoming tighter. The report says: "If the emissions gap is not filled in 2030, it is extremely unlikely that the target of not exceeding 2°C will be achieved. Even if the current NDCs were fully realized, the carbon budget for 2°C would be 80 per cent used up in 2030. Based on current estimates of the carbon budget, the carbon budget for 1.5°C will already be used up by 2030".

As a reminder, the "carbon budget" is the amount of carbon that can still be sent into the atmosphere with a probability X of not exceeding a rise of Y°C at the end of the century. The probability of 2°C and 1.5°C carbon budgets mentioned in the Emissions Gap Report 2017 is 65 per cent. (As a parenthesis: that's not much: what do you do if you are told that the plane you are travelling in has a 65 per cent chance of not exploding

in flight?).

Let's go back to the question of deadlines. For the gap to be closed by 2030, measures must be taken by 2020 at the latest - in three years - and they must multiply by three emission reductions in the NDCs. The year 2020 is the first date scheduled in Paris for the adaptation of NDCs to bridge the gap.

To prepare for this crucial negotiation, the governments have planned a process called "facilitative dialogue" that begins in 2018. The UN report on the gap writes in black and white: "The facilitative dialogue and the 2020 revision of the NDCs are the last chance to close the emissions gap in 2030."

"The last chance to bridge the gap" really does mean the last chance to stay below 2°C of global warming at the end of the century. As a reminder, global warming of 2°C will most likely - and irreversibly - involve an increase in the level of the oceans of about 4.5 metres at equilibrium...

Given the extent of the efforts needed to be in line with the Paris objectives and the extremely short time frame in

which these efforts must be decided and effectively implemented, we should be talking not about a gap, but about a precipice.

Is it possible to bridge the gap – and not to fall over the precipice? Once again, the answer to this question is twofold: technically, yes. In the context of capitalist productivism, no.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, adopted in 1990 in Rio, set the goal of not exceeding a "dangerous level" of global warming. It took twenty-five years and twenty-one COPs to decide to quantify this dangerous level: not to exceed 2°C and "continue efforts (sic) not to exceed 1.5°C."

Given this slowness, it is necessary to be naive or very optimistic to think that two years will be enough now for the governments of the world to agree on the measures to be taken to multiply their efforts by three in order to respect the objective of 2°C, and by four to respect that of 1.5°C (in fact, the one that should absolutely be reached).

Twenty-five years after Rio, global emissions continue to rise.

Admittedly, they increase only slightly, (0.9 per cent, 0.2 per cent and 0.5 per cent respectively in 2014, 2015 and 2016)... but they increase... whereas they should decrease very strongly and very quickly!

It is certainly positive that the United States is very politically isolated on the climate issue, on the one hand, and on the other that some states of the Union (California in the front line) openly challenge Trump and his clique of climate criminals. Nevertheless, the US withdrawal weighs on the negotiations.

This withdrawal will make it even more difficult to bridge the gap. The Nationally Determined Contribution of the US consisted of a promise to reduce emissions by 2 gigatonnes of CO₂. These 2 Gt are equivalent to 20 per cent of the very insufficient effort made by the NDCs as a whole. They are therefore to be added to the measures to be taken within three years.

It should also be noted that the US is

withdrawing without really withdrawing: present in Bonn, they continued – as under Obama – to put the brakes on the green fund for the climate. As a reminder: one hundred billion dollars a year that the developed countries have pledged to make available to the South from 2020, for the adaptation and mitigation of climate change, for which the rich countries are mainly responsible and the poor countries the main victims.

This green fund was decided at COP16 in Cancun in 2010 but the goal of one hundred billion is very far from being reached (to put it mildly). Seizing the occasion, other countries – the European Union in particular – have used the pretext of the US attitude to avoid answering the concrete questions of the countries of the South and NGOs: How much money? When? In what form (donations or loans?).

The truth is that, from COP to COP, world capitalism continues to bring humanity closer to the precipice. Faced with this alarming situation, they try to reassure us by picking out figures on the increasing share of renewable energy in the "energy mix". This increase is indeed very fast, and it will accelerate in the coming years, because the electricity produced by renewables is globally less expensive than the energy produced by burning fossils.

However, these reassuring speeches mislead us, because the indicator to be taken into account is the decrease in emissions, not the rise in the share of renewables. But as long as we do not question growth, therefore the race for profit, the share of renewables can increase at the same time as increasing greenhouse gas emissions, and that's exactly what has been happening for about fifteen years.

How will capitalism get out of this huge problem? For Trump and the criminal cretins of his kind, the question does not arise: the catastrophe that is coming is either natural or a punishment that God is inflicting on humanity for its depraved mores. Let us pray, my brothers... And in both cases, woe to the poor!

But the others, the spokespersons of capital who do not take refuge in climate-negationism, who know that the threat is real, terrible and that the catastrophe is already in progress, what will they do to try to meet the challenge? ? What will they do when they realize that it is impossible to bridge the gap because capitalism cannot do without growth? They will join in with the geoengineering in the hope, all the same, of avoiding tipping over the precipice.

Significantly, for the first time, the UN report on the emissions gap includes a chapter on negative emissions technologies, i.e. technologies that would remove carbon from the atmosphere "just in case" emissions reductions continue to be insufficient to meet 2°C-1.5°C. It is more and more obvious that the reservation "just in case" is a formula of style to avoid revealing the brutal truth: despite all its technical and scientific means, humanity is heading for disaster because of the race for profit imposed by a minority of the population.

But let us go back to the negative emissions technologies. Some of these technologies are worthy of sorcerers' apprentices. This is particularly the case for bio-energy with carbon capture and sequestration (BECCS), in other words the production of electricity by combustion of biomass as a replacement for fossils, with capture of CO₂ and geological storage of it.

For BECCS to have a significant climate impact, it would require huge amounts of water (3 per cent of fresh water used for human purposes today) and very large areas devoted to industrial energy crops. Clearly, we must choose between the plague and cholera: either competition with food production, or a terrible destruction of biodiversity (I mean: even more terrible). Or both at the same time.

We are told that other technologies are soft: afforestation, reforestation, soil management conducive to carbon storage, restoration of wetlands, mangroves, etc. That's right, they are soft in themselves. But experience shows that soft technologies in themselves can have very harsh social effects when they are driven by the

pursuit of maximum profit and market expansion. The capitalist logic already shows how indigenous peoples are cut off from the forest in the name of the climate (REDD, REDD +, etc.). This can only be accentuated within the framework of a generalization under capitalist management of "soft" technologies with negative emissions.

However, within the capitalist framework, soft technologies will not be enough. They could be sufficient, but they will not be sufficient in this context because they are less interesting from the capitalist point of view than BECCS. In fact, BECCS

offers markets to heavy industry and allows capital to perform a dual operation: sell electricity, on the one hand, and on the other be paid by the community to remove CO2 from the atmosphere.

Interesting in this respect: we learn from a paragraph of the Emissions Gap Report 2017 that it is still possible to stay below 2°C of global warming without resorting to bio-energy with carbon capture and sequestration. Why, then, do more than 90 per cent of the transition scenarios developed by scientists rely

on the deployment of this technology? Because most scientists who work on scenarios consider that the law of profit is a natural law, as inevitable as the law of gravity.

There is nothing, absolutely nothing to expect from the COP negotiators. Their soothing and self-satisfied discourses are only meant to lull people to sleep. Rescuing the climate in a framework of solidarity depends solely on our ability to fight and, through our struggles, to lay the foundations of an alternative social logic to that of profit: the logic of meeting

After the second national meeting of "Potere al popolo"

29 December 2017, by **Sinistra Anticapitalista**

Potere al popolo: there were even more people this time. More than the 800 who came to the Teatro Italia twenty-nine days before. More than a thousand, this time, filling L'ambra Jovinelli after having held about eighty local meetings whose images, enlarged, appeared on a giant screen behind the podium. On the stands, we could also see the banners in several languages ??of the demonstration of the day before.

Potere al popolo has become, in the meantime, the name of the list. There is a logo, now, essential, with its red half-moons and a red star askew as if it had been drawn on a wall, very quickly, during a day of struggle. The Programme and the logo are already circulating on the internet. The Programme is credible, radical, radically reformist but it succeeds in recalling words that seemed obsolete and that were uttered by many speakers: revolution, passion and even people in its sense of the world of the humble, the excluded, the exploited without the ambiguity of Grillo or every kind of populism. The list of candidates will be decided at the local level before the final rush in search

for signatures. In the meantime, to break the conspiracy of silence of the mainstream press, the list will make an appearance on December 26, with a distribution of leaflets at shopping centres.

The Rome meeting was intended to give momentum to activists from all over the place, many of whom stayed in the city after the Diritti per tutti (Rights for All) protest. And that's what happened. It was necessary to formalize the results of a work of constitution and of socialization which, in four weeks, has changed the landscape on the left.

A look around the theatre showed that "there is method in this madness", to quote the words of Eleanora Forenza, the PRC/Altra Europa MEP. In short, it was a ceremony whose importance was the passage of witness by generations of a left which knew victories and defeats, to the new generations. It was Haidi Giuliani, Carlo's mother but also a former member of the PRC at the time of the second Prodi, who opened the meeting, followed by Nicoletta Dosio, historical representative of the No Tav

movement who spoke after greetings from international guests (Moreneo, Podemos, Amard, France Insoumise and Maite Mola from Izquierda Unida). "This does not really look like an electoral meeting" she observed. Many voices, before and after, explained that this story will not end with the elections, that the irruption will be long lasting so as not to leave the left in the hands of the perpetrators of the social massacre of the last twenty years and to break with the period of neoliberalism that "taught the people to hate themselves": Giorgio Cremaschi, from Eurostop, Mauricio Acerbo, secretary of the PRC, his PCI counterpart, Mauricio Alboresi, and Franco Turigliatto from Sinistra Anticapitalista.

"We are doing what is right", said Turigliatto, "what was necessary from the social point of view and the political point of view: it would have been crazy for the supposed reconstruction of the left to come from characters like D'Alema and Bersani who are precisely our problem. It was they who created the conditions for the defeat of the workers' movement

and who accompanied it, they who imposed the jobs act and abolished article 18. The demonstration yesterday demonstrated that we can rebuild the unity of the exploited and the new migrant proletariat. The challenge is unity across borders. The challenge is to say enough with delegations, only the struggles of the popular classes can achieve results. We want to build a new mass movement that is the actor of change. The construction of unity is also the construction of unity between generations. The problem is that the development of capital dominates and no new golden age is to be expected; we must reactivate the "old" class struggle because our lives must be worth more than their profits."

At the podium, once again, two women from "Je so'pazzo", the occupied Neapolitan social centre. Alternating

at the microphone, with equal dignity, the voices of the struggles, the testimonies of local groupings - from Lampedusa to the Suza Valley, from Thyssenkrupp to Almagro - and the most well-known faces of the political organizations. We heard the writer Christian Raimo, who is researching on students and politics, and the audience was roused by Francesca Fornario, a popular satirical author who now regularly attends Potere al Popolo.

"We all agreed to the challenge", concluded the Je so 'pazzo speakers, "and we will meet it together, until the end. Because even if it is true that we have no money and we do not have famous names, that, for the moment, they do not talk about us in the newspapers and television ignores us, we have something unique. We are certain that we can count on each one

of us, because we do not fill theatres, circles and streets with prepaid buses and well-known characters. Each one of us, and already thousands of us, is free from all interest and fear. We will face this battle with the weapons that are ours and that our enemies cannot neutralize. House by house, university by university, in the workplaces, in the struggles and in all the provinces we will continue to carry the ideas for which we fight. And they are simple, beyond the technical terms of endless programs, and they are the ones that unite us all: work without being exploited, not to be forced to emigrate and to live on lands that are neither exploited nor damaged. Because it is a madness which has started with these elections but will not stop one day in March with a percentage result; they will really understand that we are so crazy that we will continue until victory. "

Independence movement resists, but without clarifying strategy

28 December 2017, by **Martí Caussa**

The pro-independence majority in the Parliament (JuntsxCat, represented by Carles Puigdemont, the ERC, represented by Oriol Junqueras, and the Popular Unity Candidacy-CUP) was again validated, despite the loss of 2 seats (70 instead of 72). The percentage remained practically the same (47.49 compared to 47.74% in 2015) in a situation of extraordinarily high participation (nearly 82%). And the number of votes this December 21 has increased slightly compared to the referendum of October 1 and that of September 27, 2014 convened by Artur Mas (respectively 2,063,361 votes against 2,044,038 and 1,897,274), but in a context in which a higher number of valid votes (245,000) were registered compared to September 27.

The balance of power within the pro-independence bloc has been changed noticeably, but not fundamentally.

Puigdemont's candidacy managed to maintain its leadership, thanks to greater autonomy from the PDeCat [Catalan European Democratic Party]. The ERC [Catalan Republican Left] almost matched JuntsxCat's results, but failed to surpass them, as predicted by most polls - that would have meant that the moderate left would have a majority within the pro-independence bloc and probably led to the presidency of Oriol Junqueras. But the most important change was the decline of CUP's anti-capitalist candidacy which lost more than 140,000 votes and 6 MPs. This implies that it will be much less decisive than before in its ability to condition the politics of the pro-independence bloc and the election of the president.

Catalunya en ComÃº-Podem (a coalition of five formations: Catalunya en ComÃº, Podem, Barcelona en ComÃº, Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds

and Esquerra Unida i Alternativa), which should continue to be characterised as a left-wing and pro-sovereignty force despite its electoral campaign, lost nearly 43,000 votes and 3 deputies. It obtained 323,695 votes and 8 deputies, less than the Catalunya SÃ Que es Pot coalition in 2015 (366,494 votes and 11 deputies) and the ICV/EUiA (Initiative for Green Catalonia - United and Alternative Left) in 2012 (359,705 votes and 13 deputies).

The unionist parties and supporters of Article 155 could not prevent the victory of the pro-independence movement. Nevertheless, they managed to be very close to their previous results in votes (174,000 less) and in percentage terms (4% less); the difference in seats is greater (13). This means that Catalonia is divided into two big blocs: a pro-independence bloc, with a shared

influence between the neoliberal centre and the moderate left; and another “unionist” bloc, defending the anti-democratic article 155 and hegemonized by the neoliberal right. The pro-rupture left is very much a minority within the independence bloc and Catalunya en Com  -Podem cannot be included in either bloc.

C’s is the broadly hegemonic force of the unionist bloc supporting Article 155: it increased its votes by 367,000 and gained 12 seats over the 2015 elections; and its results were particularly good in Barcelon  s (the administrative region of which Barcelona is the centre), Vall  s (the region of which Caldas de Montbui is the historic capital), and Tarragon  s (the region of the province of Tarragona). In all the areas that had been the red belt of the Catalan Socialist Party and the ICV until 2015, C’s orange dominates. A very important part of C’s increase comes from the collapse of the PP, which lost 164,000 votes and 8 deputies. Most importantly, C’s has succeeded in mobilizing a traditionally abstentionist vote. Without a doubt, the defeat of the PP, the party with the fewest votes and the fewest seats, is good news and this bill will probably be paid by Rajoy, since he was unable to defeat the

independence bloc and has destroyed his party in Catalonia.

In addition, he reinforced the party that contests his hegemony at the level of the Spanish state. Miquel Iceta (first secretary of the Catalan Socialist Party) placed Ram  n Espadaler (former secretary of the Democratic Union of Catalonia and the current Convergence and Union-CiU) in third position on the PSC list as well as candidates from Catalan Civil Society or the Third Way. He tried to present himself as the proponent of an acceptable article 155. Thus, he claimed that he would ask for amnesty for political prisoners, but he retreated when the union bloc attacked him. The results of all these manoeuvres were modest: he increased his score by 80,000 votes and one deputy.

In short, the results of December 21 should allow the choice of a separatist government and the presidency of Puigdemont as head of the most popular pro-independence list. The ERC has already made this their proposal. But it will be necessary to see how the difficulties resulting from Puigdemont’s exile and the accusations issued by the Supreme Court, which continues to widen the list of those prosecuted for rebellion

by including Artur Mas, Marta Pascal, Marta Rovira, Anna Gabriel and Neus Lloveras will be overcome.

In fact, the most urgent task after the elections continues to be the effective withdrawal of article 155 and all its consequences, in particular the release of political prisoners, the return of the exiles and the lifting of the trials. The yellow ribbon campaign symbolizing these demands must take on a new momentum.

Second, we must specify how to move forward in the conquest of the independent Catalan Republic. The elections of December 21 have once again clearly highlighted the main problem: how to greatly exceed the two million votes, how to increase social support for the republic, especially in the cities in Barcelon  s, Vall  s, and Tarragon  s and so on. The election campaign failed to answer this question and, on the contrary, sowed serious doubts about the validity of unilateral actions. The discussion of what has failed and what needs to be rectified in the strategy of majority separatism remains unresolved. But it is more necessary than ever to avoid improvised headlong rushes or unjustified setbacks.

Florida Students Confront Spencer

27 December 2017, by **Aliya Miranda**

On any other Thursday, we would have been in the SPOHP office promoting events, archiving interviews, and working on digital production projects, and my dad would have been at work. Instead, we’d organized to carpool from Ben Hill Griffin Stadium to a Winn Dixie parking lot, maneuvering around blockades and rereading detailed safety instructions, to document the No Nazis at UF Protest against Richard Spencer [1]

This was the situation we found ourselves in after the University of

Florida agreed to receive the Alt-Right lobbying group, the National Policy Institute, upon their request to rent out the Phillips Center.

Having been haunted by images of protesters outnumbered and surrounded by chanting, torch-wielding white supremacists in Charlottesville – images that resembled a scene before a lynching – we all knew where we’d be when we learned Richard Spencer was coming to our university.

The plan was to meet and conduct

interviews with the protesters, march with them on foot to the Phillips Center and document reflections of the day outside the event.

From the Winn Dixie, we could already see the blockade. Police enveloped the intersection of 34th and 20th, and for what seemed like the first time, Gainesville’s usually sluggish six-lane 34th Street was empty, save for a horde of armed police officers in riot gear.

It wasn’t a part of Gainesville I recognized anymore. I began to

wonder if this blockade could stop a speeding car.

Charlottesville is a college town much like my own, surrounded by a sea of rural right-wing areas that proudly wave the Confederate flag. Though many would deny it, the University of Florida is one of the strongest bastions of a Confederate history in Gainesville, still felt by both students and faculty of color on its campus.

Since the election, we had experienced a slew of racist incidents, from the uprooting of the sign our African-American and Jewish Studies building to a neonazi demonstrating in our campus courtyard, to the harassment of a faculty member of color in her office by a white supremacist â€” just to name a few.

After a hard-fought decision to finally dismantle the Confederate soldier statue, affectionately called, “Ol’ Joe,” from the City Hall lawn this summer, a “unite the right” rally in Gainesville seemed like the straw that would break the camel’s back.

When the news spread that Richard Spencer was coming to speak at UF, dark internet forums began to feature statements calling Florida “the next battlefield,” posted by users claiming to live on and near campus.

Despite this threat of violence, when threatened with a lawsuit by the NPI the university conceded, insisting it would do everything in its power to prevent another tragedy.

Protecting Whom?

I learned three things while documenting the events of October 19th. The first is that the over half a million dollars spent on security for this event was not spent to protect protesters as UF claimed. It was used to deter them, by constraining protest efforts, and protecting those who hoped to incite violence.

This first became evident in the [prohibited items list](#) put out by the University of Florida Police Department weeks before the protest.

Once we reached the parking lot, we shoved batteries, phones and IDs in

our pockets and carried everything else â€” recorders, microphones, headphones, photo cameras and video cameras â€” in hand. All bags, purses, clutches, water bottles, perhaps even our equipment, fell under the prohibited items list. The rest had to stay in the van, and my dad parked off-site where he wouldn’t get towed.

Also on the prohibited items list were signs made of anything but paper, cloth, foam-core or cardboard; signs on sticks of any kind were specifically banned. The list is overwhelmingly extensive and ends with, “Any other items that campus police determine pose a risk to safety or a disruption of classes or vehicular or pedestrian traffic.”

You can then imagine my frustration when I was told to turn back at a checkpoint for carrying a microphone. Or when I was stopped again at a second checkpoint for wearing a jacket. Or when Guerilla Medics were stopped for carrying bandages and gauze.

But what was just as frustrating to me is how easily we breezed through these checkpoints. There was no system in place to actually check protesters for these prohibited items beyond what they could clearly see upon first glance.

This wasn’t about keeping us safe. It was all theater. There was nothing dangerous about my jacket or my microphone or first aid equipment. But there was clearly something very wrong with our being there to protest. The lengths we had to go through to coordinate rides and even get to this part of campus was all intended to disrupt any plans to organize.

If law enforcement’s objective was to keep students safe, that objective was muddled completely when they confronted one of our interns in line for the Richard Spencer event because his crutches were “prohibited items.” He explained to the officer that he couldn’t walk without them, but police summarily picked him up and carried him away.

Safeguarding this event took precedence over this student’s right to attend it. His freedom of speech

was suppressed because of something he had no control over. Our safety and certainly our First Amendment rights were of no concern to law enforcement that day.

The Importance of Protest

The second thing I learned was how crucial it was that we all showed up, despite the university’s and law enforcement’s every attempt to keep us away.

Rather than using its wealth to fight the National Policy Institute in court, to defend its students of color, to combat the emboldening of racists in Gainesville and to prevent Spencer from having an academic platform to promote the inherently violent concept of ethnic cleansing, the university chose to spend over half a million dollars on security and begged students not to protest.

University President Fuchs wrote the following statement in an email to UF students and faculty a week before the event:

“(Do) not provide Mr. Spencer and his followers the spotlight they are seeking. They are intending to attract crowds and provoke a reaction in order to draw the media. By shunning him and his followers we will block his attempt for further visibility.”

In the weeks leading up to the event the university president repeated ad nauseam how disturbed he was by Spencer’s ideas, and how important it was for everyone to understand that Spencer was not invited.

Still, he would then remind us all of our responsibility as a public institution to provide a safe platform for all ideas, and in the same breath insist that students not show up to the event to protest â€” as if Spencer did not already have an eager audience.

On the day of the event, however, despite his pledging, students did show up to protest, and so did many others in the Gainesville community and beyond. And the media did come â€” not because the protesters came in droves, approximately 2500 strong,

but because they'll follow any white supremacist given a large enough soapbox.

But instead of reporting about the NPI's success in taking advantage of another university or about another tragedy sparked by their hateful rhetoric, the mainstream media reported how students rallied together and successfully shouted down Richard Spencer, leaving him disoriented and exposed for the ludicrous and vile ideas he stands for.

This was only possible because people refused to stay home or be deterred by roadblocks or checkpoints or hundreds of armed police officers.

Yet for all the university claimed to do, and even congratulated itself for doing "ensuring safety while upholding its commitment to free speech" the day did not go without violence.

At 5:20 p.m. a white supremacist, leaving the Richard Spencer event in a

car with two others on Archer Road, shot at a group of protesters walking back to their cars. The three men were from Texas and stopped beside the group of protesters prior to the shooting to chant and cheer Adolf Hitler. They were arrested four hours later.

Six hundred thousand dollars' worth of law enforcement did not stop this attempted murder that took place in my town. If Spencer had not come to speak on campus, these men would not have been here in the first place.

The Alt-Right, who continue to defend the murder of Heather Heyer, incite violence wherever they go. There is nothing peaceful about their objective.

This is the third thing I learned on October 19th: when you accept ethnic cleansing as a topic of academic debate, violence is inevitable.

The university knew what kind of violence is sparked by the Alt-Right,

and they opened their doors to them anyway. Beyond that point, there was nothing they could have done to prevent this incident.

I only hope that what the people of Gainesville did when forced into this situation serves as an example to every other town targeted by these sorts of groups. Strength in numbers has never rung more true than in times like these.

Had protesters not arrived in swarms the way they had, more of these white-nationalist terrorists would have filled the auditorium and would have unabashedly reaped even more havoc afterwards.

At UF, when the safety of protesters is threatened by Nazis, the administration's answer is to keep the protesters from protesting. I implore every other institution to resist normalizing this standard.

[Against the Current](#)

Harvey's Toxic Aftermath in Houston

26 December 2017, by **Jennifer Wingard**

So on that day, the very anniversary of Hurricane Katrina "another devastating hurricane whose effects were felt for years after the event" Houston was quite clearly revealed as another example of the devastating results of neoliberal economics' neglect on state municipalities and local governments.

As Harvey moved toward the east and lost its momentum, the city's problems were just beginning. Due to Houston's commitment to a "No Zoning" policy, several housing developments had been built in watersheds across the metro area, leaving significant flooding in scattered areas around the city. Water levels were going down but very slowly because at this point, levees, creeks, and tributaries were still at maximum capacity as water flowed out to the gulf.

Many articles have been written about Houston's problems: lack of zoning, urban and suburban sprawl, poor city planning, and lack of attention to drainage. These are problems unique to Houston and have been blamed for the devastation. In many ways, Houston's policy of No Zoning is one of its defining traits. And all these are deeply tied to Houston's (and Texas') low oversight, pro-business model of government.

This approach can lead to catastrophic events. (Remember the explosion in West, Texas a few years back, or even the Blue Bell Ice Cream listeria drama two summers ago.) So of course, these were factors in the flooding because they are factors that define the city of Houston "how it is run; how it is built; how it is lived. But I would challenge any U.S. city to take on 30-50" of rain in four days (12 trillion

gallons) and not have some levees break, reservoirs spill over, tributaries, creeks, and bayous top their banks.

I challenge any city's infrastructure, no matter how sensible (I'm looking at you, "Smart Growth" plans), to withstand that kind of heavy, unrelenting rain.

The areas near the Addicks/Barker reservoirs (the two main levees designed to keep the city from flooding) were issued a mandatory evacuation notice for homes that had taken on water because it was projected the water would not recede for at least ten more days.

The flood water was toxic. Initial tests confirmed high levels of staph and e.coli, and later tests revealed raw sewage in the water. Further testing

will be conducted to see if chemicals from the local petrochemical plants are in those waters too.

Part of the reason for these homes flooding was the overspill from both dams and the “controlled release” of water from both dams, which was done as a means to ensure they would not fail. Many neighborhoods that did not initially flood in Harvey flooded due to the overspill and release of water from the dams. These were for middle- and upper-middle-class Houstonians who bought homes in developments in watershed areas. It is not clear if they were apprised of this when they purchased their houses.

Chemical Spills and Explosions

In addition to the excess of water across the city, every petrochemical plant and most of the EPA superfund sites were breached during the flooding. One chemical plant in Crosby, a southeast suburb of Houston, had two unplanned explosions, and the advisory board of Arkema Inc. decided to explode the remaining six warehouses in order to control the damage.

The first responders to the Arkema chemical plant are suing the company because the plant was not forthright about what the responders would face, nor did they make sufficient prior preparations. The city of Crosby is also suing the Arkema chemical plant for negligence and prolonged sickness because of the toxins released by the blasts. The CEO of Arkema claimed the air from the explosions was “no more toxic than regular Houston air.”

Independent researchers and corporate reporting have confirmed that an estimated 4.6 million pounds of air polluting chemicals have been emitted from refineries and petrochemical plants around Houston and southeast Texas, and the area around Crosby shows an even higher distribution. People around Arkema have complained about burning eyes and sinuses since the first explosion at the factory.

Couple that with the orders across the

city to boil water, and the additional tests showing that the mud from the receded flood waters contained signs of chemical seepage and infection. All of this demonstrates that Houston is a sick city post-Harvey, one that will not know the full ramifications for years.

Houston’s air, water and land are a mess of benzene, e.coli, staph, and sewage. And one of the largest Environmental Protection Agency Superfund Sites has leaked at least 70,000 nanograms per kilogram of dioxins. The EPA recommends toxic cleanup when 30 ng/kg are present in the environment.

Because the superfund site is located next to the San Jacinto River, a main tributary to the gulf, it is advised that Houstonians do not fish or eat fish, shrimp, or oysters from the gulf. Not only can dioxins live in the ground and ground water for years, but they can also taint whole populations of aquatic creatures, which will cripple Houston’s shrimping and fishing businesses. Harvey’s impact on the air, water and land, as well as the economy of Houston, will be felt for years to come.

In addition to the physical environmental cost, the animal cost post-Harvey was acutely felt as well. Houston’s local animal populations were severely impacted, but none more significantly than several of our native bat colonies. These colonies help to control the abundant mosquito population across Houston, and with the additional presence of standing water and lack of a full bat population, the post-Harvey mosquito count rose to astronomical numbers.

The military’s answer has been to spray the organophosphate insecticide Naled over six million acres of the Houston/SE Texas area to “assist” with the “control of local insect populations.” Naled has been banned in Europe because of its dangerous side effects, one of which is killing off local bee populations. Again, Houston is faced with the addition of new chemicals into our already toxic environmental soup.

The Self-Help Narrative

There is a lot being written about Texas Grit and #HoustonStrong, and how individuals and communities have come together to help during and after this massive storm. And that is true. It has been wonderful to see the collective civic action, the contacts and requests made via social media, and the organization of individuals to collect supplies and help those in need across the region.

All this focus on individual (citizen or business) efforts has eclipsed the coordinated effort from local and national government. The National Guard, FEMA, Army Corps of Engineers, police, fire and medical professionals from all over the United States, the EPA, and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have all been on the scene since before Harvey made landfall.

But it is much more newsworthy in our present news cycle to watch and learn about everyday folks saving one another. It aligns with the need for us all to find hope and triumph of the spirit in times of disaster.

Again, I am by no means saying what these citizens did was not awesome, very much needed, and even a bit heroic, and it certainly does represent Texas grit. But the lack of visibility of national and local government also fits into a very “Texas” narrative “that of being the Lone Star state.

You see, Texas prides itself on not needing the Feds. Post-2008 recovery, then-Governor Rick Perry (now Secretary of Energy) very publicly refused aid for our compromised economy. What wasn’t deemed newsworthy was that the legislature overrode Perry’s injunction and took the aid just months later.

So it is not surprising that many folks did not know that the EPA or the CDC were actually onsite here in Houston and had been since the beginning of the storm. See, here in Texas we got grit, and we don’t need no stinkin’ Feds to help us in our time of need “unless we do, and then we keep it on

the down low.

The Pending Crisis

With that said, I think it is criminal the lack of systemic action or reporting about the toxins leeching into Houston. Folks are wading, cutting and clearing out brush, furniture and building materials, all saturated with toxic sludge, doing their best to prevent mold and sewage from entering their remediated homes. But there are other threats no one is identifying or naming officially.

Unfortunately, this means that what the media and independent analysts find is often discounted, no matter how clear their information may be.

As a nurse whom I've known since I was a kid, Denise L. Unger, expressed: Houston is about to have a real public health crisis on its hands if they are not very, very careful with how they manage post-storm debris and containment. But it seems that is not the focus at this moment, so we all walk around with our eyes just a bit itchier than they were a few weeks ago and with a cough that creeps up here and there. No real sickness, yet.

Everything is getting back to normal, but nothing feels exactly the same. You cannot drive anywhere in Houston without seeing erosion, felled trees, dirt on the road, piles of "trash" from homes, or new cars denoted by temporary license plates. Everywhere there are markers of Harvey even after the waters have receded.

Yet folks are back at work and school. Grocery stores are stocked. Families are meeting up for Sunday dinners. Life moves forward, and even with rooms and walls or whole floors not livable, we all pay our bills and show up for our lives and for one another. It is a return to normal, but just slightly different.

Then there is the environment around us that has imperceptibly changed. Even those of us who are not outwardly ill (and have health insurance) are making sure our tetanus shots are current; we have eye drops; we spray on DEET liberally; we pop just a few more analgesics to quell our headaches; we listen to see if wheezing is accompanying the slight cough and irritated throat we have when we go outside.

If we could, we would avoid the piles of debris outside remediated homes and businesses because of the smell, but we cannot. They are all around us, much like the mosquitos.

Part of our new normal in Houston, I fear, will be dealing with these nagging health concerns. These minor irritations that seem like nothing more than severe allergies will become the stuff of small talk at parties. And in several years when the really serious effects of these chemical incursions are seen, only a few liberal news outlets will connect them to the post-Harvey chemical soup that was southeast Texas.

By then, Texas will have made more rollbacks to regulations to "stimulate business growth" and even more layoffs of governmental oversight agencies in the name of "offsetting the

cost of rebuilding post-Harvey," yet again begging the question: what are the "costs" we are willing to shoulder here in southeast Texas?

But I suppose the more pertinent question is who will shoulder the costs that will inevitably befall southeast Texas? Even now, barely three months after Harvey, as the FEMA payouts stall and the city's skilled workforce is pushed to its limits, we are beginning to see that those who have the means are putting Harvey in their rear view, and those with limited funds are struggling to return to a "normal" life.

This division is not along racial lines, nor is it reserved for the working poor versus the professional classes. Instead, due to lack of state and national support both pre-and post-storm, only the Houstonians at the top of the economic food chain are able to rebuild and move forward quickly. Even professional, middle-class folks are still displaced, paying 121% higher prices for contractors and supplies.

Harvey may have hit the city of Houston "equally," but its aftermath reveals the stark contrast between the have-and-have-nots across the city. And it is this same inequity that has been fostered by governmental pro-business economic policies both nationally and in Texas over the last three decades. The ramifications caused by Harvey demonstrate what can happen when businesses are left to their own devices in the name of profit.

[Against the Current](#)

The Kurdish Crisis in Iraq and Syria

25 December 2017, by **Joseph Daher**

The massacre by chemical weapons against the Kurdish population of Halabja in 1988 by Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime [then supported by the U.S. and other Western governments] is particularly

remembered. About 5000 Kurds perished in this massacre. This attack was part of Operation Anfal launched by the authorities in Baghdad during this period, which killed 182,000 people and destroyed more than 90%

of the Kurdish villages.

The Iraqi referendum also demonstrated, once again, the failure of the models of the capitalist, chauvinist and centralized nation-

states of the region, which have consistently repressed, erased, and/or denied the plurality of their societies by affirming the supremacy and/or domination of an ethnic group over others, a religious sect over others, or both at the same time.

In Syria, no solution for the Kurdish issue and an inclusive Syria can be found without recognizing the Kurds as a proper “people” or “nation” and providing unconditional support to the self-determination of the Kurdish people in the country and elsewhere.

The destiny of the Kurdish people in Syria was and remains intrinsically linked to the dynamics of the Syrian uprising and therefore its future is in danger, just as with the rest of the protest movement. This is why we should not isolate the struggle for self-determination of the Kurdish people from the dynamics of the Syrian revolution.

Any possibility of self-determination of the Kurdish people in Syria, as well as in Iran and in Turkey, has to go through common struggle with the popular classes of these countries against the various fractions of the bourgeoisie that dominate these states, whether they are from reactionary Islamic fundamentalism or nationalist chauvinism, or a mix of both.

That is why we must support the right of self-determination for the between 28 and 35 million Kurdish people in Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran. We need to denounce these authoritarian regimes, foreign international and regional measures and pressures that prevent Kurdish populations from deciding their own future.

Iraqi Kurds’ initial enthusiasm following the massive victory of the “yes” vote at over 92% in favor of independence on September 25 quickly gave way to multiple threats and military offensives against the autonomous territories under the control of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) since 1992.

Composed of three provinces of northern Iraq, this broad swath of land stretching from the Iranian to the Syrian border with Kirkuk at its center

is” and claimed by both Erbil and Baghdad is” was lost in mid-October. The loss included the oil-rich city of Kirkuk.

Meanwhile the Iraqi government led by the Shia Islamic fundamentalist party al-Dawa, with the support of Turkey and Iran, are continuing their pressure to obtain new concessions from the KRG.

In Syria, the PYD (Democratic Union Party), through its armed wing, YPG that dominates the SDF coalition of fighters, has accumulated victories and controls new territories in Syria, mostly but not only at the expense of the jihadist group Islamic State (IS), with the support of both the U.S.-led International coalition and Russia. In November the SDF controlled nearly a quarter of Syria.

The last major success of the PYD was the expulsion of IS forces from Raqqa in Syria, although not without deep humanitarian cost for its inhabitants. This good situation, however, comes with threats from various actors issuing from Turkey and Iran, as well as the Assad regime.

Iraq, or the Fallen Dream

On October 16, Iraqi forces and Iran-backed Iraqi Shia militias of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) captured the city of Kirkuk and its surrounding oil fields from the Kurdish forces. This action followed an agreement concluded between Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi and a faction of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), a political rival of the Barzani-led Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).

Kurdish peshmerga affiliated with the PUK and KDP either withdrew or fled. During his resignation speech on October 29, former President Masoud Barzani accused his political rivals of “high treason” for yielding territory, particularly Kirkuk, without a fight. The referendum and government backlash have also revealed deep divisions among the Kurdish political parties and increased them.

(Kurdish politics have been dominated for decades by the KDP, led by three generations of the Barzani family, and its main rivals the Patriotic Union of

Kurdistan (PUK), led by the family of Jalal Talabani, who died in October. The two parties fought a civil war against each other in the 1990s, but maintained an outward appearance of unity after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, with Jalal Talabani serving as Iraq’s ceremonial president in Baghdad from 2005-2014 while Masoud Barzani ran the Kurdish autonomous region.)

On November 1, President Barzani resigned and passed on many of the powers of his office jointly to his nephew Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, Deputy Prime Minister Qubad Talabani, the Speakership of Parliament, and the Judicial Council.

This resignation appeared at first to be a significant concession by Barzani’s KDP, following the failure of the referendum, to relieve the impasse surrounding his extralegal retention of office, and raised the possibility of democratic reforms.

In fact, it is an attempt by the KDP to maintain its domination over the KRG, and for the PUK to hang on what remains of its long-standing and exclusive power-sharing relationship with the KDP in an increasingly volatile and polarized political environment.

Barzani remains nevertheless influential as head of the ruling KDP and still sits on the High Political Council (HPC), a non-governmental body that emerged after the referendum that can act independently of the KRG’s legally established institutions. [2]

More than 183,000 civilians have been displaced by the conflict, including 79,000 from the city of Kirkuk, which Baghdad conquered on the first day of its offensive. The KRG lost about 40% of its previously held territory as its forces withdrew from the disputed areas.

The Iraqi central government has continued to threaten the KRG and demand new concessions regarding its sovereignty. Baghdad wants control of all border checkpoints, including the Turkish frontier that has been controlled by the KRG since the Saddam Hussein era.

The KRG sought to defuse tensions with Baghdad with a ceasefire on all fronts, continued cooperation in the fight against IS and joint deployments in the disputed territories claimed by both Erbil and Baghdad.

The Kurdish defense department said the offer for joint control of frontier was part of a “deconfliction” proposal made to Baghdad on October 31. One of the border crossings, Fish-Khabur, is strategically vital for the landlocked KRG as the point where oil from northern Iraq crosses into Turkey.

The Iraqi government also demanded that the KRG stop exporting its own oil and hand over sales to the Iraqi state-oil marketer SOMO. Baghdad is actually discussing with Ankara to let SOMO sell Kurdish crude that arrives by pipeline.

Until mid-October about 530,000 barrels per day (bpd) arrived in Ceyhan, the Turkish terminal on the Mediterranean, via the pipeline. Half came from the KRG’s oilfields, the rest from Kirkuk.

The Iraqi government was supported directly in its military actions by the neighboring states, Turkey and Iran. Ankara and Teheran actually fear that an Iraqi Kurdish independence process will have consequences for their own Kurdish minorities, who also suffer from the discriminatory and oppressive policies of these regimes.

Turkey and Iran

Turkey, which had excellent relations with the KRG and the Barzani family and is the primary investor in Iraqi Kurdistan, denounced the referendum as a “terrible mistake” and reiterated its support for “the territorial integrity of Iraq.”

Tehran pledged to stand by Baghdad and Ankara against the outcome of the referendum for the independence to Iraqi Kurdistan. Ali Akbar Velayati, chief adviser to Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, declared that “Muslim nations will not allow the creation of a second Israel.” The conservative press in Iran described the referendum as a “Zionist plot” to destabilize the region.

Similarly, he failed to answer whether,

in case the Assad regime tried to wrest control from the authorities governing the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, the United States would support the SDF. On their side, PYD leaders voiced support for a longer-term role for U.S. forces in Syria once IS is defeated and until there is a political solution to the Syrian crisis.

By the end of November, there were new rumors Donald Trump’s administration planned to ask Kurdish PYD fighters in Syria to return U.S. weapons loaned for the fight against the Islamic State (IS) when the jihadist group was completely defeated, although this would not mostly occur on the short term.

Political and military collaboration among Baghdad, Ankara and Tehran intensified throughout this period against the KRG.

The Iranian regime benefited directly from its participation through the PMF in the conquest of Kirkuk by positioning itself to take control of oil exports from this region rich in oil. Under a new arrangement with Baghdad, Teheran will receive 15,000 barrels per day worth nearly \$1 million, rising gradually to 60,000 bpd. Iran and Iraq also revived a project to build a pipeline to carry oil from Iraq’s Kirkuk fields to central Iran and onwards for export from the Gulf.

At the same time, the United States and European States opposed the referendum and the idea of independence. Western countries repeatedly reiterated their opposition to holding both the referendum and the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan. They feared that these developments would lead to more regional instability, weaken the “war” against IS, and lead to unrest in disputed areas such as the multi-ethnic and wealthy city of Kirkuk.

Russia, which invested over \$4 billion in the Kurdistan region’s energy sector, overtaking the United States as the largest investor, declared on its side “that the disputes between Baghdad and Erbil must be resolved by dialogue with the aim of finding a formula of coexistence within the Iraqi state.”

On November 6, 2017, the KRG declared that it would respect the ruling by the Iraqi Supreme Federal Court, which declared that no Iraqi province could secede. “We believe that this decision must become a basis for starting an inclusive national dialogue between (Kurdish authorities in) Erbil and Baghdad to resolve all disputes,” the KRG said in a statement.

However this did not prevent, on the same day, the Iraqi cabinet from proposing a reduction of the Kurdistan region’s share of the 2018 draft federal budget to 12.6%. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein the region has been entitled to 17%. [3]

The reduced budget would dramatically add to the KRG’s financial difficulties and is viewed as a punitive measure. Additionally the draft budget would distribute the Kurdistan region’s share directly to the three provinces, further undermining KRG’s control over the allocation of funds.

In short, the Kurdish population of Iraq has suffered a new and terrible blow as most countries define their own interests in opposition to Kurdish independence.

Syria After IS

Although mostly limited to the military field, the PYD in Syria has developed closer relations with the United States and Russia in the past few years. But recently relations became more tense with the latter.

Within the strategic framework of “IS first” and the complete failure to assist Free Syrian Army (FSA) forces to combat the IS, Washington increasingly supported the PYD and the YPG-led coalition known as the Syrian Democratic Forces established in October 2015. They were created officially as a response to fight the “terrorism represented by the IS, its sister [organizations] and the criminal Ba’th regime” according to its founding statement.

The SDF was actually established to provide a legal and political cover for American military support for the PKK-affiliated group PYD in Syria.

U.S. support for the SDF continued in its struggle against IS in 2016 and 2017, while Russia prevented any direct confrontation between SDF and Turkish forces by creating de facto buffer zones between both actors in some areas.

The SDF was seen especially by the USA as the best actor on the ground to fight IS. The United States notably supported SDF units to expel IS from Raqqa and its surroundings. The cost in human terms, as previously seen with the Iraqi city Mosul, resulted in destroying more than 80%.

There is a humanitarian crisis with a serious shortage of food, medicine, electricity, drinking water and basic necessities. In the four-month offensive on Raqqa, between 1300 and 1800 civilians were killed. [4]

Some 270,000 to 320,000 people have been displaced by the fighting and are living in miserable conditions in overcrowded camps on the outskirts of the city. They will not be able to return until the city is cleared of the mines and explosives scattered by the IS, which might take months.

At the end of October, with the loss of Raqqa, IS controls less than 10% of Syrian territory “compared with 33% at the beginning of 2017. More than half lies in the province of Deir Zor, close to that of Raqqa. IS was the target of two separate offensives in Deir Zor: one led by the regime’s troops and its allies, supported by Russia, the other by the SDF, supported by the United States.

The province of Deir Zor also suffered tremendously from these offensives and bombings. From September 10 to the beginning of November, between 660 and 880 civilians died, while more than 200,000 people fled the province.

The IS proto-state crumbled nearly completely at the end of 2017 under the pressure of multiple offensives in Syria and Iraq.

In mid-November the regime’s army and its allies, Hezbollah and Iran-backed militias, with the assistance of Russian aviation, were fighting IS in desert areas near Albu Kamal, the last town the jihadist group held in Syria,

near the border with Iraq. Albu Kamal was a major supply and communications hub for IS between Syria and Iraq, was a big prize for the Iranian-backed militias.

However, this succession of defeats has not prevented the IS from multiplying suicide operations and car-bomb attacks in different regions of the country. The jihadist group has also increased the abuses against civilians in the areas from which its soldiers are withdrawing.

PYD’s Moscow representative Abd Salam Muhammad Ali, declared at the beginning of December that the SDF could be integrated into the Syrian army if a political solution that satisfied all parties was found. The leading Syrian Kurdish PYD politician, however, co-chair of the Syrian Democratic Council Ilham Ahmed, revealed in September 2017 that PYD officials had already met with the Assad regime twice, but the Russian-brokered dialogue went nowhere.

Russia was unable or unwilling to override a Turkish veto of PYD participation in January 2017 peace talks in the Kazakhstan capital Astana, during which both the representatives of the opposition and of the regime rejected any Kurdish autonomy.

The rapprochement between the Turkish and Russian leaders, Erdogan and Putin, did not improve PYD’s situation following the failed military coup of a section of the Turkish army in July 2016. That August the Turkish forces formed a coalition with the Syrian armed opposition forces in a military campaign called “Operation Euphrates Shield.” They targeted both IS and PYD in Syria and their intervention was not opposed by Russia, the USA or Iran.

Turkey’s Deputy Prime Minister Nurettin Canikli even acknowledged in December 2016 that Turkey “would not have moved so comfortably” without the rapprochement with Russia, which effectively controls parts of northern Syrian air space. This demonstrated that Russian interests were not similar to the PYD.

Similarly, interactions between U.S. officials and YPG commanders

remained largely informal. In January and September 2016, Brett McGurk, the U.S. special presidential envoy for the anti-IS coalition, twice visited YPG-controlled areas, Rumeilan and Kobani. He was filmed with YPG-PYD and SDF commanders but did not discuss the issue foremost on the PYD group’s mind: U.S. protection and recognition of the self-rule area.

Not wishing to encourage Kurdish separatist ambitions that further upset Turkey, Washington also avoided providing economic support to PYD-controlled areas. After Ankara fumed over a U.S. decision to arm SDF fighters for the offensive on Raqqa, U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, during May 2017 talks with Turkey’s prime minister, voiced strong support for Turkey’s fight against PKK militants.

The United States has maintained the PKK on its terrorist list throughout these years. This prevented PKK leaders from speaking directly to U.S. military commanders. (They did so through the PKK’s YPG associates, in their capacity as SDF commanders.) In June 2017, Washington even pledged to take back weapons supplied to YPG after the defeat of IS.

PKK leader Riza Altun pointed out that U.S. behavior towards the Kurdish issue in Syria “is double-edged depending on its interests, and the relationship with Washington is therefore tactical in nature.”

More recently, on October 31 Major General James Jarrard, the Special Operations Joint Task Force, Operation Inherent Resolve commander declared that the United States would continue to support the SDF after the military defeat of IS, but he claimed to not know for how long.

Similarly, he failed to answer whether, in case the Assad regime tried to wrest control from the authorities governing the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria, the United States would support the SDF. On their side, PYD leaders voiced support for a longer-term role for U.S. forces in Syria once IS is defeated and until there is a political solution to the Syrian crisis.

The PYD faced the contradiction that Russia and the United States were not ready to jeopardize their relationships with Turkey to support any Kurdish autonomy plan whether in Syria or elsewhere.

The rapprochement at the end of 2016 among Iran, Turkey and Russia threatened PYD's interests even more.

Turkey and Syria

In October 2017 the Turkish army deployed once again in Syria, in Idlib province in northern Syria, setting up observation posts as part of a mission to control the SDF. Initially the mission was officially aimed at dislodging Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), a military alliance dominated by the jihadists of Jabhat al-Nusra.

The HTS actually agreed not to interfere with Turkish operations along the border and is therefore relatively spared, for the moment, by Ankara. This Turkish military deployment, in collaboration with Syrian armed opposition groups, is part of the so-called de-escalation agreements reached with Iran and Russia. The objective is to isolate the city of Afrin controlled by the SDF.

The Turkish pro-government daily *Yeni Safak* did not hesitate to use as a headline in one of its editions at this period: "Today Idlib, tomorrow Afrin." The Turkish government also placed opposition armed groups that it sponsors and supports in the areas.

At the time of writing, the Turkish forces continued their incursions into the northern territories of the country, while in mid-November Erdogan declared "We need to cleanse Afrin of the structure there called the YPG terrorist organization."

The Syrian regime's military advances also demonstrated Damascus' unwillingness to accept a rival actor in the territories recaptured from IS, as shown by the multiplication of clashes with SDF. The fact that for tactical reasons both actors avoided each other's major infighting in the past few years, [5] and that there are examples of on-the-ground tactical cooperation, do not change the fact that the two factions are strategically

opposed.

In mid-June 2017, U.S. warplanes shot down a Syrian jet in the southern Raqqa countryside because it dropped bombs near SDF positions. In mid-September, Russian air forces targeted positions of the SDF, causing injuries, east of the Euphrates River in Syria near Deir Zor. Although Moscow denied bombing SDF forces, the U.S. coalition and the SDF argued otherwise.

The pressure on SDF forces continued to mount as they suffered a new attack carried out by Russian and regime forces against their positions in Deir Zor province on September 25.

On its side, the Damascus regime has repeatedly declared that it would not allow PYD to threaten the country's territorial unity and that "Those who will move in those directions know what price they have to pay."

A high regime official, Bouthaina Shaaban, actually declared that the Syrian government was ready to fight the SDF, characterizing them as an illegitimate foreign force just as is IS. For officials in Damascus, Raqqa is still considered an occupied city.

In the midst of worsening military and political tensions between Damascus and its allies on one side and the PYD, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moallem affirmed at the end of September that the Syrian government was open to negotiations with Kurds over their demand for autonomy within Syria's borders. This declaration was merely rhetoric, as it did not provide any political content to the meaning of "autonomy" used by officials in Damascus.

Walid Moallem's ambiguous statement sought short-term understanding with the PYD by possibly providing the Kurdish movement with a sort of political arrangement to try and avoid a scenario of complete separation similar to Iraqi Kurdistan.

It might also pressure the Turkish government, which sees a Kurdish autonomous region under the leadership of PKK's sister organization as a danger. The statement of the Syrian Foreign Minister was made on

the same day of the Kurdish independence referendum in Iraq, which was completely rejected by the Syrian regime.

Despite the cautious readiness of some PYD officials to engage in dialogue with the regime, Ilham Ahmed remarked that in both their meetings Damascus officials "did not appear serious" about talks on the future of the autonomous regions and the demand for a federal system for Syria. The Syrian regime through the voice of its dictator Bashar al-Assad has promised to restore the authority of the state over the entire national territory, including Raqqa.

Conclusion

Support for self-determination, which can take diverse forms such as independence, federalism or recognition of the Kurdish people as an entity with equal rights within a state, must not mean being uncritical of the policies and collaboration with various imperialist countries by the various Kurdish leaderships of the Barzani clan, PKK/PYD or any other Kurdish political parties.

Of course this is not to say that we consider these forces as similar. We can express, for example, critical support to PKK/PYD "we can notably talk of positive policies regarding women's rights and secularism, among other things" while progressives should oppose the Barzani clan's neoliberal and conservative policies and their links with Israel.

However, collaboration by some Kurdish forces with imperialist forces can't be used to justify the refusal of the right of self-determination of the Kurdish people, as did some chauvinist leftists in the region. As the revolutionary Russian Vladimir Lenin said:

"The fact that the struggle for national liberation against one imperialist power may, under certain circumstances, be utilized by another 'Great' Power in its equally imperialist interests, should have no more weight in inducing Social Democracy to renounce its recognition of the right of nations to self-

determination than the numerous cases of the bourgeoisie utilizing republican slogans for the purpose of political deception and financial robbery, for example in the Latin countries, have had in inducing them to renounce republicanism.”

What is important to understand here is that Kurds in the past have been used by authoritarian regimes and imperialist actors to serve their interests before being sacrificed when these interests changed. This has occurred before and most probably

will happen again.

In this perspective, the unity and independence of the popular and working classes without any forms of discrimination (race, religion, gender, etc.) in the region is of course the only way for the liberation and emancipation of all.

Workers’ struggles alone will not, however, be sufficient to unite the working classes. Socialists in these struggles must also champion the liberation of all the oppressed. That

requires raising demands for rights for women, religious minorities, LGBT communities, and oppressed racial and ethnic groups.

Any compromise on the explicit commitment to such demands will impede the Left from uniting the working class for the radical transformation of society. This means also supporting the right to self-determination of the Kurdish populations throughout the region.

[Against the Current](#)

Open and Hidden Horrors

24 December 2017, by [Against the Current](#) Editors

To begin with a simple exercise in translation, which applies almost without exception to modern warfare: When military officials proclaim that “our forces take extreme care to avoid civilian casualties, even when this risks the safety of our own soldiers,” it means “we are killing lots of civilians, particularly to avoid casualties to ourselves.”

That’s the strategic logic of drone warfare and reliance on air power. The “enemy” is targeted with no risk to the remote-control operators hundreds or even thousands of miles distant, or pilots flying high above the kill zone “while civilians blown to bits in the vicinity, deliberately or by accident, are discarded as “collateral damage.” The family of Basim Razzo in Mosul, Iraq in September 2015, wiped out by a U.S. air strike, chronicled in the stunning investigative report by Azmat Khan and Anand Gopal, is one wrenching example. (“The Uncounted,” New York Times Sunday magazine, November 19, 2017, [here](#).)

The military reported that “89 of its more than 14,000 airstrikes in Iraq have resulted in civilian deaths.” The reporters’ on-the-ground survey of U.S.-led coalition bombings of supposed “Islamic State” targets concluded instead: “The rate we found on the ground “one out of every

five “is 31 times as high” as the official claim. The numbers of civilian deaths are indeed “uncounted,” but “31 times as high” would extrapolate from some 466 admitted civilian deaths to well over 10,000. No one knows.

The liberation of Mosul from ISIS forces has destroyed much of Iraq’s second largest city. Similarly catastrophic conditions prevail in post-ISIS Raqqa in Syria “where the United States is now admitting to more than 2000 U.S. troops on the ground, not the fictional previous claim of only 500 in “non-combat advisory roles.” That’s in addition to 9000 in Iraq.

The Destruction of Yemen

All this pales in light of the near-destruction of the country of Yemen. With direct U.S. support, Saudi Arabia’s bombing and blockade of Yemen has brought about a civilian holocaust. According to the al-Jazeera website, “Two years of conflict have killed more than 10,000 people, wounded tens of thousands and displaced millions.”

Following the collapse of health and

sanitation services, “There are more than half a million suspected cases of cholera in the country and on average 5,000 new cases are recorded a day.” Diphtheria is also ravaging the country’s children. The United Nations reports that famine in Yemen threatens seven million people with starvation. (For some additional background see, for example, New York magazine, [here](#).)

All this was before Saudi Arabia induced former president Ali Abdullah Saleh to switch his allegiance, leading rapidly to his assassination by his former Houthi allies and the collapse of any prospect of negotiations. And unlike the Syrian catastrophe, Yemen hasn’t produced a massive refugee exodus because most of its people have no way out.

This massive crime against humanity remained almost uncovered by U.S. corporate media during the Obama presidency, during which Washington uttered occasional muted criticisms of the Saudi kingdom’s behavior. Some of the facts about Yemen are now appearing in the press, especially those outlets critical of Donald Trump “reflecting the traditional U.S. policy elite’s embarrassment by the big twit’s full-Monty fawning over the Saudi rulers.

How deep the distrust of Trump's stability and sanity runs is shown by the U.S. military command making it publicly known that it would refuse presidential illegal orders to initiate nuclear hostilities (against North Korea).

Toward Regional War?

The strategic calculations behind the Trump-Saudi lovefest go beyond mere grotesque spectacle. There's a real emerging danger of a major regional war.

U.S. and Iranian forces have been tactically allied in the military campaign against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, but the rout of ISIS is bringing that cooperation to an end. (See Joseph Daher's analysis in this issue of how Kurdish forces have been used on the ground, and how Kurdish aspirations are betrayed by the various powers.)

Yemen's internal civil conflict, which was destructive enough in the wake of the failed hopes of the "Arab Spring," has been overlaid by a vicious proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Saudi rulers are openly looking to the United States and Israel to roll back Iran's political-military regional power, which grew following the disastrous 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. Yemen's 28 million people are pawns to be sacrificed.

The Saudi regime, now controlled by Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, appears to have triggered a major political crisis in Lebanon by forcing the "resignation" of prime minister Saad Hariri, possibly after effectively kidnapping him. After Hariri came back home and rescinded his resignation, it is unclear whether Lebanese political forces can sort this out — but the Saudi goal is to eliminate the power of the pro-Iranian Hezbollah ("Party of God") in the country.

This raises the almost-unthinkable prospect of another civil war in Lebanon, which was almost torn apart by the previous one that lasted from 1975-90. Saudi Arabia has no military

forces to coerce Lebanon, but it does have vast economic assets and leverage over Lebanon's banks, which it could withdraw causing the collapse of Lebanon's economy although at some cost to the Saudis themselves.

Direct military muscle, of course, is where the United States and Israel come in. The Israeli press is full of its military's preparation for the next war against Hezbollah, with the message that this would not be a "limited" campaign but a full war against the Lebanese state.

For its part Hezbollah, although it has suffered heavy casualties in its intervention on the side of the murderous Syrian regime, is not only battle-hardened but is believed to have missile stockpiles large and powerful enough to penetrate Israel's defense systems.

In the event of full-scale war, particularly if there were also a new Palestinian uprising, the Israeli government might see the opportunity for a third historic mass expulsion (following 1947-9 and 1967) of the Palestinian population (although this might be tempered by the threat of disrupting Israel's growing friendly relations with Arab states).

Although these are extreme and improbable scenarios, nothing can be ruled out in the context of the chaos that imperialism has created. Meanwhile Saudi Arabia, with the Trump gang's eager encouragement, also lined up its allied Gulf states to blockade Qatar — demanding that Qatar's rulers cut ties with Iran and shut down al-Jazeera broadcasts — adding another front to the conflict.

Topping it off is Trump's decertification of the nuclear deal with Iran, arduously negotiated by the P5+1 (UN Security Council permanent members plus Germany) during the Obama presidency, even though Washington admits that Iran has abided by its terms.

Trump's war threats against Iran, backed up by new sanctions voted by the "bipartisan" U.S. Congress, have resulted — among other things — in wrecking the huge reservoir of pro-American good will among the Iranian

population, fuelling a fresh wave of Iranian nationalism even among the regime's opponents, and increasing China's prestige and investment opportunities there.

Fawning Punditry

Amidst the spreading Trumpster fire of U.S. Middle East policy, in fairness it must be admitted that this president — forgive the expression — is not the only huge fan of the new Saudi strongman Mohammad bin Salman (often known as MBS) and his internal purge of potential rivals in the elite in the name of fighting corruption.

On November 24 the New York Times featured an extraordinary essay titled "Saudi Arabia's Arab Spring, at Last," taking up three-quarters of the op-ed page, by the Times' veteran apostle of globalization Thomas Friedman. Among all the pieces of nonsense from Friedman over the years, [this one stands out.](#))

"M.B.S. is on a mission to bring Saudi Islam back to the center," Friedman gushes, citing the pending legalization of women driving and the undoubted popularity of his "shakedown" of assorted princes and tycoons forced to give back some of what they've stolen through corruption (a loss the cash-strapped kingdom can't afford with the fall of oil prices).

"The most significant reform process underway anywhere in the Middle East today is in Saudi Arabia. Yes, you read that right...and, if it succeeds. It will not only change the character of Saudi Arabia but the tone and tenor of Islam across the globe."

Yes, "you read that right." What you don't read in Friedman's punditry is a mention of Saudi Arabia's slaughter in Yemen, or its malicious mischief in Lebanon, its siege of Qatar — even though Friedman himself once upon a time hailed al-Jazeera as the Middle East's great new thing — much less the United States' active backing of these brutal interventions.

The implied claim is that Saudi Arabia's new dispensation will end its support for al-Qaeda and ISIS-type jihadist forces, but no serious

evidence is offered. As for the internal repression including mass beheading of dissidents and leaders of the Shia minority, Friedman doesn't mention it and apparently didn't broach the subject during his long evening of feasting on "different lamb dishes" and conversation with MBS and the crown prince's close associates.

It's almost a caricature of the longtime Western infatuation with "modernizing dictators," especially for those supposedly benighted regions where the people are too backward to bring about reform themselves. (In a subsequent column, Friedman appeared to be walking back some of his extreme enthusiasm for the crown prince.)

The Rest of the Story...

There's more going on than this brief summary can cover, of course. The deaths of four U.S. Special Forces supposedly "non-combat" personnel in Mali in a botched pursuit of jihadist forces was highlighted when Trump went out of his way to humiliate Myeshia Johnson, the widow of Sgt. La David Johnson. In fact U.S. military involvement in Africa is larger and deeper than has been acknowledged.

Meanwhile, amidst the daily noise of Trump's latest poisonous buffooneries lies the question that the media won't yet openly ask: Does Donald Trump need a war or a major war scare in the Middle East, or Korea, or somewhere like Venezuela, to salvage his collapsing, plutocratic, about-to-be-indicted presidency?

That's the great unknown, and we don't particularly want to find out. What's all too clear is that a crisis-

ridden imperial order has put the world in a dangerous place; that the behavior of the Trump regime enhances the instability and the craziness already embedded in the situation; and that the United States capitalist ruling class, whether through pure greed, slothful indolence, blindness or a combination of all three, is enabling the slide toward potential catastrophe.

The majority of the people of the United States "and the world" do not support this course of action. That opposition remains to be forged into a global mass movement against the madness.

(A statement by the Solidarity Steering Committee, "Standing Up for Palestine: BDS More than Ever!," is online [here](#) and was originally published [here](#).)

[Against the Current](#)

The #MeToo Revolution

23 December 2017, by [Against the Current](#) Editors

In the past, when a woman came forward she stood alone, facing a barrage of interrogators. This time, within 24 hours of #MeToo being re-launched on Facebook, 4.7 million people around the world responded with their stories of how men used their position to intimidate and bully women and even children "especially in workplace and prisons, but also within the family.

Will this be different than all the other moments in which sexual abuse was revealed?

We think yes, that this time the level of consciousness and solidarity is deeper. It's not just high-profile powerful male celebrities who have been exposed. Sexual abuse is a much broader issue in workplaces throughout society, where victims and survivors risk their jobs, careers and economic survival if they dare to speak out. And organized labor can play a big role in demanding a

harassment-free environment, merging this movement with the struggle for decent wages.

That's why the statement that Latina farmworkers from the Alianza Nacional de Campesinas wrote for the November 12 "Take Back the Workplace" march in Los Angeles hits the nail on the head.

"We write on behalf of the approximately 700,000 women who work in the agricultural fields and packing sheds across the United States. For the past several weeks we have watched and listened with sadness as we have learned of the actors, models and other individuals who have come forward to speak out about the gender based violence they've experienced at the hands of bosses, coworkers and other powerful people in the entertainment industry. We wish that we could say we're shocked to learn that this is such a pervasive problem in your industry.

Sadly, we're not surprised because it's a reality we know far too well. Countless farmworker women across our country suffer in silence because of the widespread sexual harassment and assault that they face at work.

"We do not work under bright stage lights or on the big screen. We work in the shadows of society in isolated fields and packinghouses that are out of sight and out of mind for most people in this country. Your job feeds souls, fills hearts and spreads joy. Our job nourishes the nation with the fruits, vegetables and other crops that we plant, pick and pack.

"Even though we work in very different environments, we share a common experience of being preyed upon by individuals who have the power to hire, fire, blacklist and otherwise threaten our economic, physical and emotional security. Like you, there are few positions available to us and reporting any kind of harm

or injustice committed against us doesn't seem like a viable option. Complaining about anything "even sexual harassment" seems unthinkable because too much is at risk, including the ability to feed our families and preserve our reputations.

"We understand the hurt, confusion, isolation and betrayal that you might feel. We also carry shame and fear resulting from this violence. It sits on

our backs like oppressive weights. But, deep in our hearts we know that it is not our fault. The only people at fault are the individuals who choose to abuse their power to harass, threaten and harm us, like they have harmed you.

"In these moments of despair, and as you cope with scrutiny and criticism because you have bravely chosen to

speak out against the harrowing acts that were committed against you, please know that you're not alone. We believe and stand with you."

The unity that is being forged "and a growing awareness of how racism reinforces the power dynamic" is truly a sea change, and the sign of a revolution that's only just begun.

[Against the Current](#)

Some quick notes on the outcome of the Catalan elections

22 December 2017, by **Raul Camargo**

Pro-independence parties maintain (with a loss of two seats) an absolute majority and support for Rajoy's party, the Partido Popular (PP), has crashed, leaving it as a residual force on the verge of losing its parliamentary representation. It seems that the decline of the PP may be starting because it now has real competition in its own camp.

2. The pro-independence camp has been rearranged but with little overall difference in votes and seats. It remains solid and has not been deterred by Article 155, police deployment or imprisonment. But the right of that camp has gained ground from the left, especially the CUP (Candidatura d'Unitat Popular), which lost half of its votes and 60% of its seats. The CUP is an admirable organization in many ways, but from almost the beginning it has played the role of the little brother of the process, without any orientation towards left sectors which are not pro-independence. This work of providing an inter-class bridge above the camps (even though the independence camp is recognized as hegemonic) is, I believe, at the origin of the poor result of the lefts. The ERC (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya) has demonstrated a lack of boldness and in general its leaders have appeared as people of a low political level. The

opposite is true of the party of the Catalan nationalist right, the convergence now called Junts X Catalunya, which has found in Puigdemont a shrewd politician who has managed to overcome a very difficult starting position for his PDeCAT (Partit Democràtic Europeu Català). The future of the process is uncertain. But imprisoned or not, it seems clear that Puigdemont will again be the president of Catalonia. It is a pity that the right has kept the leadership of this camp but in any case, it is not comparable in any way to the other right on the unionist side.

3. Ciudadanos swept the board in the unionist camp, absorbing the PP vote almost completely but biting into the left-wing electorate, above all in Barcelona's industrial belt. It is alarming that a 100% neoliberal party, further to the right than the PP on some issues, can attract so many working-class votes. The absence of the left in many working-class neighbourhoods is a factor but also the pro-independence movement, particularly its most left-wing component, has not been able to connect with these people, who channel their rage into a national rather than a social key. Its leader, Albert Rivera, can have a privileged springboard here for his leap to the rest of the Spanish state. A dizzying

thought. The PSC (Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya) remained almost at the same level, lowering the unfounded expectations placed on its candidate, Miquel Iceta. PSOE leader Pedro Sanchez didn't win anything today, but didn't lose either.

4. As for los Comunes and Podemos, the result was bad, though there were no expectations of much more. But the cold data say that Catalunya en Comú (CeC) drew 84% of its votes in the province of Barcelona but only 9.5 % in the capital, Barcelona, where they have the mayor, Ada Colau. The CQSP (Catalunya Sí que es Pot - the Podemos-inspired coalition in the last regional elections) result was already disappointing but this was worse, despite the fact that the candidate and the campaign were better. Here the errors of permanent equidistance and the lack of preparation for the referendum on October 1st and subsequent demonstrations have weighed heavily. Also, the quasi-dissolution of Podem by administrative means. For a left-wing force, being a spectator at the biggest popular mobilization process in years doesn't seem like a good recipe for more support. Now CeC should think about how to build an organic reference that can actually be implanted. But the risk of being a surrogate for ICV (Iniciativa de Catalunya) remains high. At the

state level, we hope that there will be no backsliding in the defence of the

referendum for Catalonia, which after this 21-D continues to appear as the only possible solution to the Catalan

issue.
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Podemos Under Pressure

21 December 2017, by **Brais Fernandez, Eoghan Gilmartin, Jorge Moruno**

Since the proclamation of a Catalan republic on October 27, the independence movement in Catalonia has been on the retreat. Hours after the parliamentary vote on independence, the right-wing Spanish government of the Partido Popular (PP) moved to impose direct rule and took control of Catalan institutions in the days that followed.

This setback opened up a debate among pro-independence forces over how to proceed. Given the evident *force majeure* of the Spanish state, Catalan Premier Carles Puigdemont's center-right Partit Demòcrata Català and its center-left coalition partner Esquerra Republicana have both distanced themselves from the unilateral approach to independence. Instead, they will participate in fresh elections this month aiming for "bilateral negotiations with the [Spanish] State and the EU".

In the rest of Spain a wave of nationalist sentiment has seen a clear shift to the right, with some polls showing the PP and Ciudadanos, the two main right-wing parties, winning an absolute majority if general elections were held today. Podemos, the only major Spanish party to vote against suspending Catalan autonomy, has found it difficult to operate in a climate dominated by the national question. Defending an alternative federal model for the country that would recognize the right to decide, they have repeatedly been painted as "traitors" and close allies of the independence movement by much of the Spanish media.

In the following dialogue Jorge Moruno, Podemos's former head of

discourse, and Brais Fernández, editor of Viento Sur and activist with the Anticapitalista wing of the party, talk to Jacobin's Eoghan Gilmartin about the strategic failures of the independence movement and how the Spanish left can regain momentum after months on the back foot.

Catalonia in Crisis

EG: How do you view the current situation in Catalonia after the imposition of direct rule from Madrid and the arrest of members of the Catalan government?

JM : It remains acute. The Catalan crisis is a fundamentally political one and cannot be resolved judicially or through the detention of political leaders. With the imposition of direct rule, Spain might have won as a state but it has failed as a nation. Indeed at the origin of this crisis is the historical failure to construct a form of political coexistence in Spain that could aggregate the national differences and political wills into a more universal imagined community.

In Podemos we have always said that the only solution is through the ballot box, offering Catalans the choice in a negotiated referendum to either remain as part of a new plurinational Spanish state or to pursue an independent Catalan republic.

BF: The response from the Spanish government has been very authoritarian, showing once again the inability of the political class to resolve the Catalan question democratically. They have been unable to generate a new

constitutional consensus that could incorporate demands from Spain's peripheral nationalities.

At the same time the pro-independence parties' strategy based around a "process of disconnection" from the Spanish state has also failed. The idea that through a series of parliamentary declarations and one-off mobilizations Catalonia was going to secede from Spain underestimated both the coercive powers of the Spanish state and the lengths to which it would go to maintain Catalonia as part of its territory. The regional elections in December look likely to result in a further impasse. The pro-independence parties might maintain their slim majority of seats but they don't, as yet, have the capacity to advance their historic objectives.

JM: Yes, it is clear the unilateral path to independence has failed on its own terms, i.e. the Catalan government's inability to exercise sovereign force. Sovereignty is not declared but rather exercised through one's dominion over a given territory and population, and in the final instance through one's monopoly of violence. This was never going to be possible in the case of Catalonia.

Traditionally a unilateral secession requires either the support of more powerful nations or the ability to confront the state through armed conflict. Obviously the second option was never considered but the Catalan government has also failed to win international support. There was a belief among many *independentistas* that because Catalans spoke French, Italian and English and were culturally European, the EU would somehow be

more sympathetic towards their claims. That's not how politics works. Germany was thinking about Bavaria and France about Corsica and they saw nothing to gain from backing the Catalans.

This only leaves the option of securing a negotiated referendum with the state you belong to, which entails joining other forces whose objectives might differ from yours but who agree on a method for resolving the conflict. Catalonia can only exercise its right to decide if the independence movement works with forces of change in the Spanish state. The idea of a unilateral referendum that takes place in defiance of the state is impossible.

BF: I disagree that a unilateral referendum is impossible. Faced with an anti-democratic blockade from the state, the Catalan people had to look for alternative ways of exercising their right to self-determination. In this sense the referendum on October 1st was legitimate. It succeeded in centering debate not only on the question of independence but on democracy and the Catalans' right to decide.

After this, the question is how you manage the situation politically. Do you use it to try to improve the balance of forces in your favor, opening up a series of new alliances across the Spanish state based on the need for a democratic rupture and a constituent process? Or, alternatively, do you use it to push ahead towards a declaration of independence without any concrete plan of how to realize a republic?

For me the crisis in Catalonia was an opportunity to accelerate a wider crisis of the state that would weaken the Spanish ruling classes. Obviously, this has not happened and the independence movement has been temporarily defeated, but the process also contains many lessons on how to go forward.

In this respect the independence movement has to confront its lack of organization amongst the subaltern classes. We have seen the mobilization of precariatized middle classes as well certain sectors of the working class since October 1st but they have no

control over the process. It is managed from above by the political elites. Having been pushed by popular mobilizations to go farther than they would have liked, these centrist politicians then don't know how to confront a clampdown by the Spanish state.

JM: It is true for a moment on October 1st the independence movement managed to overcome its own limitations, moving from an identitarian idea of the Catalans as "a people" to a democratic sense of "we the people". The vote succeeded as a form of popular mobilization, incorporating many who didn't support independence but believed in the right to decide. But it should not be understood as a referendum capable of giving the Catalan government a mandate for independence. And from the moment it was interpreted as such, the possibility of building upon this mobilization to construct a broader majoritarian bloc closed.

Also the idea that this unilateral path could have become a political opportunity for the forces of change in Spain omits at least two important points: the existing balance of forces in Spain and the feeling of national belonging among Spaniards. The pursuit of independence was not going to create a positive synergy with the rest of the country.

EG: What was the purpose then of the Catalan parliament's declaration of independence? It was clear in the days leading up to the vote Puigdemont did not want to proceed with it and was looking for a way to back down.

BF: It was a symbolic declaration aimed at securing a dignified outcome for the pro-independence parties in the face of their incapacity to construct a real Catalan republic. The predominantly institutional process of separation has failed and so I don't think we should focus too much on the declaration. It only plays into the Spanish right's narrative of rebellion and sedition. The challenge for the independence movement is a strategic one: do you continue to concentrate on the parliamentary route or do you accept a more autonomist framework

based around more militant social organizations such as the Committees in Defence of the Republic (CDRs).

EG: These are the new assembly-based groups that organized a wave of direct actions during the recent general strike.

BF: Yes, for me the CDRs represent a step beyond the superficial participatory structures of the existing independence organizations. Though at an early stage, they are much more rooted in the social terrain and daily life of the Catalan people and have the capacity to attract sectors of the Left which until now have not identified with the independence process.

JM: The declaration was a fake. They didn't even go so far as to remove the Spanish flag from institutional buildings. This desire to see the republic made symbolically real but then having it later shown to be a fraud could produce real frustration going forward. Also with their unilateral approach to independence discredited, what are the demands of pro-independence parties going to be? A negotiated referendum? It is not clear.

In this sense there is a possible opening for Catalunya En Comú-Podem [the alliance between Barcelona mayor Ada Colau's en Comú and Podemos in Catalonia]. While not easy in the current climate, as we move forward it needs to begin reframing the debate underlining how there are only two ways to vote. On one side are those who want to continue in the current cycle of confrontation, who are in fact united by a belief that Spain cannot change, and on the other those willing to bet on a way out of this cycle through the idea of a new plurinational state.

Where Next for Podemos?

EG: You said earlier that at the root of the crisis is the failed construction of Spain as a nation. What is Podemos's alternative plurinational idea of Spain and what conditions would be needed to secure it?

JM: Like all identities, the elites' conception of Spain needs an Other to oppose itself and project as a threat. For the dominant sense of Spanish identity that Other is the Spanish people in its diversity. Unable to build a nation that can integrate these existing differences, it is an idea of Spain that can only define itself by being able to point to part of the population as an internal enemy, with anyone who questions the socio-economic and territorial order seen as part of this anti-Spain.

By contrast, Podemos sees Spain as a project to be constructed, we aim for a new country where nobody wants to leave because nobody is forced to stay. This federalized Spain would require the reordering of the states' institutional and constitutional architecture so that there is no conflict between being Spanish and belonging to another national community existing in the state. It would be a polycentric Spain where not everything passes through Madrid, and where Madrid is converted into a federal district along the path to a less unitary state. Ultimately a plurinational Spain has to do with reinventing Spain's own identity so that it ceases to be a weapon used to attack other Spaniards.

BF: In Spain two crises have flared up time and again: the social and the national. But they have tended to erupt in distinct moments and find separate social expression. For example, in 1934 you had both the failed social revolution centered in the mining region of Asturias and the proclamation of the Catalan Republic, which the anarchist CNT refused to throw its organizational weight behind. In the current conjuncture you first had the Indignados movement and then later the push for Catalan independence.

The dilemma is that a plurinational state can only be constructed if there is a political subject capable of assuming both crises. What alliance of classes has the capacity to resolve the Spanish state's historical problems?

EG: This summer, after Pedro Sánchez's re-election as PSOE leader, political debate focused on the possibility of a government of

the left between the Socialist Party and Podemos. The Catalan crisis has shown both the need for such an alternative and the incapacity of the PSOE to confront the historic problems at the root of Spain's regime crisis. How do you see the current position of the Spanish left?

JM: The re-election of Pedro Sánchez was the latest iteration of 15-M with his victory secured by the rebellion of Socialists against their party hierarchy. But clearly a lot has happened since and the Catalan crisis has reconfigured the political agenda. The polarization around Catalonia has allowed the PP to engage in a hegemonic operation forcing the Socialists into a subordinate position within a bloc of pro-constitutional forces. In the current climate you are either an *independentista* or you back Spanish unity in its existing form and PSOE has made it clear they will stand behind Spain.

With emotions polarized along identitarian lines, there is no space for an intermediary position. This is clearly difficult for us, we are receiving attacks from all sides. The idea of an internal enemy, the anti-Spain, is not only being applied to Catalonia. It is everyone who does not share this particularly narrow idea of the country. When we say that the Catalan people have the right to vote in a referendum, the response is "what do you mean, are you not Spanish?"

EG: And how should Podemos approach relations with PSOE after Sánchez backed Rajoy's imposition of direct rule?

JM: The key to relations between the two parties is who is capable of taking the initiative. Our discourse cannot be centered around denouncing the failures and betrayals of the Socialist Party. This can bring you so far but at a certain point you have to be able to offer people a clear project, a vision of the country you want to construct. If you can do that, you can force others to respond. When Podemos was born it created a transversal bloc of support by being able to tap into the new common sense existing in post-crisis Spain. We articulated how just defending basic human rights such as

housing and public health care put you in opposition to the elites.

Hegemony requires this ability to incorporate a plurality of sectors and differences within a common framework. How can we recuperate this capacity? Well, first, the current cycle centered on Catalonia will have to pass.

BF: In theory PSOE's swing back towards the establishment bloc should be an opportunity for Podemos to recover a politics clearly polarized against the regime as a whole. However, the national question is the point on which the regime is strongest and so the current reordering of the political field is taking place along lines which are much less favorable to us.

In approaching relations with PSOE more generally, we have to remember Podemos emerged as the representatives of a broad sway of Spanish society in the context of the 15M movement. In taking up the *Indignados* challenge to the existing order, we advanced rapidly in the first two years but then reached a limit. This opened up a debate over the need to enter into a pact with PSOE in order to govern in the short to medium term.

But this implies a change in the terms through which we position ourselves politically. If the problem beforehand was the political regime as a whole, now we frame it in terms of defeating Mariano Rajoy and the right-wing. We end up returning to the old parliamentary logic of left against right while marginalizing the "populist" opposition between *those above* and *those below*, which in my opinion has a much more radical potential.

The other key question is where we see politics centered: in the institutions or in the squares and wider social field. I'd prefer for the party to bet on a longer-term strategy and not be conditioned to such a degree by short-term considerations. It would be better to see Podemos in the opposition organizing extra-parliamentary structures. Given the current relation of forces, an openness to joining a PSOE-led government

risks leading to integration, with the party being forced to abandon those elements which threaten the system in order to enter office.

JM: In Podemos we often draw an opposition between *governismo* and polarization, i.e. between those who are open to forming a government with the Socialists and those who believe we should stay in opposition until PSOE pasokifies. But this debate is misleading. The value and meaning of a tactic does not derive from the tactic itself, but the correlations of forces existing in a given conjuncture. If the strategic objective is to secure progressive change for the social majority, then to enter a government or not is a tactical consideration that should be decided according to the circumstances.

BF: Podemos needs to concentrate on strategic considerations, but at the

same time we also clearly have to respond to the demand from much of Spanish society to get rid of the current government. In theory this would involve enabling the PSOE to govern in minority while we remained in opposition. But even this seems difficult right now as it would only be possible numerically with the support of Basque and Catalan nationalists. We have to acknowledge that the opening which the re-election of Pedro Sánchez represented has closed again.

EG: The PP has gone on the offensive after suspending Catalan autonomy and is pursuing further forms of recentralization, such as their move to take control of the finances of Madrid's left-wing city council. How far are they hoping to go with this?

JM: The PP believes it is their moment. From their perspective the crisis is an opportunity to recentralize power

while renewing the regime with themselves at the head. With the Spanish economy remaining in a precarious position propped up by stimulus from the European Central Bank and low petroleum prices, they are aiming to normalize aggression beyond Catalonia.

BF: Yes, the PP is using the national crisis to force through a wider shift to the right on other questions. This is what is happening with the city council in Madrid which has a massive surplus and, despite its many limitations, has shown it can govern without corruption while also improving public services. The PP wants to liquidate these achievements. Having taken the city councils in elections two years ago, we on the left now need to learn how to defend them.

[Jacobin](#)

21D: pre (and post) electoral anxiety

20 December 2017, by **Josep María Antentas**

2. In the elections the future is at stake, but before some unclear roadmaps (except on the misnamed “constitutionalist” side), it is likely that the result will be largely resolved based on the balance sheet that the electorate makes of the recent past and of the five years of the independence process. That is to say, of the capacity of each of the electoral options to offer a narrative and a coherent interpretative frame of what has happened and the point at which we are. The reality is that all the hypotheses of political change (also conceived as a lever for a social transformation) that galvanized the political imagination of a large part of Catalan society come into this election in an open strategic crisis. Neither the state-wide majority for change (Catalunya en ComÃº-Podem), nor the panacea of “easy independence” (ERC and PDCAT), nor being the honest and combative guarantor that the break

with the state will go all the way (CUP), are now credible as plausible and concrete projects of realization. Although they work as legitimate proposals for affirming a political-social space of their own and as a long-term hypothesis.

3. From 2011 and 2012, two great stories and proposals for the future have coexisted in Catalan society. The first, the horizon marked by 15M and its political derivatives, Podem and Catalunya en ComÃº. The second, the independence movement. Both were successful in articulating two projects of defined change and perceived as easy and painless: a new majority in the Spanish state and the independence of Catalonia, respectively. But both hypotheses have collapsed, at least temporarily, and need a second breath to hit back. On the one hand, the possibility of a new government bloc at the Spanish state level, anti-austerity and

defending an agreed referendum in Catalonia, has disappeared for now from the map. There is no short-term vision, neither in its original version (a majority around Unidos Podemos), nor in its caricatural reformulation adopted by Podemos since the summer of 2016 (an alliance between the PSOE of Sánchez and Unidos Podemos). In this sense, the “key” to unblocking the situation alluded to by spokespersons for Catalunya en ComÃº-Podem seems more the affirmation of a pretence than a positive capacity. If at the right moment the Comunes, instead of passively betting on the independence movement having crashed, had adopted an active and offensive policy in favour of a constitutional rupture linked with a social emergency plan, it is probable that today they would not be so sandwiched in a debate in which they have always been uneasy. Meanwhile, the hypothesis of quiet

independence, as a result of a slow citizens' mobilization, of the civic exercise of the right to vote, of the transition from one legality to another and of progressive disconnection from the Spanish state, was abruptly denied. The strategic horizon (really that of placid independence or that of the search for a negotiation with the Spanish state through citizen mobilization), and the public narrative of PDCAT, ERC and the ANC have broken down. And the CUP's policy of sustaining the process by pushing it to the end, was also weakened, since there is no longer a mainstream independence bloc with a crystalline road map to press for compliance. At the same time, the insufficiencies shown by the ruling pro-independence bloc highlight the limits of the CUP's policy of playing exclusively within the process and lacking a strategy directed at (the social base of) the non-independentista left.

4. The possibility of making a horizon of democratic political change plausible depends on two different but partly interrelated dynamics: the ability of the independence movement to redefine itself and reorient towards a "constituent" and "anti-austerity"

turn and the capacity of the left, whether pro-independence or not, to play an important role in the new scenario, causing a shift in the centre of gravity of Catalan politics. Although collective balance sheets are for the moment conspicuous only in their absence, the challenges are there. For the independence flank, two old issues are now inescapable: expanding their influence in Catalonia and making alliances in the rest of the Spanish state. This can only be done through two combined processes that would imply burying the foundational paradigm of the movement, "first independence and then everything else", reformulating its strategic objectives, and displacing the PDCAT (and Puigdemont's new list, Junts x Catalunya) from the centre of the government of the Generalitat: linking the independence agenda to anti-austerity policies and defending a constituent process compatible with a separatist and confederal destiny. Catalunya en Com  -Podem, for its part, urgently needs to recover its constituent and pro-rupture drive, to have a Catalan agenda that is not subordinated to statewide vicissitudes, and to become a force with social

roots and an activist culture, which would involve retracing a large part of what has been done in the path of rapid and dizzying institutionalization that the Comunes have gone through in their short existence.

5. Deep strategic reformulations don't mix very well with the immediacy of electoral politics and with the illusions and longings of an immediate political and social transformation, and it is necessary to recognize that it does not seem that neither independentism in its plurality nor the Comunes go in the direction stated here. But, a clear challenge for all is on the table, whether or not it is taken up: to avoid the triple danger of locking in an illusory proposal of imaginary change, of entrenching in a purely resistance-based approach or of accommodating to the narrow institutional framework of the possible. A successful completion of this triple dribble would open the door to tracing a path and an offensive-defensive strategy, short-long, unilateral-bilateral, national-social, democratizing, constituent and anti-austerity. Difficult? Undoubtedly. But in the history of popular movements it is frequently the case that the arduous is also the necessary.

Presidential elections, a first round full of surprises

19 December 2017, by **Franck Gaudichaud**

Caramba! Wrong again! In 2009, Sebastian Pi  era obtained 3.6 million votes. On November 19, he got only 2.4 million (36.62 per cent). Even with the votes (8 per cent) of the Pinochetist Jos   Antonio Kast, his victory is not necessarily assured on December 17th.

For the Socialist candidate, Alejandro Guillier, the result was not excellent: 22.67 per cent of the vote. In fact, Beatriz S  nchez - candidate of a new formation of the left, the Frente Amplio (Broad Front) - got a score of 20.27 per cent. And the Frente Amplio

got 20 MPs and a senator (against 2 MPs in the previous Parliament).

To analyze this unforeseen situation, we publish this interview giving the analysis of Franck Gaudichaud, author of *Chili 1970-1973. Mille jours qui   branl  rent le monde* (PUR, Rennes, 2013) and the collective work *Chili. Gouverner et r  sister dans une soci  t   n  olib  rale* (Harmattan, Paris, 2016), and member of the editorial board of *Contretemps*.

Several polls said that the winner of the next elections to the

presidency of Chile would be the former president Sebasti  n Pi  era. Why was the return of the representative of an anti-social right possible?

It is often said, paraphrasing Marx, that the dominant ideas in society are precisely those of the ruling classes. In the Chilean case, we must remember what the period of the dictatorship (1973-1989) meant: a radical counter-revolutionary transformation and the bloody establishment of neo-liberalism in this country, which has gone through the

longest historical experience of it in the world. The right was finally able to spread its ideas to all levels of society, breaking the solidarities, the strength of the workers' movement and the social state of the time of Allende (1970-1973). The twenty years of the governments of the Concertation [6] only served to strengthen this process. Finally, the return of the right in 2010 - with the first presidential term of Piñera - confirmed the weight of the ideas and doxa of neo-liberalism in Chile.

Why this return of an anti-social right after the second term of Michelle Bachelet?

Piñera focused his whole campaign on the weak growth and the strong disillusionment with the record of the outgoing president. He had a discourse, which works for a part of the population, focused on business, economic development and individual success. Chilean society remains largely conservative, but this model is cracking more and more. The Chilean right is indeed reactionary, but let us remember that it is the entire political system inherited from the dictatorship that is, while on the macro-economic level, the centre-left of the former Concertation and the right conduct more or less the same (neo-liberal) policy. Finally, to the right of Piñera, we find an openly Pinochetist candidate, José Antonio Kast (who still won 8 per cent of the vote!), and we also find nostalgia for the dictatorship within the Piñera coalition, Piñera having started his rise in the shadow of the military and of his own brother, an important minister of Pinochet...

What is the balance sheet of the mandate of Michelle Bachelet and the government of the "New Majority" (the parties of the Concertation - PS and PDC - plus the Communist Party)?

The election of Michelle Bachelet's second government was the result of a campaign at a time when as sitting president she was still very popular and thanks to her taking up - in part - the demands of the 2011 social movements, particularly the student movement for free, public and quality education. These demands have been, so to speak, digested and "neo-

liberalized". So Bachelet won the 2013 election by promising reforms in education, taxation and the Constitution.

We can now take stock of her term of office: Michelle Bachelet embodies a "transformisi" social-liberal progressivism. She has achieved a tax reform that is painless for big capital (mining in particular) and the richest people; as for educational reform, at present only 28 per cent of students have access to free higher education: in fact, it is essentially a state subsidy to private institutions; the objective was to reach 80 per cent of free education by 2020).

The draft reform of the Constitution was formulated through parodies of "citizen consultation", and must be approved by the Parliament and not by a Constituent Assembly. Remember that it is still the (amended) Constitution of the dictatorship that is in force... Not to mention the major mobilizations conducted in recent years against pension funds and for a reform in favour of a public and contribution-based system: there has been no progress on this theme, hence there is much disillusionment among Bachelet's own electoral base.

More generally, there is a crisis of legitimacy of the Chilean political "caste" and the "democratic" model installed since 1990, while levels of social repression remain high. This is also reflected in the abstention rate: this vote confirms that the biggest majority in Chile is abstention (54 per cent, which is considerable). It is very high among the popular classes, who do not feel represented, without this being expressed in an anti-system politicization; on the contrary, it is rather the opposite that is happening.

Is there a left alternative to the New Majority? Is there a credible political reorganization of the Chilean radical left?

The (good) surprise of this first round were the results of the Frente Amplio, whose candidate, Beatriz Sánchez, got more than 20 per cent and was close behind the candidate supported by Bachelet, Alejandro Guillier, who won less than 23 per cent of the vote. Beatriz Sánchez almost qualified for

the second round, whereas she was credited with only 8-10 per cent in the polls. So it's a slap in the face for the dominant media. We can see that the Frente Amplio managed to mobilize - not a minor achievement - in some big popular communes like Puente Alto and Maipu, in Santiago. It succeeded in fighting to win this electorate away from the right, which is strong in these neighbourhoods. It did this in a few months, since the Frente Amplio (FA) was formed in January. In the eyes of many hundreds of thousands of people, it has managed to embody a credible electoral alternative on the left.

Let us remember that the FA comes in part from sectors that led the student movement of 2011, including two young people who subsequently became MPs, Gabriel Boric and Giorgio Jackson: it regroups a broad and heterogeneous spectrum, ranging from the liberal centre to several organizations of the radical left, such as Igualdad (Equality) or Izquierda Libertaria (Libertarian Left). It is a global anti-neoliberal coalition, which represents a kind of Chilean equivalent of the Left Front in France or Podemos in Spain, with real difficulties in seriously implanting itself among the popular classes.

Moreover, several small collectives of the revolutionary left criticize the orientation of the FA, which they consider to be electoralist, and the composition of its leadership, which comes essentially from the middle classes. Beatriz Sanchez, a journalist who came late to politics, became the candidate after having defeated in primaries a candidate more clearly positioned on the left, the critical sociologist Alberto Mayol. But overall, the Frente Amplio has succeeded in becoming an alternative force on the national level. With this election, it also wins 20 MPs and one senator (out of 155 parliamentarians), more MPs than the Socialist Party (the party of Bachelet) and more than twice those of the Communist Party (which is part of the presidential majority). It's historic.

The recomposition on the left will therefore accelerate. It remains to be seen whether this will be essentially an electoral surprise, resulting in an

institutional integration of a new centre-left, which is what the ruling classes and traditional elites hope for, or whether the Frente Amplio will succeed in basing itself on the resistance "from below", or indeed become closer to the anti-capitalist sectors that do not belong to this coalition. However, there are major strategic contradictions within the FA, and the majority of elected MPs are from forces tempted by a "light" reformism, some of them being close to the PS and having even worked in ministries of the outgoing government. It is up to the rank and file of the FA and its left wing to conduct battles about the Front's orientation, and to do so now.

To win in the second round, Alejandro Guillier - candidate of the "New Majority" - absolutely needs the votes of Beatriz Sánchez. There is also the collapse of an essential part of the traditional political system - Christian Democracy - which will certainly reintegrate the "New Majority". The FA can now pressure Guillier to

publicly commit to ending the pension fund system, transforming education, public control of natural resources and a genuine Constituent Assembly.

But this must be without entertaining any illusions about this candidate, who is really from the establishment, and especially without entering into negotiations between party machines concerning a possible governmental majority, at the risk of losing from the beginning any political capital acquired. Again, some leaders of the FA (especially *Revolución Democrática*) are unclear on their positioning. However, there are many FA activists who do not want to vote for Guillier and the heirs of the old Concertation (a slogan of "not one vote for Piñera" would in fact be largely sufficient from a tactical point of view)... One of the great absent factors is undoubtedly the mobilized workers, who have remained largely outside this election campaign, while the trade union movement is being revitalized little by little.

But this election and the unexpected emergence of the FA mark an inflection and an opening of the field of possibilities. We will have to follow what happens in the second round: whether Piñera is finally able to pull it off on December 17, placing himself in the wake of the current 'right turn' of South America or whether the recomposition in progress will allow Alejandro Guillier to govern from the centre-left. In any case we hope that there will be - whoever is the winner - a broadening of social struggles, because we still have a long road ahead of us to build real alternatives in Chile. And it is still and always the dignified resistance of the Mapuche people that can show the way, and also the many - still scattered - examples of eco-territorial, working-class and feminist resistance.

November 25, 2017

This interview was initially conducted by Stéfanie Prezioso for the Swiss journal *Solidarités*.

Empire and the Middle East in the age of Trump

18 December 2017, by **Alan Maass, Gilbert Achcar**

Gilbert Achcar is a socialist who grew up in Lebanon and the author of numerous books, including *Morbid Symptoms: Relapse in the Arab Uprising* and *Clash of Barbarisms: September 11 and the Making of the New World Disorder*. He talked to Alan Maass about recent developments in the Middle East and the consequences after a year of Trump.

The U.S. has been mainly focused on defeating the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which seems to have been largely accomplished with offensives to drive ISIS out of its main strongholds in both countries. First question: What happens to the Islamic State now?

ISIS has obviously suffered a severe defeat. They thought they had built a state, a caliphate that would last for a long time on a very large stretch of territory in Syria and Iraq, and they have basically lost all this. It lasted some three years before unraveling.

You could say that it was already a feat for ISIS to hold onto such a large territory for such a long time against virtually everybody else. Because this is the only group against which there has been some kind of unanimity among all other forces involved in the region.

ISIS has suffered a heavy defeat, but that doesn't mean it will disappear. A lot of its fighters managed to go

underground in Iraq and Syria, and they have branches in several other countries. And as we see from the case of al-Qaeda, terrorism can carry on over the long haul through underground networks.

I'm sure we will see a lot of this terrorism in the coming period—because there's no real way to get rid of such a scourge without changing the conditions that produce it.

Today, these conditions are quite complicated. They include, first of all, state terrorism, starting with Israel's and that perpetrated by Western imperialist domination in the region. A lot of what has happened worldwide

since 1990 finds its roots in the wars waged by the U.S. against Iraq in 1991 and 2003, and [the ensuing occupation of Iraq](#).

But there are also many despotic regimes in the region that practice state terrorism and stoke similar hatred, thus creating a breeding ground for groups like ISIS.

Overall, we are witnessing what I called in a book I wrote after 9/11 [the "clash of barbarisms."](#) The barbarism of the strong creates conditions for a counter-barbarism of the weak.

That's what we have been seeing—and we'll see more of it, I'm afraid to say—whether the strong barbarism is the United States of America, the deadliest of all, or Russia, or local despotic regimes such as the Assad tyranny in Syria, the most barbaric of the regional governments, or the Sisi dictatorship in Egypt, to name but two.

The other side of the question stemming from the conquest of ISIS strongholds in Iraq and Syria is where this leaves U.S. imperialism. What's the position of the U.S. relative to the regional powers in the Middle East and to its international imperialist rivals?

There's no doubt that the United States is at the lowest point of its influence in the region since 1990. That's when the U.S. intervened, deploying massive forces to the region in the preamble to the first war against Iraq. The U.S. reached a peak in the history of its regional hegemony after that.

This happened at a time when the Soviet Union was in its death throes, and so Washington took complete control of the situation in the Middle East. When you measure the present situation compared to that peak, you see how much the U.S. has fallen.

The clearest illustration was the uprisings of 2011. That was the year when the U.S. had to withdraw from Iraq without achieving any of the occupation's goals, leaving a country that had fallen under the control of Washington's regional archenemy, Iran. Tehran now has much more

decisive influence over the Iraqi government than Washington.

2011 was also the year when key allies of Washington faced mass uprisings. There was Hosni Mubarak in Egypt after the Tunisian dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Libya's Muammar el-Qaddafi, who had shifted to Washington's side in 2003, followed them, and Bahrain erupted in a rebellion, scaring all the Gulf oil monarchies.

The military intervention in Libya in support of the uprising against Qaddafi was the occasion for Obama's famous formula about "leading from behind," reflecting the fact that the U.S. had a lower profile in that intervention than its European allies in NATO, which took the lead.

But that intervention turned into a fiasco. The attempt at controlling the Libyan insurgency and steering it toward a conclusion that would preserve the Libyan state failed miserably, and the Libyan state collapsed entirely.

Libya thus became the only Arab country where the revolution had succeeded in thoroughly overthrowing the ruling regime—except that there was no alternative in place, let alone a progressive one. Chaos ensued naturally.

The "Yemen solution"—a compromise between that country's ruling group and the opposition concocted by the Gulf oil monarchies with U.S. support, and so much praised by Obama that he pointed to it as the model to be applied in Syria—collapsed tragically after less than three years.

So the U.S. has accumulated a whole series of setbacks in the region since the invasion of Iraq. The Iraq war will be [remembered in the history of the U.S. empire as a major misstep](#)—a self-defeating occupation undertaken by the Bush administration against the advice of even close friends of the Bush family who knew what kind of problems the U.S. would face.

As a result, Washington is at a very low point compared to a few decades ago. It seized the opportunity of ISIS's expansion into Iraq in 2014 to

orchestrate a limited comeback. It organized a coalition to launch a bombing campaign against ISIS, established some presence again in Iraq, and did the same in Syria.

Washington's main intervention on the ground in Syria was on the side of the Kurdish forces. That in itself is a paradox, because these forces stem from a radical left tradition—yet they were the main ally of the U.S. in the fight against ISIS in Syria. Donald Trump has called this "ridiculous," declaring he wants to stop it.

Again, this shows Washington's general weakness—whereas Iran is expanding its power, influence and direct intervention in the region. And Russia, of course, appears as a big winner in this whole situation, from Syria to Libya.

Moscow started [intervening directly in Syria with its air force in 2015](#). At the time, the Obama administration welcomed Russia's intervention under the pretext that Russia would be participating in the war against ISIS. But everybody knew that Moscow's main target was going to be the Syrian opposition to the Assad regime, not ISIS.

Essentially, Washington gave Russia a free hand to help the Syrian regime crush its opposition. After Trump's election, but before he became president, Russia began to prepare itself for the role of solution-maker in Syria, suddenly acting the role of arbiter between the regime and the opposition, with both Iran and Turkey on board.

There is one more issue here. In the autumn of 2016, Turkey, angered by Washington's support for the Kurdish forces in Syria, shifted into an alliance with Russia, thus dealing another heavy blow to U.S. influence in the region.

Today, Russia appears to be the country that is gaining ground in the whole region, while the U.S. is losing ground. Moscow appears today as the most effective buttress of the regional repressive order. After the very brutal role it played in Syria, it was granted air base facilities in Egypt by Sisi to sustain Sisi's intervention in Libya

along with the United Arab Emirates, in support of the local strongman Khalifa Haftar. All the oil monarchies, including the Saudis, are courting Moscow and buying Russian weaponry.

Donald Trump is definitely not going to reverse this tide of U.S. regional decline. On the contrary, he is the reason for a further, rapid deterioration of U.S. influence in the Middle East.

And now Trump has made the announcement that the U.S. will recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. What impact will that have?

This is a completely gratuitous provocation that only an irrational man like Trump could carry out—irrational, that is, by the standard of the basic interests of U.S. imperialism.

It definitely doesn't serve U.S. interests to play such a game. Trump is doing it for no apparent reason but to cater to the most reactionary wing of his supporters and boost his morbid narcissism of having "delivered" where his predecessors failed to fulfil their campaign pledges.

He's done it without offering anything to try to appease the Palestinians. He hasn't secured anything from the Netanyahu government in Israel in return for making such a move. It just doesn't make sense from the point of view of U.S. Middle East politics.

This will cost Washington a lot, at a time when its image, because of Trump, is already terribly negative in the Arab world, the Muslim world and the Global South. [Whatever limited image enhancement was achieved under Obama](#) has been completely wiped out and replaced with the ugliest image the U.S. has ever had in the world.

The result can only be more hatred against the U.S., breeding more terrorism—the weapon of the weak. And once more, the U.S. population will bear the price of its rulers' rapacity, just as it did with 9/11, which was a direct result of U.S. policy in the Middle East.

Let me ask about another part of the picture: Can you talk about the developments in Saudi Arabia with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's maneuvers?

What's happening in the Saudi kingdom is, first of all, a domestic matter—it's a struggle for power. What has been happening is a kind of "palace revolution," but in relatively slow motion in the sense that it has been done by stages, until the recent dramatic arrest of several tycoons among the emirs and other members of the country's aristocracy.

We are witnessing an attempt by Mohammad bin Salman [often referred to by his initials MBS] to turn the kingdom into more of the traditional pattern of monarchies, where you have one smaller family ruling. In the Saudi kingdom, by contrast, there is an extended ruling family made up of the sons of Abdulaziz (Ibn Saud), a king who had a huge number of them—45 sons among close to 100 children—because of the number of wives he has had: over 20!

MBS is attempting to end this tradition of rule by the extended Saudi family and concentrate power in his own hands, inaugurating a new dynastic line. He's doing this from the position of crown prince, since his father is the king, but his father is supporting everything he's doing, so he has carte blanche in that regard.

He is an ambitious young man who was appointed Minister of Defense in January 2015 after his father Salman became king, when he wasn't yet 30.

The first thing he did as Minister of Defense was to launch the war on Yemen—a devastating, murderous bombing campaign by the Saudis and their allies. It has failed in the sense that the expectation that the Saudis and the coalition would settle the matter quickly proved completely wrong.

As you can see from recent events—especially the killing of former President Ali Abdallah Saleh after he turned coat one more time and announced a renewed alliance with the Saudis—they are very far

from achieving victory. They only succeeded in causing what is already the worst humanitarian tragedy of our time, with close to 7 million people facing death from starvation and close to 1 million facing death from cholera.

MBS then shifted his attention to more domestic affairs, and that was when the previous crown prince, who had been designated according to the old tradition, was simply removed from that position, and MBS took his place. This was a key moment in the "palace revolution"—the first major break with tradition.

Since then, MBS has been consolidating his own power by eliminating potential rivals. Anyone who could stand in his way is being repressed, arrested and harassed under various pretexts, one of them being corruption.

Of course, MBS resorted to this pretext because it is popular, and it is undeniable that there is a huge lot that is rotten in the Saudi state. But it's also obvious that this is just a pretext.

MBS is himself very corrupt indeed—this is a young man who can use any amount of money any way he wants, while imposing austerity on his kingdom's subjects. He proved that last year when he fancied a yacht belonging to a Russian tycoon and bought it for half a billion euros—around \$550 million! That just gives you an idea of who we're dealing with.

What are the reverberations of this power struggle for the region? For example, the Saudi regime seems to have attempted to intervene in Lebanon by getting its chief local ally Prime Minister Saad Hariri to resign. All of these moves are bound up with its longtime rivalry with Iran, right?

The Saudi kingdom has been increasingly worried by Iranian expansionism—first in Iraq, then in Syria, and through to Lebanon. There is now a corridor of Iranian domination running from Tehran to Beirut, which includes both direct and proxy Iranian military presence.

The Saudis are extremely worried about this because they see Iran as their archenemy. They have ever since the Islamic revolution in Iran, which overthrew the monarchy there in 1979—a nightmare scenario for the Saudis, who were confronted the same year with an ultra-fundamentalist uprising at home in Mecca.

When Salman became king in 2015, he first shifted the Saudi kingdom toward a policy of unifying Sunni forces in the region. He followed this policy for a couple of years, including mending fences to a certain degree with the Muslim Brotherhood.

That continued until Donald Trump became president. Trump, advised by the sinister Stephen Bannon, pushed for a reversal of this policy and an escalation against both Iran on the one hand and the Muslim Brotherhood on the other.

This led earlier this year to [Saudi Arabia's break with Qatar](#), which is the main sponsor of the Muslim Brotherhood. Until that point, Qatar was involved in the coalition bombing of Yemen, but it was kicked out of that coalition because of this issue. That was a very poor maneuver, and it backfired.

The escalation against Iran is what led to the recent episode with Lebanon. Hariri is entirely dependent on the Saudis. The Hariri family made its fortune in the Saudi kingdom, through its connection with members of the ruling family, which is a prerequisite of all moneymaking in the kingdom.

The message that was being sent by the Saudis is that we don't want our people—that is, Hariri—participating in a government in Lebanon that is dominated by Iran's people, which is Hezbollah.

That was the message. But even that failed due to the intervention of Western governments, including the U.S. and France. The French president Macron played an active

role in getting Hariri out of the kingdom and back to Lebanon, where he is now engaged anew in some form of compromise, which is what the Saudis wanted to end. The situation there is highly unstable, though.

Can you draw some general conclusions about the balance sheet of revolution and counterrevolution now, almost seven years after the Arab Spring? You've written before about understanding this as an ongoing process—not broken up into separate episodes, but continuous. Could you expand on that?

The starting point is to understand that [what was called the Arab Spring](#) wasn't limited to issues of democracy and freedom, as it was portrayed in the media. It was a much deeper social and economic explosion, due to the accumulation of grievances of a social character. Record rates of unemployment, especially for youth; low standards of living; poverty—it all came to a head in 2011.

That's why I emphasized at the time that what I called a "long-term revolutionary process" had started, one that would carry on for many, many years of turmoil—one can say confidently now: decades.

There will be no new stabilization in this part of the world for a very long time indeed because the condition for stabilization is a radical social and political change, one that would put the region on track for a very different kind of economic and social development. Without such radical change, the instability of the Middle East won't be resolved.

The immediate problem of the moment is that the progressive forces that emerged in the Arab Spring have receded to the margin almost everywhere within several years of 2011. Since then, the region has been torn between two reactionary forces.

On the one hand, there are the regimes—or their remnants in countries where they were overthrown

or significantly undermined. And on the other, there are the Islamic fundamentalist forces—most importantly, the Qatar-sponsored Muslim Brothers and Saudi-inspired Salafists—that have arisen since the 1970s and '80s on the corpse of a previous wave of left-wing activity, in which nationalist and communist parties played a key role.

The reality is that the whole region has shifted since 2013 from the preceding revolutionary phase, dubbed the Arab Spring, to a counterrevolutionary phase. The latter is characterized by the clash between the two counterrevolutionary poles—that of the regimes and that of [their Islamic fundamentalist rivals](#).

This is what is at work in the wars that have erupted in Libya, Syria and Yemen—basically, you find those same ingredients everywhere. They exist in the intensifying situation in Egypt: the form they took there was the return of the old regime with a vengeance, crushing the Muslim Brotherhood.

We are in the midst of this counterrevolutionary phase. But at the same time, you can see from any number of indications that social issues are boiling over. Not only are all the social and economic factors that led to the explosion in 2011 still there, but they are a great deal worse.

This will lead to further explosions and further turmoil: that much is sure. We can only hope that the progressive potential that emerged powerfully in 2011 will be able to reconstitute and organize itself to bid for power. This is what was lacking in the Arab Spring—organizations that embody this potential, with a clear strategy of building an alternative to both the old regimes and their fundamentalist contenders.

December 11, 2017

Transcription by Rebecca Anshell Song and Christopher Zimmerly-Beck

[Socialist Worker.org](#)

Evicting the Underclass

17 December 2017, by **Eli Friedman**

On November 18, a fire on the outskirts of Beijing [killed nineteen people](#), including eight children. Skyrocketing rent in the urban core has pushed working-class people “especially [migrant workers](#) without local residency permits” into shoddily constructed, crowded, and poorly regulated housing, setting the stage for this all-too-predictable tragedy. Dangerous living conditions, exceedingly long commutes, and exposure to health risks are simply the price impoverished migrants have to pay in order to access the booming urban labor market.

Following the fire, the Beijing city government “almost certainly in consultation with national leadership” snapped to attention. Within days, it launched a forty-day campaign to address building safety violations. But the real intention has quickly become evident: to rid the city of people deemed extraneous.

These expulsions are consistent with China’s long-standing policies that dehumanize and exclude migrant workers. But purging Beijing of this population will also free up land for more profitable uses, giving the [revenue-hungry](#) city added motivation.

As a result, the original tragedy has quickly transformed into a state-directed catastrophe on a much larger scale, as tens of thousands of people face eviction, dispossession, and homelessness in the fast-approaching winter. [Images of demolished buildings](#) and [streams of weary people](#) look more like a city under siege than a major metropolis “fitting, since the state has declared all-out war on its urban underclass.

Many elements of this campaign seem unnecessarily cruel and have generated resistance not just among migrants but also among [sympathetic intellectuals](#) and other residents. Yet the government has shut down

nonprofits and private citizens trying to provide housing and other forms of assistance to displaced people.

The government’s rhetoric of removing “low-end populations” has also sparked widespread outrage. The state gave many people mere hours to clear out of their apartments; in some cases, it cut off electricity and water. It has even razed entire neighborhoods. The campaign’s scale and ferocity has been shocking, even to a citizenry relatively accustomed to an overbearing state apparatus.

Indeed, the central government has been waiting some time for the right moment to strike. For many years, Beijing and other megacities have expressed their intentions to improve the “quality” of their urban populations. Though Beijing has consistently set (and then exceeded) population limits, something changed in 2014.

That year, the central government released the National New Urbanization Plan (2014–2020), which established [urbanization](#), rather than industrialization, as the engine for a more equitable and sustainable model of [capitalist](#) development. The plan calls on “extra-large” cities “those with an urban district population exceeding five million” to “strictly control” population growth. Wealthy cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen would belong to the elites, while the low-end population would be relegated to [low-end cities](#).

To speed the program along, Beijing and other metropolises have been making life intolerable for working-class migrants: revoking access to education for their children, relocating labor-intensive sectors further and further from the urban core, and occasionally demolishing schools or settlements. This current round of expulsions is not a new approach to

urbanization, but an expansion of an ongoing process.

The political logic supporting these actions has even deeper roots. Since the formation of the People’s Republic, the Communist Party has sought to treat labor as it would any other element in the production process. In 1957 Mao Zedong said:

[China] has plans for production in factories, for producing cloth, tables and chairs, and steel, but there is no plan for producing humans. This is anarchism “no governing, no organization, and no rules. This government perhaps needs to have a special ministry “what about a ministry of birth control?

Although China never realized Mao’s suggestion, it did of course develop the world’s most comprehensive and effective policy for regulating reproduction. And, in 1958, the central government introduced the *hukou*, or household registration system, which tied the provision of social services to specific places, making it very difficult “if not impossible” for citizens to relocate without official approval. These two technologies gave the state an unparalleled capacity to control the production and distribution of human beings.

In the era of capitalist transition, prosperous cities have used these tools to filter their populations, aiming to admit just the right qualities and quantities of labor at just the right time “an approach I’ve termed “[just-in-time urbanization](#).” Drawing in cheap labor has fueled high-speed capital accumulation, but urban elites face competing pressures to draw in and expel workers: they must ensure the availability of pliable laborers without sparking [social chaos](#) or spending too much on schools, health care, housing, and pensions. This tension explains, at least in part, why

cities like Beijing have continually exceeded their self-imposed growth limits.

This mass eviction campaign shows that the urban state is now willing to risk depriving capital of labor in order to realize their utopia of orderly and socially sterile metropolises stocked exclusively with the elite. It also indicates that the state is turning its back on employers that depend on cheap labor, siding instead with real estate interests eager to turn more profit than rent on cheap housing can provide.

Since the campaign began, labor-intensive businesses have been scrambling to keep their workers in Beijing, with e-commerce giants Alibaba and JD.com [making housing](#)

[arrangements](#) for their displaced couriers. Residents have complained that the street hawkers they depend on have disappeared, and workers who keep Beijing's airport running have also [faced eviction](#). Migrant laborers may be a despised underclass, but the city cannot function without them. These contradictory pressures will push the state into schizophrenic behavior, and the nation's most vulnerable will pay for this instability.

There is no silver lining to nineteen unnecessary deaths and tens of thousands of people rendered homeless. But one hopeful sign has been the various acts of support from urban residents. We should not overstate the implications and scope of this backing, and some efforts are undoubtedly paternalistic assistance

rather than acts of solidarity. But as housing prices continue to climb, wages for most fail to keep up with the cost of living, and schools and the labor market remain intensely competitive, a segment of officially recognized urban residents might begin to see reflections of their own position in the precarious lives of migrant [workers](#).

After all, state protections from the market aren't what they used to be, even for those with a highly coveted Beijing residency. As the government drags nonresident migrants out of their homes, the market is ensuring that millions more cannot participate in urban life "regardless of their residency status.

[Jacobin](#)

Alliance of Middle Eastern Socialists - Founding Statement of Principles

15 December 2017

We oppose capitalism, class divisions, patriarchy/sexism, racism, ethnic and religious prejudice and speak to the struggles of women, workers, oppressed nationalities such as Kurds and Palestinians, oppressed ethnic and religious minorities, and sexual minorities. We also oppose Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.

We stand for socialism as a concept of human emancipation and an affirmative vision distinguished from the authoritarian regimes that called themselves "Communist."

The effort to create an Alliance of Middle Eastern Socialists, originally started in March 2016 as an Alliance of Syrian and Iranian Socialists with a trilingual [website](#) (English/Arabic/Persian) to help express the aspirations of "the Other Middle East" and to offer analyses of critical issues and new dialogues and bonds of solidarity between Syrians

and Iranians opposed to their authoritarian regimes.

Since the destinies of people are linked across borders, important developments in the region -some terrifying and some hopeful"have compelled the formation of a broader Alliance.

*What was left of the Syrian revolution has been completely destroyed. The Assad regime, with the help of Iran and Russia has declared victory and is being recognized as a "legitimate" government despite the fact that it is responsible for the death of over 500,000 innocent people and the internal and external displacement of over 12 million or half of Syria's population. One million people remain under siege by this regime and at least 100,000 political prisoners are facing daily torture and dying mostly in the Assad regime's prisons.

*The claim by many on the left that the Rojava project of Kurdish democratic confederalism in Northern Syria could continue in co-existence with the Assad regime, seems increasingly unsustainable as the Assad regime has stepped up its pressure on Kurdish areas ever since it was reassured of having crushed the Syrian revolution. At the same time, all regional and international states have refused to support the self-determination of the Kurdish people, in Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Iran. Turkey has increased its threats and interventions against Kurdish areas in Syria and continues to assault Kurdish areas in Turkey itself. The Israeli government supports the idea of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan for opportunistic reasons to find a new ally in the region against Iran.

*Regionally, authoritarian regimes are engaging in more repressive campaigns and consolidating their

forces against the interests of the popular classes. This drive can be seen in Saudi Arabia's bloody war in Yemen; the Turkish government's campaign of mass arrests and imprisonment of all opposition forces; and the Egyptian military government's imposition of a level of repression that even exceeds that of the Mubarak regime before 2011. In the case of Egypt, some leftists supported the 2013 military coup against the Muslim Brotherhood government at the time. Instead of presenting a democratic and principled opposition to all forms of state and non-state repression, they sided with the new military government's repression of the Muslim Brotherhood.

*Two new coalitions, one consisting of Saudi Arabia and its allies, now including Israel, and the other consisting of Iran, Turkey, Qatar and their allies are vying for control of the region and its capital. Saudi Arabia and its allies count on the support which Donald Trump's recent trip to the Middle East and a \$110 billion U.S. arms contract with Saudi Arabia has offered them. Iran and its allies are counting on support from Russia. Russia and China have also found ways to benefit from helping both sides.

*The new U.S. president Donald Trump and Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu are intensifying their war threats against Iran. While the Trump administration claims to be against the Assad regime, its imperialist intervention is in fact helping the Assad regime and further intensifying the bombing of innocent civilians in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, which began with the Bush and Obama administrations. Trump's and Netanyahu's call for "regime change" in Iran are for their own imperialist gains. Their campaign will only lead to war and the destruction of genuine progressive struggles inside Iran.

* Israel's colonialism, militarism, apartheid and racism is repressing and killing Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem and what was Historic Palestine or "Palestinian territories of 1948." The Occupation and militarization are also normalizing

increasing class inequality, sexism and racism within Israel. Neither the two-state solution nor the secular one-state solution seems realizable given the Israeli occupation, Israel's extreme right-wing leadership, and the alliance between Israel, Saudi Arabia and the U.S. which aims to destroy the Palestinian struggle for self-determination.

Some hopeful developments however show that the desire for human emancipation has not been quelled in the region:

*New and persistent labor protests in Iran are opposing the increasing poverty and horrible working conditions that the Iranian regime wants to hide in its effort to expand its imperialist intervention in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen. Although the existing labor struggles are not directly connecting the impoverishment of the bulk of the population to Iran's militarism and regional imperialism, they do offer a potential for a progressive mass movement for social justice.

* Labor struggles and struggles for democratic rights continue in Egypt, Tunisia and Bahrain, despite increasing repression.

*Feminist and LGBT struggles have expressed themselves in Turkey as part of the mass protests against the authoritarian and reactionary Erdogan regime which has aimed to create a virtual police state after the July 2016 coup attempt. In Egypt, feminist/human rights activists such as Mahienour El-Massry and LGBT activists fight for social justice despite imprisonment by the state. In Lebanon, women's rights activists organized a campaign to repeal the "marry your rapist" law. In Iraq, women are fighting against a parliamentary amendment that aims to abolish women's rights in family law. In Iran, imprisoned feminists such as Narges Mohammadi, Golrokh Ebrahimi Iraee and Kurdish women's rights activist, Zeynab Jalalian continue to speak out for human rights.

* Popular mobilization in the Moroccan Rif continued throughout 2017, has spread to several of the

country's towns, despite repression by security forces and the regime's attempts to discredit the movement.

* The Kurdish struggle for self-determination continues and needs to be defended. This struggle has taken diverse forms such as the call for independence, federalism, confederalism or the demand for the recognition of the Kurdish people as an entity with equal rights within a state. All socialists do not agree with the idea of an independent Kurdistan, and some have valid criticisms about various Kurdish parties for their authoritarian policies/practices and collaboration with various imperialist countries. However, critical solidarity with Kurdish parties and organizations that oppose capitalism/imperialism and defend women's rights, secularism and the rights of other oppressed minorities is urgently needed.

In the face of these developments, we have come together in an Alliance of Middle Eastern Socialists on the basis of the following goals.

1.Opposition to capitalism, militarism, authoritarianism, imperialism, religious fundamentalism, patriarchy/sexism/heterosexism, racism, ethnic and religious prejudice.

2. Developing connections and active forms of solidarity between labor, feminist, anti-racist, LGBT, student and environmental struggles in the Middle East region and internationally.

3. Tackling the deep and historical problems of Middle Eastern socialism. The region has been so plagued by the politics of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" that any effort to develop an affirmative vision of a humanist alternative to capitalism around universal concepts and goals has been missing. As a result, revolutionary or progressive movements that do emerge, most recently those that arose in 2011, have been destroyed by authoritarian capitalist systems, religious extremism and sectarianism, with the assistance of various regional and global imperialist forces.

We have come together to address these issues in a collective way in a

joint website and through joint conferences and other possible activities. We see this Alliance as a place for debate toward the aim of finding real solutions that are not trapped within the capitalist mindset. Those who wish to join us can contact us at info@allianceofmesocialists.org

Signatories:

Omar Abbas, Syrian student, U.S.A.

Frieda Afary, producer of Iranian Progressives in Translation, U.S.A.

Said Afshar, Iranian journalist, Europe

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Roya Assadpour, Iranian member of Swedish Left, Europe

Joey Ayoub, Lebanese scholar and writer, Europe/Lebanon

Bibi, Syrian artist and writer, Occupied Tongva, North America

Sara Dehkordi, Lecturer in Political Science and activist at Manjanigh, Europe

Joseph Daher, Swiss-Syrian academic & activist and creator of Syria Freedom Forever, Europe

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[Alliance of Middle East Socialists](#)

How we won marriage equality

14 December 2017, by **Louise O'Shea**

Two key events had precipitated this action. One was then US president George W. Bush's vocal support the previous February for a move to amend the US Constitution to define marriage as between one man and one woman in order to protect, in his words, "the most fundamental institution of civilisation".

The other was the lodging of a case in the Family Court involving two same sex couples attempting to have their

Canadian marriages recognised in Australia.

In characteristic wedge politics style, Howard identified a political opportunity in this confluence of events. By changing the law, he stymied any possibility of same sex marriages happening or being recognised in Australia, while at the same time whipping up hostility to an oppressed minority and motivating his conservative base.

Shamefully, Howard's manoeuvre encountered almost no resistance from the government's supposed adversaries. Under the leadership of Mark Latham, every single Labor parliamentarian voted for the amendment.

Of the parliamentary parties, only the Greens and the now defunct Australian Democrats were prepared to make a stand for LGBTI equality by voting against the government.

Outside of parliament, the situation was not much better. Demonstrations held in most capital cities to protest the amendment were small, the wintry weather serving as a metaphor for the campaign's prospects. The rallies were organised by a handful of LGBTI activists and socialist groups. But despite their size, they were important. They helped establish from the outset that there would be resistance to this homophobic move and that a determination existed to challenge it.

Other more conservative groupings, such as Australian Marriage Equality, also expressed opposition to the amendment, although their primary focus was on the possibility of a High Court challenge or lobbying the governor-general to withhold royal assent to the bill, rather than grassroots campaigning.

Friendly fire

Not helping the situation was the fact that a significant proportion of the self-identified radical LGBTI activists rejected the demand for marriage rights. This hostility extended even to the organising of counter-demonstrations, one such gathering throwing eggs at couples taking part in an illegal wedding at a demonstration in Melbourne in August 2005.

This attitude was mistaken for two main reasons.

First, it aided Howard's agenda and did nothing to challenge homophobia. The Howard government was not amending the Marriage Act to ensure that the superior, non-conformist lifestyles of inner city LGBTI radicals remained unsullied by the practices of the masses in suburbia. It was rather a transparent attempt to whip up prejudice that radicals had a responsibility to resist.

Second, left opponents of the campaign were wrong to see the issue entirely in terms of marriage. Just as your attitude towards eating at diners was not really the starting point in considering what approach to take to the civil rights movement in the US south in the 1960s, opinions on the

merits or otherwise of marriage were not the key question informing whether or not to take up a battle against discrimination imposed by a conservative government.

2004-2009

The initial few years of the campaign were a battle. Up against the hostility and stonewalling of the Labor Party – in government from 2007 – it was difficult to force the issue into the political spotlight. A move by the Greens in November 2008 to amend Labor's Same Sex Relationships Bill to extend equality to the Marriage Act was overwhelmingly defeated, as was their attempt to have their 2009 Marriage Equality Bill read in the Senate in early 2010.

During this time, regular demonstrations were one of the only ways in which activists could attract the attention of the media and raise consciousness about the issue. Defiant rallies of people demanding their rights, especially those held every year on the anniversary of the amendment's passing, helped gradually to establish the issue as a question of civil rights and equality. Bit by bit, this began to influence public opinion. The initial 38 percent support gradually transformed into majority support, with polls in 2008 for the first time showing a majority to be in favour of equality.

This significant shift in mass opinion, combined with increasing attendance at demonstrations nationally, led to the campaign announcing in 2009 a Year of Action in 2010. The focus of this was to up the ante against the government through more rallies and to build pressure on the ALP to reverse its discriminatory policy in the lead-up to its national conference scheduled for the following year.

This escalation yielded results. Prominent Labor frontbencher Mark Arbib publicly declared his support for marriage equality in 2010, as did Paul Howes and then assistant treasurer Bill Shorten. The fact that these figures were predominantly from the right of the party, while those from the left, including prime minister Julia Gillard, maintained an intransigent

opposition, made the party's position seem increasingly untenable.

In the same year, Greens, along with some Labor MPs, made moves in various state parliaments including Tasmania and South Australia to introduce state-based marriage equality provisions. While none of these ultimately proved successful, they helped maintain a focus on the issue and forced more prominent individuals and organisations to take sides on the question.

A bill moved by Greens MP Adam Bandt mandating MPs to consult with their electorates on the question of marriage equality in 2010 likewise helped maintain a focus on the issue. Its aim was to highlight the significant disconnect between the intransigence of parliament on the question of LGBTI rights and the much more progressive attitudes of the public. This same disconnect would later become crucial to achieving change. Indeed, despite polls indicating more than 60 percent support for marriage equality from 2010 onwards, a Greens bill in 2012 was voted down by a more than two to one margin.

Political issues

Two political questions confronted the campaign during this period. One was the question of civil unions: should the campaign accept some form of recognition other than marriage in the spirit of compromise? Or should it stick to demanding full marriage rights? There was strong pressure from the Labor Party to accept some sort of civil unions compromise.

The arguments of the more radical wing of the campaign and its allies were crucial in establishing that such a B-grade version of relationship recognition was not going to be acceptable to advocates or LGBTI people as a whole. We argued that civil unions represented a relegation of same sex couples to second class relationship status, not a preferable or more clever way to gain equivalent rights. Importantly, this was eventually established as consensus within the campaign. From then on, the focus was firmly on the principle of equality, not what might be good

enough or substitute for full civil rights.

The second question was about what sort of action should be demanded of the governing Labor Party. Some argued that a conscience vote rather than policy change should be the demand of the campaign, on the basis that it was more achievable.

Again, it was the more radical activist arm of the campaign that argued against such a backdown. A conscience vote, we argued, would only legitimise bigotry, and it was therefore imperative for the campaign to force Labor to acknowledge the injustice of discrimination by pushing for policy change.

ALP conference

The December 2011 ALP conference in Sydney provided an important focus and resulted in a significant victory, vindicating the arguments of the left in the campaign. More than 10,000 demonstrators from all over the country rallied outside the conference venue as the party's marriage equality policy was voted on. Despite then prime minister Julia Gillard's opposition to equality, the party voted convincingly to change the policy. But by a vote of 208 to 184, it also voted to allow parliamentarians a conscience vote on the issue, which doomed any push for marriage equality in parliament to failure.

Nevertheless, this was an important milestone for the campaign. It established the legitimacy of the demand for full equality in relation to marriage and represented an important defeat for the section of the right wing of the ALP whose efforts to hold out against the reform from this point on were severely weakened.

So while Labor in government was a frustrating period – the numbers and policy existed to make equality a reality but the conscience vote prevented this – it was the case that achieving marriage equality began to seem more like a matter of time and less like a political impossibility. And it provided vindication of both the intensification of protest action and the uncompromising stance taken by

activists in relation to demanding full civil rights and rejecting half measures.

International situation

Progress internationally added to the momentum and helped create the impression that there was a growing consensus around this issue, against which the politicians were wildly out of step.

As early as 2005, the Netherlands, Belgium, Canada and Spain had all legalised same sex marriage. A campaign had been running at a state and national level in the US for some years, with an impressive mass march on Washington of hundreds of thousands in October 2009 making international headlines.

In May 2012, then president Barack Obama declared his public support for marriage equality. In 2013 France, the UK and New Zealand all removed discrimination in relation to marriage. But it was the Irish referendum held in May 2012 and the US Supreme Court decision the following month that found discrimination in relation to marriage unconstitutional that gave rise to a sense of optimism and mass protests in Australia.

Liberals in government

The election of notorious reactionary Tony Abbott as Liberal leader and later as prime minister was a shock for the campaign and made victory seem more distant than ever. There were differing reactions to this setback. The more conservative arm of the campaign emphasised that it was important to treat Abbott with respect and that an intensification of lobbying, not protest, would serve the campaign best.

Activists, along with most of the LGBTI community, rejected this and continued to fight the government, encouraged by the enormous hostility to Abbott born not only from his openly reactionary social agenda but

also from his myriad other attacks.

The replacement of Abbott by Turnbull should have made marriage equality more likely. For the first time, the leaders of both major parties publicly supported reform. Yet just as Gillard had done in 2010, Turnbull made a deal with the right wing of his party to toe the line in relation to marriage equality in return for the leadership.

Increasingly, however, the situation came to be seen more as farce than tragedy. The right wing of the Liberal Party, in consultation with the Christian right, adopted a strategy of extreme belligerence towards LGBTI rights, drumming up a moral panic about Safe Schools and the supposed consequences of marriage equality. However, this had the flavour of desperately delaying the inevitable more than it did serious derailing of reform. This is not to say the various roadblocks they threw up to prevent progress didn't cause undue delay and put the campaign on the defensive, but ultimately they proved futile.

As is now well established, the postal survey represented a significant own goal for the social reactionaries. It united the vast majority of the population as well as a range of civil and political institutions against them and in support of social justice reform. And it convincingly discredited their pretence of representing the "silent majority" and speaking for ordinary folk in the suburbs.

The mass Yes campaign also confirmed the argument made doggedly by activists over the 13 years of this campaign: that it will be the actions of the millions of ordinary people who support equality that will be crucial to victory, not currying favour with politicians or limiting our efforts to polite pleading behind closed doors.

The Yes campaign empowered and politicised LGBTI people and their supporters. It gave thousands of people experience of battling, ideologically and organisationally, a well-organised conservative enemy. And it showed that victory is possible when people are prepared to take a stand rather than passively accept injustice. This will leave an important

legacy for the future.

Ironically, because in Australia there has been more resistance to marriage equality than in most other countries in which it has been achieved, the victory is also more significant. It is not simply reform being handed down quietly from our benign

representatives. It is rather a hard-fought victory against a hopelessly out of touch parliament and belligerent right wing enemy. It has not been won easily, but has taken years of determined battle, which, although at times gruelling, has provided political experience that will be invaluable in future social justice struggles. And it

has demonstrated in practice the value of a political approach that doesn't give in at the first challenge or opt for the path of least resistance, but that sticks to its principles and is prepared actively to take on the powers that be.

[Red Flag](#)

Mobilise On the Streets first, to Resist Normalization of Communal Murders

13 December 2017, by **Radical Socialist**

When in 1992 Advani and the others of his criminal gang led the attack and destroyed the Babri Masjid, the action was widely treated as a crime. A quarter century later, not only are they proclaiming 6th December as a Day of Valour, but have been able to push their agenda a great deal.

Much of the debate over how to resist these forces have focused on exactly how fascistic they are, but the real issue today is more on recognizing that regardless of whether we see them as fascists or as aggressive communalists, it is essential to understand that this is a political force that maintains an autonomous agenda and constantly strives to push it forward. It is necessary, as always, to stress that the RSS and its whole network is not a simple instrument that the ruling class creates, to keep in readiness for bringing out whenever rulers feel the need. Historically, the relationship between fascism as a political movement and the bourgeoisie is more complex, and varies from country to country. In the case of India, the Sangh combine has spent nine decades building an ultra-nationalism through the valorization of a chauvinist Hindutva, presenting other religions as enemies, especially presenting Muslims as sub-human beasts and eternal enemies of Indian culture and tradition. There is nothing in a purely capitalist rationality that would push this outlook. But the terms that the RSS and its various branches

collectively have set out is, in return for their delivering certain highly needed profitable steps for the ruling class and international capital, they will be given freedom to pursue their politics of hatred. The murder of rationalist secular activists like Dabholkar, Pansare, Kalburgi and Lankesh; the murders of ordinary Muslims for no crime other than being Muslim, with allegations of cow slaughter, "love jihad", being agents of the Isis, etc., in cases ranging from Mohammad Akhlaq, Pehlu Khan, Junaid Khan to Mohammad Afrazul, present this politics of hatred in its open form.

The accusation behind attacking and murdering Mohammad Afrazul was a by now routine one, of being a participant in a "love jihad". It is significant that the man was a Muslim labourer from West Bengal. Bengali speaking Muslims have been repeatedly targeted and accused of being Bangladeshi infiltrators. Each of these points must be noted. That immigration, which happens all over the world primarily due to economic hardships, are now being declared terroristic plots. Secondly, that unless they can prove their Indian-ness, Bengali speakers, especially if Muslims, are being accused of being foreigners. This too is part of the larger fight to impose the Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan design all over India. And any Muslim, anywhere in India, is seen as fair game.

From mid November, a pamphlet on the so-called love jihad was distributed in Jaipur. Instead of immediately halting it, the police merely carried out an inquiry. Love Jihad is a lie, but one that has a long pedigree. It asserts that Muslims pretend to love Hindu women in order to make them convert to Islam. In the recent notorious case of Hadiya, the Kerala High Court had set aside her marriage, despite all evidence that she had converted of her own, and had only then met her future husband and married him, and above all that she is an adult. Even the Supreme Court has been far from clear, so far, in her Case, with the NIA having been asked to investigate if it was indeed a case of love jihad at one stage.

In the case of Afrazul, who has a family, the entire horrifying episode shows how murdering Muslims has become a near normalized event, with the Hindu upper caste communities ignoring it, or taking to the social media to drag in killings in Bangladesh, Syria and elsewhere to dilute the gravity of the situation in India. Resistance by all democratic forces, by all those who seek to retain all the colours of the rainbow in a pluralist India, is essential. And we must be aware that such resistance has to be completely free of all rightwing parties, not just the RSS-BJP. Even as protests erupted, in Kolkata, about twenty-five protesters were arrested by the police for

demonstrating close to the Keshav Bhavan, the RSS Headquarters in the City. The government of West Bengal, under Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee, is showing that its verbal fencing against the BJP is not serious, and that it is keen to break up any independent protest.

It is only by as combined struggle on the streets, in courts, and in the electoral space, that responses to

these can be made. There is certainly a need to fight electorally. But those who make that the principal terrain can only end up as fifth wheels to a Congress led alliance where social issues will take a back seat. It is important to note that with the Gujarat election campaign in full swing, the Congress is keen to prove that Rahul Gandhi is a good Hindu, and hence it has not gone out for a forthright condemnation of the murder

of Afrazul, with the stress on how the official Hindutva campaigns are empowering such individual murders as well. And as the Supreme Court has repeatedly shown, any tactics of court battles without social struggles are fraught with uncertainty as the court may take poor stances. Mass mobilisations, public resistance, thus remain the starting point.

[Radical Socialist](#)

Brazil's Abortion Battle

12 December 2017, by [Sabrina Fernandes](#)

Brazil's right wing has gotten ahead through a series of dirty tricks. The [2015 impeachment](#) of Workers Party (PT) president Dilma Rousseff, pushed through despite the absence of any "crime of responsibility," is the most notorious example. Now, through similarly slick maneuvers, they're seeking further restrictions on reproductive rights. This, in a country where already one woman dies from a clandestine abortion procedure every nine minutes.

Currently, abortion is legal only in particular cases, such as when there's a direct threat to the life of the pregnant person, or when the pregnancy results from rape. It's these exceptions that the conservative and Evangelical parliamentary front is seeking to destroy. Through a variety of proposed bills and amendments, they may [eliminate the right to abortion completely](#).

One proposal sought to establish conception as the moment when life begins. But that was taking too long, so the front decided to push their agenda through a different bill, called PEC 181, which would extend maternity leave for mothers of premature babies.

The tactic was simple: find a bill that women of all political visions will support, work directly with the women involved, create an emotional narrative about the connection

between a mother and her child, and insert, somewhere in there, what's known in Brazil as a "turtle" clause: a provision snuck into a separate, unrelated bill. If the bill is time sensitive, the "turtle" clause might get pushed through without due public debate.

[Eduardo Cunha](#), the previous parliamentary leader, who also drove Rousseff's impeachment, is responsible for writing the anti-abortion turtle clause in PEC 181.

So far, this strategy has made some headway. But in seeking to eliminate the right to abortion altogether, conservatives may have overreached. Women in Brazil are ready to fight for the few reproductive rights they still have left.

The Family Front

The Evangelical church is the major social force driving Brazilian conservatives' political project. Brazil is still the most Catholic country in the world, but the Catholic population has fallen while the Evangelical community has grown.

Though there are different strands of Evangelism, it's the mega-church, prosperity gospel, morally conservative kind that has a national political project in Brazil. Unlike the Catholic church, the Evangelical

churches have invested heavily in electing their pastors and members to all levels of political representation. They also work to establish relationships with the judiciary, the executive, and high-ranking bureaucrats and successful businessmen. Mirroring the televangelists and mega-churches of the United States, they preach financial prosperity as the path towards a "nation chosen by God."

Their federal parliamentary front consists of almost two hundred congressmembers, acting in tandem with other powerful fronts. Prominent among these are agribusiness, business, the construction sector, and, crucially, the family front: 238 congress-members whose families have pursued political power in Brazil for decades now. Together, these fronts acted in opposition to Rousseff and have helped to keep [Michel Temer](#) as president despite his abysmal approval rating.

Members of the Evangelical front come from different parties, from the extreme conservative right to the moderate left, including the Workers Party. Though they don't vote together on everything, they collude on issues involving religion and traditional family values.

To expand their social base beyond the churches from which they emerged, the family front stokes moral

panics, especially around “concern for children.” These panics have united conservative churches with liberal-conservative movements and parties — including some that attempt to project a non-partisan, independent image, like the Free Brazil Movement — in outbursts against the left, the LGBTQ community, and feminists, accused of corrupting “our children.”

In September, the front sparked a frenzied movement to [close a queer art exhibit](#), claiming it promoted incest, pedophilia, and religious heresy. Then there was the campaign against São Paulo’s Museum of Modern Art, for admitting children to an exhibit involving artistic nudity. These culminated into a generalized crusade against art and progressive intellectual work, setting the stage for the outrageous physical confrontation [against Judith Butler](#) and her partner Wendy Brown when they visited Brazil earlier this month.

Butler symbolizes the enemy for conservatives, since, according to them, she supports not only feminism and queer “corruption,” but also bestiality, Marxism, and communism. For the Right, the moral panic is part of a broader project of promoting anti-leftist sentiment, especially as elections approach.

The Feminist Threat

The Right’s moral panics and anti-leftist campaign tend to converge on a single target: women, and their growing presence in the political field. Feminist action gained widespread visibility with the [June 2013 protests](#), when a hike in bus fares sparked a generalized social revolt. Women took a leading role in the protests and were key in keeping the movement’s demands progressive. They took to the streets en masse to denounce conservative pastor Marco Feliciano and Eduardo Cunha, sparking “Cunha Out!” demonstrations organized by the Left.

All sectors of the right wing, whether conservative, neoliberal, or hybrid are driven by fear of the momentum

behind such feminist action. That’s not to say that Brazil’s feminist movements are entirely cohesive or united. The normalization of sexism in leftist organizations, the influence of both liberal and radical feminism online, and the disconnect of that feminism from class-based struggles all work to fragment the women’s movement. Yet, for the Right, feminism is seen as a homogeneous movement: the Left’s tool for attacking the status quo. And they’re only partly wrong. Butler may not be the “Marxist witch” her protesters believe her to be. But the currents she represents — questioning gender norms, struggles against rape culture, and a focus on women’s collective problems — do tend to open space for leftist ideology.

This poses a threat to the Right as leftist women have started coordinating explosive popular campaigns and mobilizations. They filled the vacuum created by the official left’s uneven mobilization against the neoliberal government. In an interregnum period, marked by a highly fragmented left plagued by the PT’s contradictions and sectarianism, Brazil’s “feminist spring” has helped keep popular stagnation at bay.

Women have been prominent in the anti-Temer mobilizations, and are starting to demand more representation within leftist parties, unions, and movements. The Right is particularly concerned about the growing presence of leftist women as political representatives. The 2016 municipal elections saw the rise of feminist city councillors, even in places where conservatism was on the rise. Names such as [Sâmia Bonfim](#), [Talãria Petrone](#), [Fernanda Melchionna](#), and [Marielle Franco](#), among others, are becoming more well-known despite the right’s attacks.

Women have also started to populate the higher levels of politics. [Luciana Genro](#) was The Party of Socialism and Freedom’s (PSOL) presidential candidate in 2014; the United Socialist Workers Party (PSTU) recently made [Dayse Oliveira](#) their vice presidential candidate; and there are talks about [Áurea Carolina](#), a black feminist who won the most city council votes in Belo Horizonte, and [Sonia Guajajara](#), an

indigenous woman leader of growing prominence, as potential names in next year’s presidential race.

This puts the right in a delicate tactical position: if they attack women frontally, they have to brace for the potential whiplash of women’s mobilizations across the country. Just in the past week, there were dozens of mobilizations against PEC 181 and there are bound to be many more if the men in congress trying to push the bill don’t abandon it. The turf wars are intense, with conservative men spreading outrageous lies about feminist eugenics schemes to abort male babies. This plays out in the mainstream media, as well as online, where the Brazilian right has managed to keep a loyal and growing base of followers.

The stakes of this battle are high. Brazilian women still need and get abortions despite the laws against them. Some estimates put them at two thousand abortions per day. The majority of the women who can pay for safe (or at least safer) clandestine procedures are white and middle- and upper-class. The majority of women who can’t — and who risk it with trafficked pills and homemade procedures — are black and live in the poor peripheries; these are the people who bear the brunt of conservatism.

What the Right underestimates is how the abortion debate unites these women of vastly different backgrounds across Brazil. And that includes religious women: groups like Catholics for the Right to Decide act as pioneers within and outside their own circles. Even Evangelical women are taking a stand, with the recent creation of the Evangelical Front for Legalizing Abortion.

If leftist organizations and their feminist sectors play this right — summoning women to stand up to the right to choose motherhood or not, whether or not they would have an abortion themselves — feminist acts of resistance for reproductive justice may get the masses stirring again in Brazil.

[Jacobin](#)

Goodbye and Good Riddance, Robert Mugabe

11 December 2017, by **Melusi Nkomo**

When the history of Robert Mugabe is written, it will not be about a black man raised by a single mother, who defied all odds in racially segregated Southern Rhodesia to pursue an education at the highest levels. Neither will it be about an articulate black African teacher-turned-politician, who spent around a decade in prison for challenging white colonial racism and working for the betterment of black Zimbabweans. It will be about the four decades Mugabe was at the helm in post-colonial Zimbabwe, in which his rule was anything but admirable.

As a young politician in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Mugabe was by no means the most prominent of the black nationalists fighting white colonial rule. Neither was he the most motivated. He was, however, the most eloquent. For a clique of educated black elites, whose political and societal outlook was fashioned in mission schools, Mugabe was the man of choice to convey the message to white rulers – in voice and comportment – that blacks were no longer “uncivilized tribesmen.” They were sophisticated enough to deserve the franchise.

In everyday manners and air, Mugabe was an “English man” who spoke their language in the shapely tone of an eloquent and “cultured” gentleman. It is no wonder that when he arrived on the nascent nationalist scene, fellow nationalists noticed his gift of gab and appointed him publicity secretary in their organization, the National Democratic Party.

At the time, Mugabe had come back home, presumably for the holidays, from Ghana, where he worked as a teacher, with the intention to go back to West Africa. He may never have wanted to stay in Rhodesia for long. He became the reluctant latecomer who would go on to dominate Zimbabwean politics for almost half a

century.

Much of what people outside Zimbabwe know about Mugabe starts on April 18, 1980, when the colonial tether on Zimbabwe [snapped](#) and the country gained independence from Britain. The popular story is that Mugabe, as a Marxist revolutionary, ushered in a new era of liberation and social progress, exemplified by the early expansion of the education and health delivery system for black people. Yet Mugabe was neither a socialist nor a revolutionary.

He was a rebel, but one who wanted to replace white rulers with a self-interested political project. When he “talked revolution,” it was out of expediency, to further his goal of securing the presidency for life. When he donned revolutionary garb, it was always fleetingly (in the early 1980s, for picture poses), and with an unseemly addition: a tie that clashed with his safari suit.

Mugabe never hid his [disdain](#) for pot-smoking and dreadlocked black men, instead marveling at European classical musicians, especially Beethoven. In an oft-recounted story, Mugabe was quick to express his displeasure about Bob Marley’s invitation to perform at the 1980 independence celebrations. It’s said that he wanted a pianist, preferably British, possibly Cliff Richard.

As an intellectual, Mugabe was never a serious one. His idea of intellectualism was confined to the accumulation of certificates, academic or otherwise. His much-vaunted “seven university degrees,” many achieved through correspondence, were a testimony to this shallowness. A cursory Google search of his works pulls up [one collection](#) of his speeches titled *Our War of Liberation: Speeches, Articles, Interviews, 1976-1979*, but nothing intellectually intriguing. His politics

correspondingly lacked ideological robustness, and many of his party and national programs were not designed to outlive him. For that reason, he loathed any discussion about succession, and was violent to anyone posing any kind of threat to him.

It is easy to point to the social programs during the independence euphoria of the 1980s as an example of Mugabe’s commitment to black people and socialism. But throughout the 1980s, and with “[Britain’s willful blindness](#),” Mugabe sought to build a one-party dictatorship in the mold of the Kims’ North Korea. In fact, he invited North Korean military supervisors to help him create a private army brigade that hounded the opposition and committed [one of the worst atrocities](#) against African people in independent Africa. In the end, the Gukurahundi massacres left an estimated twenty thousand civilians, most of them isiNdebele-speaking black men, women, and children, dead in unmarked mass graves.

Mugabe’s politics were a bizarre [populism](#) that relied on force rather than the support of the masses. While this aided his self-interested political ambitions, it was simply unsustainable; his hold began faltering as early as the 1990s. Faced with a fast-changing global political economy and louder demands for change at home, Mugabe’s ostensible socialism was exposed as the clumsy fraud that it was.

Western donors who had footed part of his bills started isolating him, and corruption in his government sprouted. The perceived glories of the 1980s went down the drain and, with them, the social programs. Epidemic after epidemic exposed the weak foundations of the health care delivery system, from HIV and AIDS in the late 1990s to cholera and typhoid in the 2000s. Educated Zimbabweans hopped in desperation from one

country to another, carrying wads of certificates that often yielded little more than menial jobs.

The Mugabe-era education system, specifically, was bad for the country. With it, he stifled critical minds and killed innovation. Schools taught people to cram for exams and follow instructions to a tee. The most famous teacher in the village or township was the one who whacked the hell out of children for failing a test. Most school were a mirror image of Mugabe's political *modus operandi*; slapping down dissenters and ruling the country with a huge stick in hand. Pupils passed with high grades, but out of fear: fear of the teachers' reprisals or, in the case of college students, fear of being left behind when others' ostensible qualifications allowed them to leave the country

after graduation.

Mugabe, a teacher trained in the 1940s and 1950s, when blacks weren't expected or allowed to think critically, managed to oil and expand what his *Rhodesian predecessors* had left behind. He flaunted the education system whenever he got the chance. It churned out a politically compliant population that loved instruction manuals and textbooks. Individuals who recited what they memorized under the watch of an angry teacher and ended up doing it with glee. That was sometimes seen as a sign of intelligence amongst Zimbabweans.

Those who managed to skip the border to escape the hellhole that our country had become made for lovely, smiling, articulate butlers and waiters that

attended to tourists in places like Dubai and Cape Town. Zimbabweans could, of course, read and cram the menu, enough to explain food recipes to visitors in impeccable English.

They also made for the best implementers of NGO projects – whether or not they believed in their employers' philosophies (most of the times they didn't). They became the best foremen and machine operators on farms in South Africa's Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces – because they could read and follow instructions on seed and pesticide packages. Most never uttered any criticism, come rain come sunshine. Sadly, that extended to the politics of our nation. And Robert Mugabe knew it.

Jacobin

Renewal or exhaustion

10 December 2017, by **Daniel Albarracín**

However, there are signs of depletion of the project, within its stabilization, which should signal the need for its renewal.

Bolivia's national newspaper, *La Razón*, reports that the Bolivian economy has grown in 2017 by 3.94% of the GDP, remarkable growth until we compare it with the vigour of activity in previous years – only in 2010 did it grow at a lower rate. Currently the Bolivian cycle is slowing down, for several possible reasons. The first is the fall in the price of hydrocarbons, which has only recently been reversed. Also, Brazil's demand for natural gas has fallen. There will be an impact inasmuch as extra Christmas pay, the second "bonus", will not be distributed this year, as was the case in 2016, since the requisite 4.5% growth in production has not been attained.

In previous years we have seen how the Bolivian economy was oriented to facilitate a certain degree of redistribution, with growth in real

wages, and a social policy that has improved the living conditions of the popular classes.

Bolivia has enjoyed a longer positive economic cycle than other countries committed to the Bolivarian development model. It has persisted in its dynamics of deploying a private redistributive and anti-oligopolistic policy. However, it has barely managed to modify the national productive model.

In this regard, the Bolivian economy continues to be dependent on its exploitation, almost monoculture, of hydrocarbons and various agricultural activities. It maintains a strong external dependence on the Brazilian and Argentinean economies. Recently it has reached agreements with Brazil to continue selling gas, and dam mega-projects (El Bala and Rositas) are being launched that threaten biodiversity and may cause displacement of indigenous populations. In sum, this policy increases economic dependence,

subject to the vagaries of surrounding countries, the price of hydrocarbons, and is sustained by a strong aggression to the natural environment.

To date, the MAS has had strong electoral support, despite the attacks of the right. But the Latin American context has been inserted in a regressive political cycle, with political changes in Brazil and Argentina, while other countries such as Venezuela and Ecuador are finding very real limits to their project with internal opposition, international harassment and the exhaustion of the development model applied.

Bolivia also has a fierce internal opposition, which in the past has generated secessionist tensions. The Bolivian plurinational project has managed to avoid the latter, with a strong municipal decentralization but maintaining the main policies from the centre.

The Masista project seeks to renew

itself and now has the opportunity to try to do so. At the moment there is a concern about the electoral situation, where the next judicial elections (Bolivia is one of the few countries where the judiciary is elected) will hopefully not yield bad results for those close to the government.

The project seems to lack new ideas, and there are difficulties in mobilizing the peasant and indigenous social bases, who joined the project to see their idiosyncrasies recognized and for the redistribution facilitated, but now may see it as too small for them to fulfil the new aspirations that have emerged. The request for renewal of a possible mandate for Evo Morales entails a resource that entrusts the political future to charismatic inspiration rather than to a renewed political project capable of addressing the challenges and contradictions facing the country and the Bolivarian model of development.

The project of social transformation does not only need political continuity, it also has to renew itself and to advance before these challenges. It still enjoys important reserves from a previous boom period, thanks to the macroeconomic results generated by hydrocarbons. This base offers, especially in a country like Bolivia, conditions for the beginning of the replacement of the old extractivist model by a productive model based on renewable energies, capable of

producing enough with less raw materials.

Perhaps it should begin with the training of trained personnel to innovate the local production system, adapting to its regional conditions. Why not a public scientific foundation, perhaps in agreement with other friendly countries, that prepares qualified personnel to undertake the technical and social change that makes an industry and a model of agricultural development possible and sustainable? In this respect, much remains to be done with decisive action by the public sector, promoting everything necessary so that all possible common goods can be socially extended.

The internationalist renewal of the Bolivarian project could happen through reaching new agreements of complementary cooperation that made a reality of an endogenous and participative development with the communities, opening the way to its own path, founded on change and productive diversification, sustainable and adapted to the local context, from these countries.

It should be said that Bolivia is trying to innovate in several fields. It has begun, for example, with the development of a Joint Commission of Investigation on the Panama Papers, to question the role of tax havens and the tax evasion practiced by more than a hundred Bolivian companies.

Regulation in that area, creating records of the final beneficiaries of offshore schemes, controlling the movement of capital, and putting a stop to some of the gaps through which capital flight occurs, would constitute a good initiative.

But perhaps it is more important to begin with the bases, implementing a tax reform that addresses big capital and large family fortunes, who avoid taxes by taking their profits and assets to jurisdictions with low tax burdens, and to prevent the greatest tax burden falling on consumers, workers and small producers. To this day, the Bolivian fiscal regime continues to support its public resources by indirect taxes. So, there is an opportunity, as a first step, of trying to reduce the latter and to implement a corporate tax with higher effective minimum rates, a tax on equity or inaugurating a progressive income tax, making the tax collection model much more just.

In sum, we trust that the Bolivarian project can continue on its way. Now, the road to socialism requires transformations of a depth that for the moment are not receiving the attention they deserve. We believe that this requires rethinking its productive, social and environmental strategy, the sole basis on which it is possible to sustain and deepen an emancipatory political model over time.

Standing Up for Palestine: BDS More than Ever!

9 December 2017, by **Solidarity Steering Committee**

First, *there is no "peace process"* and hasn't been for a long time. Endless blather about "the two-state solution" has only covered up the *destruction* of any viable two-state possibility — through Israeli settlement expansion, demolition of Palestinian homes and neighborhoods in Jerusalem itself, the

expansion of "Greater Jerusalem" and "Metropolitan Jerusalem" to slice the West Bank in half, the annexation Wall and apartheid roads for the settlers, and brutal repression of Palestinian protests including the Israeli Army's deliberate targeting of children.

Israel's crimes against human rights and international law, well-documented by Palestinian, Israeli and international human rights and legal organizations and on-the-ground reporting, have been systematically enabled by U.S. administrations of both parties – Bill Clinton, George W.

Bush, Barack Obama - with relatively inconsequential differences in rhetoric. The difference now is that the rightwing extreme Israeli settler movement is now *directly engaged in setting White House policy*, through Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, his bankruptcy lawyer David Friedman whom he appointed ambassador to Israel, billionaire backer Sheldon Adelson - all corrupt figures in their own right - and a cohort of Christian Zionist fanatics spearheaded by vice-president Mike Pence.

Announcing the embassy move rips away what's been a convenient fig leaf of U.S. "peace" posturing and isolates Washington from the rest of the world including its major allies, but it changes little on the ground except to encourage even greater Israeli military and settler violence.

Second, *there should be no surprise about Trump's announcement*, coming from the same thief-in-chief who has pulled the United States out of the Paris climate accord, threatens to start trade wars with Canada and Mexico, terrorizes immigrant communities and destroys their families, intends to cancel the multilateral nuclear agreement with Iran, threatens North Korea with "total destruction" (meaning nuclear war), and is looting the treasury of the American people with tax cuts for the

super-rich, the destruction of priceless national monuments - and so much more besides.

Here, the difference is that many liberal Democrats who oppose Trump on other issues think it's just fine to recognize Jerusalem as "Israel's eternal capital" and treat the lives and the rights of the Palestinian people as minor collateral damage. That's another whole discussion of its own.

For social justice and Palestine solidarity activists, the big question of course is: What can we do? Many important emergency appeals have been made, all worth supporting, by CODEPINK, Jewish Voice for Peace, the U.S. Campaign for Palestinian rights, numerous Arab, Palestinian and Muslim organizations and progressive Christian church bodies - to call Congressional representatives and Senators, to write letters to newspapers, to demonstrate in the streets and proclaim in social media, "Not in Our Name!" in response to Trump's latest atrocity.

But we believe that one ongoing grassroots campaign stands out: The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement has been growing in strength on U.S. campuses, in communities and internationally. The BDS campaign was launched in 2005

by Palestinian civil society organizations around three fundamental demands: an end of the post-1967 Occupation, full equal rights for Palestinians who are treated as second-class citizens inside Israel, and the right of return for Palestinian refugees. (Read the call [here](#))

It's not that BDS has the power to severely impact the Israeli economy (much of which is based on high-tech and military exports). Rather, it brings the issues of the Occupation and of racist policies inside Israel, and particularly the complicity of U.S. corporations, to the attention of ordinary people in a way they can do something about it. The U.S. Campaign for Palestinian Rights has a summary of BDS activism and victories [here](#).

That's why Zionist forces, state legislatures and the U.S. Congress (yes, both parties) are attempting to suppress and criminalize BDS activism. That's perhaps the best indicator of its growing importance and success. Those of us outside Palestine and Israel can't produce "the solution." What we can do is show that the Palestinian people have allies in their struggle for dignity, survival and self-determination. BDS now more than ever!

[7]

Towards the women's international strike on March 8th

8 December 2017, by Julia Camara

The lines that open this text are taken from theses 17 and 18 approved at the 7th Congress of the Liga Comunista Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Communist League, then the section of the Fourth International in the Spanish state) in 1989. I think that, despite the passing of time, they reflect well the way of understanding the world of those who believe that without emancipation of women there

is no human emancipation and that, without socialism, there is no possible emancipation.

We come from a current that, with its errors and limitations, knew how to open Marxism and understood the strategic dimension of the women's movement and feminism as a whole. It was not just that, as Lenin said, women had to "get out of slavery"

because otherwise half of the class would continue in it, but to understand that we ourselves constitute a strategic political subject for the breaking of the existing social framework.

We are feminists, first of all, out of necessity. Because one day they raped us or because we survived a shit relationship, because we owe it to our

mothers and grandmothers who left their lives in precarious and poorly paid jobs fighting for a future for us, because we cannot take it any longer that going to a party or even onto the street is synonymous with being harassed and because we are fed up with harming our bodies to try to look like those women on billboards that will never exist in real life.

But we are feminists, too, by understanding. Because we understand that Capitalism is a murderous system frontally opposed to life, which reproduces itself through the destruction of the planet and the exploitation of the working class, yes, but also through the expropriation of our bodies and the imposition of work of reproduction and care which is not recognized or remunerated, which is discredited and undervalued, without which society could not continue to exist.

Last March 8th, gathering the experiences of the women's movements of the Spanish state (where, on November 7th, 2015, we achieved not only the paralysis of the

counter-reform of the abortion law but also the resignation of Minister Gallardón), Poland, the United States with the "Women's March", Argentina or Italy with "Non una di meno", women from different countries promoted an International Women's Strike that would represent a qualitative leap in the fight against the oppression that we experience.

We are the women who move the world. We are the ones who give birth, who raise, who accompany our elders, who care and wear ourselves out physically and emotionally so that every day masses of workers leave the house clean, fed and healthy to produce for a system that devours them and return home exhausted, exhausted and unwilling to live.

We are the women who, when we go out, have the lowest paid jobs, the ones that nobody wants, the most precarious and unstable jobs and those that generate the most vital anxiety.

We women are the ones who, if we stop, have the capacity to stop

everything.

Last September, compañeras from all over the state met in Elche, Alicante, in a General Assembly that began to prepare the legal, organizational and strategy issues necessary for what is to come. In just a month and a half they will meet (we will meet) again, this time in Zaragoza, to continue preparing the forms and the events of a day of historical struggle. Because next March 8th, women from all over the world are going to go on strike.

As feminists, as revolutionaries, we have the historical responsibility to build this strike. In each institute, in each university, in each work centre but also in each house, in each kitchen and in each bed, on March 8th women stop.

As those responsible for preserving life, we refuse to continue supporting a murderous system that is determined to exterminate it. We need to be organized and conscious, because we have our horizon clear: to change the world and transform life, which are, after all, the same thing.

For advance toward socialism without distinction between ethnic groups

7 December 2017, by **Tadashi Kinoshita**

Over the past 72 years, the divided North and South Korea were under permanent threat by the United States. In the Korean Peninsula, this created a contradiction between oppressing people and oppressed people in addition to the basic class contradiction between bourgeoisie and proletariat. And international solidarity in the East Asia area to resolve the contradictions between oppressing people and oppressed people was insufficient. So a united front of working class against imperialism and the ruling class was not created in East Asia.

But from before foundation of divided

North and South Korea, oppressed Korean people have continued a permanent international movement to organize a unified state with political independence rather than waiting for social revolution.

This year marks the hundredth anniversary of the Russian revolution. In 1917, the Soviet regime of Vladimir Lenin proposed the immediate conclusion of a peace treaty with the all belligerent countries of the First World War; insisting on self-determination for all nations with no compensation and no annexation as the first Russian foreign policy during the October Revolution.

What Is To Be Done in the present crisis of nuclear war in East Asia?

This article aims to examine the way to solve the problem of current situation especially in East Asia. We will discuss the major independence movement against imperialism by the Korean people before the divide between North and South Korea first. After that, we will pursue the possibility of forming a united front of oppressing and oppressed peoples through acquisition of the right of self-determination for the Korean people.

Major independence movement by Korean people before division of North and South Korea

North and South Korea were not divided just after Korea's independence from Japan. Divided North and South Korea did not exist for three years: from 1945 to 1948. So analysis of independence movement in those three years is required to ascertain the nature of foundation of divided North and South Korea. And to analyze independence movement against Japanese colonial rule to clarify the nature of foundation of divided North and South Korea, analysis of independence movement during the Second World War is also required.

The independence movement against Japanese imperialism during the Second World War was developed through various organizations; so we need to analyze the nature of those organizations.

The fundamental nature of the independence movement is not mere opposition to Japanese colonial rule. An analysis of philosophy and content of the organizations will allow us to clarify the nature of independence movement.

Four major independence movement bodies existed: Korean Restoration Brotherhood (KRB), Korean Fatherland Restoration Association (KFRA), North Korean Independence League (NKIL), and Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea (PGRK). The political ideologies of these organizations are almost the same from the standpoint of independence from the Japanese colonial rule. But their political characters are completely different. They divide into two groups on the basis of their ideas. One group includes the KRB, KFRA, and NKIL which intended the foundation of a

"people's democratic nation". The other group includes the PGRK which wanted the establishment of anti-communist nation.

Movement for establishment of people's democratic nation

KRB

In August 1944, the KRB was founded by the activists including Lyuh Woon-hyung [8]. The political ideology of KRB intended to build the people's democratic nation for freedom of workers and farmers after overthrowing Japanese imperialism. With organizational expansion, the KRB developed struggle against colonial rule of Japanese imperialism putting out a manifesto which includes democratic principles and liberation of workers and farmers.

But the KRB confronted some problems to establish an independent state. First, the KRB did not have an armed organization. Second, the KRB did not have any direct international relations with other anti-fascist forces. Lack of international solidarity with other anti-fascist forces set limits to the scale of anti-Japanese independence movement. And the political ideology of the KRB may have not been reflected in the movement if the independence problem of Korea became an international problem between anti-fascist forces.

In August 1945, Lyuh Woon-hyung founded Committee for Preparation of Korean Independence (CPKI) based on the KRB. CPKI was dissolved after the foundation of National People's Representative Conference (NPRC) on September 6, 1945. [9]. And in July 1947, Lyuh Woon-hyung was assassinated.

The People's Committees, the local organization of NPRC, existed in the area of 38th parallel north which was occupied by the Soviet Union Army. The People's Committees played the role of founding the current Democratic People's Republic of Korea

(DPRK).

KFRA (later Manchuria Faction and Kapsan Faction)

Activists such as Kim Il-sung [10] started to carry out anti-Japanese independence work from the first half of 1930 in the area from Korea to Manchuria. The Korean People's Revolutionary Army (KPRA) was organized in April 1932. And KFRA was founded as a unified front organization of nationalists and communists. The KPRA and KFRA cooperated closely with each other. Since its foundation, KFRA declared its political ideology was to establish people's democratic regime after liberation from Japanese colonial rule.

KFRA built an independence movement with international solidarity with anti-fascist nations and political parties such as the Soviet Union and the Communist Party of China. After the outbreak of the Second World War, KFRA put forward two social missions: the overthrow of Japanese colonial rule and the foundation of people's democratic regime. Korean people responded to communist policy of KFRA and developed an anti-Japanese independence movement based on solidarity with the organizations such as KRB and NKIL. Therefore there was a favorable possibility of establishing people's democratic nation based on the political ideology of KFRA after the Second World War.

On the other hand, problems may have been created by the relationship with the Soviet Union. The foreign policy of the Soviet Union may have prevented the development of independence from Japanese imperialism and may have hindered the independence movement of KFRA by signing a neutrality pact with the Japanese. [11] The manifesto of KFRA was based on the revolutionary ideology of the current DPRK.

(NKIL (later Yan'an Faction)

Korean communists such as Kim Du-bong [12] carried out anti-Japanese Independence movement work around Yan'an (China) area. In 1935, Kim Du-bong founded the Korean National Revolutionary Party. And in 1942, he moved to Yan'an with Korean Volunteer Corps which was founded the previous year. Then Kim Du-bong became chairman of NKIL with farmers, workers, and young activists in the July.

The NKIL and Korean Volunteer Corps cooperated with each other toward foundation of the people's democratic nation based on the labor-farmer union of Koreans. NKIL carried out its work in cooperation with other Korean independence movement bodies. And NKIL and Korean Volunteer Army was founded as a result of joint struggle with communists of KFRA.

NKIL had a close relationship with KRB and especially with other anti-fascist forces such as Communist Party of China. Also NKIL carried out joint struggle with Japanese who were against the war of invasion.

But NKIL had some problem to develop independence movement. First, NKIL did not have any movement bodies in Korea. Second, Communist Party of China was the main object of international solidarity of NKIL. At that time, Communist Party of China strongly conflicted with Chinese National Party. Therefore anti-Japanese independence movement of Communist Party of China was restricted by relation between Communist Party of China and Chinese National Party.

At that time the Communist Party of China still did not represent China.

Movement for establishment of anti-communist

nation

Kim Koo [13] and other activists founded the PGRK as a political organization and carried out independence movement during the Second World War. PGRK was led by former landed class of the former Joseon Dynasty. In September 1940, the former landed class such as Kim Koo formed Korean Liberation Army (KLA) under PGRK. PGRK intended to found anti-communist nation after independence from Japanese colonial rule.

The PGRK was formed by a small number of Koreans and had no political, military, and economic independence. The PGRK was the movement body which subordinated to the Chinese National Party Government. The KLA of PGRK supported Chinese National Party Government.

PGRK carried out no independence work during the Second World War in Korea. So no Korean people in the Korean Peninsula were involved in the movement. Only independence movement bodies in the United States joined the anti-communist force of Chinese National Party government. Despite the historical background, PGRK strengthen the international political work for approval of the organization as the only legal government of Korean people.

First PGRK requested China and the United States to approve the organization. But even the Republic of China Government did not approve PGRK. The United States also did not approve PGRK. Consequently, it was hardly possible for the anti-communist state to be established.

Conclusion

In the sections above, we have analysed the organizations which intended to found people's democratic nation. Among these organizations, especially the KFRA maintained its hegemony as a big power to found the people's democratic nation. And there was almost no possibility that the nation of anti-communist forces was founded with politically and militarily

dependence on other countries. Therefore there was a favorable possibility of establishing unified people's democratic nation based on the political ideology of KFRA after the Second World War if the right of self-determination of Korean people was not violated.

But among the interests of the great powers such as the United States and the Soviet Union, the right of self-determination was violated. The cause of the divided North and South Korea was a violation of the right of self-determination of Korean people mainly by the United States and to some degree by the Soviet Union.

The problem around the Korean Peninsula has been prolonged by complicated causes. And the Korean War (1950-1953) completely broke Korean popular movements which oriented foundation of people's democratic nation.

Just before the Korean War, Republic of Korea (ROK) was faced with armed struggle by communist forces. Compared with ROK, DPRK was organized with a rather stabilized structure from a political point of view compared with ROK after its foundation in 1948.

Faced with the tense situation in East Asia, we should examine the fundamental cause of foundation of divided North and South Korea. The right of self-determination of Korean people should be restored completely under international solidarity with the working class of oppressing people and under unity without distinction between ethnic groups. Before solidarity with oppressed people, oppressing people have to overcome self-denialism and destroy the wall of unilateralism which prevents the formation of united front to overthrow imperialism.

Unavoidable fusion of ethnic groups will be realized through transition period with freedom of ethnic separation. Oppressed people's acquisition of the rights equivalent to oppressing people and freedom of political separation from oppressing people should be guaranteed unconditionally to create united front for development of international

struggle against the common enemies of working class toward socialism.

Chronology

1919.3.1: March First Independence Movement

1919.4.13: Provisional Government of the Republic of Korea founded.

1925: Communist Party of Korea founded.

1930: Korea Independence Party founded.

1932.4: Korean People's Revolutionary Army founded.

1935: Korean National Revolutionary Party founded.

1936.5: Korean Fatherland Restoration Association founded.

1940.9: Korean Liberation Army founded.

1941: Korean Volunteer Army founded.

1942.4: North Korean Independence League founded.

1944.8: Korean Restoration Brotherhood founded.

1945.8.15: Japan surrendered.

1945.8.17: Committee for Preparation of Korean Independence founded.

1945.9.6: National People's Representative Conference founded.

1945.11.12: People's Party of Korea founded.

1945.11.23: Communist Party of Korea merged into Workers' Party of South Korea. People's Party of Korea partly merged into Workers' Party of South Korea.

1946.2.16: New People's Party of Korea founded. (chairman :Kim Du-bong)?

1946.5: Communist Party of Korea

(North Korea Bureau) renamed to Communist Party of North Korea.

1946.7: New People's Party of Korea (Pyongyang) and Communist Party of North Korea merged into Workers Party of North Korea (chairman: Kim Du-bong).

1946.11: New People's Party of South Korea and People's Party of Korea merged into Workers' Party of Korea.

1947.7.19: Lyuh Woon-hyung assassinated.

1948.8.15: I Seung-man declared independence of Republic of Korea with the approval of the United States.

1948.9.9: Democratic People's Republic of Korea founded.

1949.6.30: Workers Party of North Korea and Workers' Party of South Korea merged into Workers' Party of Korea.

1950.6.25: Korean War began.

1953.7.27: Korean Armistice Agreement signed.

An uncertain future

6 December 2017, by **Virginia de la Siega**

Let's start by saying that the "progressivism" of the Kirchners, Néstor then Cristina, was quite different from the other progressive movements of Latin America. Most of these leaders came to power after leading or participating in major popular mobilizations. This was the case with Chávez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia. Lula was not elected following mass mobilizations, but he was a recognized political and trade union leader.

An assessment of

Kirchnerist "progressivism"

We cannot say anything like this of Néstor and Cristina Kirchner. Néstor Kirchner was unknown to the masses when he was chosen as a presidential candidate by a sector of the Partido Justicialista (PJ, Peronist). Facing the loathed Carlos Menem, a craftsman of the myth of parity between the peso and the dollar that led to the 2001 explosion, he was outpaced in the first round and was only elected after the withdrawal of Menem, who knew he would be crushed if he stayed in the second round.

Néstor Kirchner was a millionaire entrepreneur, a PJ leader in the province of Santa Cruz (in the south of the country), who had followed Menem and his neoliberal steamroller for ten years during his tenure. It was Eduardo Duhalde, the PJ leader who was enthroned as president on January 2, 2002, who had sponsored him.

Duhalde had assumed the presidency after popular mobilization in December 2001 brought down four successive governments. His role was to complete the term of the deposed president, de la RÃa, in order to hand over to his successor, on December 19, 2003, a pacified country whose bourgeois institutions had been

recomposed. For that, Duhalde did the dirty work of maxi-devaluation and the conversion to the peso of a dollarized economy. These measures triggered rampant inflation that reduced wages by almost 50%, bringing them down to their lowest level in fifty years. This helped to rebuild the profits of the export-oriented productive sectors, while protecting the less competitive, domestically oriented sectors. The situation of the population deteriorated to the point where in many places people had to resort to barter for food and other basic needs. But the networks that the working and popular masses then created prevented them from feeling defeated.

The Kirchners, Néstor and Cristina, were tasked with curbing the mobilizations and defeating the workers' and people's movement. The economic recovery resulting from the maximum devaluation and then the commodity boom led to a strong expansion of exports and a very large surplus in the trade balance. As the masses had not been defeated, the Kirchners were forced to apply a redistributive policy to buy a relative social peace. So, they used the foreign currencies entering the country as export payments to finance massive plans to support the unemployed, through which they co-opted the majority of the leaders of the *piquetero* movement. When unemployment fell as a result of the economic recovery, trade union struggles forced them to concede real wage increases.

Their goal has never been to open a path to "socialism". The Kirchners maintained neoliberal privatizations - with a few partial and deceptive exceptions - and deepened the extractivist economic model exporting raw materials, thus aggravating the traditional dependence of the Latin American model of capitalism on imperialist capital. When the profits from soybeans, minerals and oil began to run out, the Argentine bourgeoisie and the imperialist bourgeoisies, who had made substantial profits under the Kirchners, preferred to bring to power someone who promised them to finish with the costs of "progressivism".

No longer able to run for president after her two consecutive terms,

Cristina Kirchner wanted to do the same thing in 2015 as Lula in Brazil or Correa in Ecuador: supporting a second-term candidate who would only serve one term, then to run again in the presidential election in 2019. This candidate was the entrepreneur and governor of the province of Buenos Aires, Daniel Scioli, the former vice-president under Néstor Kirchner. Scioli was not seen badly by the Argentine bourgeoisie. Some of its sectors preferred him to Mauricio Macri, considering that as a Peronist leader, he was in a better position to control the masses.

In addition, everyone knew that the programmatic differences between Macri and Scioli - two successful bosses and, moreover, childhood friends - were only of degree. The fall in commodity prices and the political and economic crisis in Brazil - Argentina's largest export market - left only limited choices. Whoever held the presidency would have to carry out a thankless task: negotiating with the vulture funds the payment of the foreign debt which had been defaulted on in 2001, liquidating exchange controls (which would provoke a devaluation of the peso and higher inflation), applying the increases in electricity, gas, water and transport tariffs that private companies demanded, while eliminating, in order to reduce the state budget, the subsidies that Cristina Kirchner had granted.

Macri, the investment that doesn't arrive and foreign debt

The plan of Cristina Kirchner was reduced to nothing after the defeat in 2015 of the "Front for Victory" (the coalition of the PJ with, among others, the Communist Party of Argentina, the Humanist Party, the Partido Intransigente, the Broad Front and sectors of the Radical Party). The winner of the elections was Mauricio Macri, who got 34.19% of the votes in the first round and 51.34% in the second round.

According to the World Bank, GDP has declined by 0.5% over the last two years. The proliferation of redundancies has brought unemployment to 8.5% of the population, public sector tariffs have all risen, sometimes up to 70%, and inflation has exceeded 40% for the first time in fourteen years. According to the INDEC (National Institute of Statistics and Census), between January and July 2016, 32.2% of Argentines lived under the poverty line, including 6.3% in destitution.

This trend began to reverse in late 2016, when the poverty rate fell to 30.3%, before rising to 28.6% in mid-2017. The reasons for this are the increase in demand for raw materials from China and the United States, as well as the economic recovery in Brazil, after two years of economic contraction. According to ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), Argentina is expected to grow by 2.4% in 2017.

But what concerns the bourgeoisie is mainly the fiscal deficit and the way the government covers it. Cristina Kirchner financed this deficit with dollars held by the Central Bank and the creation of money, which caused a fall in reserves and had inflationary effects. Macri's entire economic plan was based on the hope that with his arrival in power, foreign capital would flow. To demonstrate that Argentina is a "reliable" country, Macri hastened to pay off the vulture funds. But after two years, investments are still not arriving.

Macri knows that if he cuts unemployment benefits or transport subsidies, he risks a social explosion. On the other hand, he does not want to run the money printing press because he wants to reduce inflation. Thus, his only possibility is to go into debt abroad. Macri has issued ten-year debt bonds at the same rate as Greece: 7% (when Uruguay does so at 4.25%). This year, the government has budgeted \$16 billion for debt interest payments, double the education budget and triple the health budget. Taking advantage of his electoral victory of October 22, 2017, he has just borrowed \$2.75 billion through the issue of one-year bonds whose

return will be 7.9% annually.

The provinces (federal state regions) and the companies have joined this process of indebtedness in foreign currency, thus increasing the foreign debt. According to the Ministry of Finance, by the end of March 2017 it had reached \$ 284.8 billion, 21% more than a year earlier and a 26% increase over the end of Cristina Kirchner's term. This debt now amounts to 51.2% of GDP.¹ With a foreign debt that grows by \$ 100 million a day, each of the 44 million Argentines already owes \$4,363 - figures that recall the suspension of payment of 2001. Not to mention that a portion of these loans went directly to foreign accounts: capital flight has been estimated at \$18 billion since December 2015.

For the moment, Macri has the support of the Argentine bourgeoisie. The congress of the IDEA (Institute for the Entrepreneurial Development of Argentina), which every year brings together all the employers' sectors of the country (and which benefited in 2017 from the presence of PJ political leaders and trade unionists), showed understanding of the president's "gradualist" policy. According to Mario Blejer, former president of the Central Bank, "the entrepreneurs hope for the pursuit of gradualism so as to maintain social peace and order. Without this, there will no longer be any more investment." [14]

But employers, both local and foreign, are calling for two things: a reform of employment law that facilitates layoffs, and lower taxes. All have their eyes riveted on Brazil, where Temer has managed to impose a brutal reform of employment law. Macri, who knows that the Argentine labour movement would resist, nevertheless preferred to make an agreement with the Peronist trade union bureaucracy. Against his commitment to convince the workers to accept this reform, he had promised that it would not be as violent as that of Brazil. In this configuration, bureaucrats also retained control over social security plans. But Macri's clear victory in the October 22 legislative elections could change the game.

Why did Macri win?

It is not easy to understand why Macri won so clearly, but it is certain that the climate has changed in the months following PASO. [15] The slight improvement in the economic situation cannot be the only explanation. It is true that before the elections, the government had opened new lines of consumer or real estate credit, which had sparked a certain consumerist and optimistic wave in sectors of the impoverished middle class, which recalled phenomena seen under Menem in the 1990s. At that time, Menem had granted dollar credits that had boosted his popularity with the petty bourgeoisie, which had allowed him to be re-elected. But these credits proved explosive in 2001, when the foreign debt crisis erupted.

An alarming factor is the almost nil influence that the appearance of the corpse of Santiago Maldonado had on the electoral result, in a country where the memory of the 30,000 disappeared of the military dictatorship still remains very alive. This 28-year-old tattooist had disappeared during an illegal intrusion by the police in a Mapuche autonomous territory. For 80 days, the country was in suspense and a succession of demonstrations had demanded he be returned alive. To discredit Santiago, his family, the Mapuche and the human rights movement, Macri and his teams used the same discourse that the dictatorship used against the disappeared.

But an essential reason explaining the victory of Cambiemos (with a little more than 40% of the votes) is the splintering of Peronism. The twelve years of Kirchner government generated hatreds and resentment that, in a highly politicized country like Argentina, divided families and destroyed friendships, as well as alliances within the Peronist movement. A united Peronism would certainly have won these elections. But it was divided into three, between the lists of the Frente Justicialista (FJ - driven by the traditional apparatus of

the party and most of the trade union bureaucracy), those of Unidad Ciudadana (formed by "Cristinismo" and allies) and those of "1Pais" led by Sergio Massa, who claimed to embody a Peronist "renovation".

With 3.48 million votes in the province of Buenos Aires and 5.27 million nationwide, Cristina Kirchner was, despite her defeat, the Peronist leader with the best results. Those of the FJ as well as Massa were, comparatively, very disappointing. In the province of Buenos Aires, which is home to almost 40% of the country's population, Sergio Massa beat the FIT (Frente de Izquierda y de los Trabajadores, Trotskyist), but the latter won two national deputies by defeating the FJ list.

Both the FJ and Massa intervened in these elections as they did previously in parliament, where they brought Macri the necessary votes to pass counter-reforms. In contrast, Cristina Kirchner said her parliamentary group would form the basis of the opposition to the government. It remains to be seen how far she will go. Her most serious problem is the investigations for corruption that target her, her family or her political and business associates. To which is added the scandal of the Nisman case and the suspicions of complicity in the AMIA attack. [16]

Will there be a "Macrist cycle"?

Two years after becoming president, Macri managed to do what had happened only twice before, in 1985 and in 1997: to defeat Peronism in an intermediate election. Cambiemos won in 13 of the 23 provinces, including some that had been Peronist strongholds for decades. Even if it only has a third of the deputies in order to pass the reforms demanded by the national and international bourgeoisie, its victory over a Peronism in crisis leads to a situation where the parliamentary opposition will be weak. This victory, which financial capital has welcomed by lowering Argentina's country-risk by four points, also opens up a perspective of re-election in 2019.

It was on this basis that Macri was able to call on parliamentarians, businessmen and representatives of the judiciary for a "grand national agreement" at a press conference on October 23 - a gesture requested by the head of the Justicialist group in the Senate and the President of the Argentine Industrial Union (the employers' federation). According to the president, the upcoming conference will discuss the "necessary" changes for the country's "political, institutional and tax system". The agenda will be the 2018 budget, the law that distributes funds to the provinces, tax reform but also political, educational and judicial reforms.

According to the foundation Argentina 2030, a think-tank created by the government, Macri does not want to impose a neoliberal model on a forced march nor to question the arrangements of social protection created by Perón in the 1950s and reactivated by the Kirchners. Rather, it would be a question of protecting the national market through a series of aid measures and limiting the intervention of the state in the economy, the judiciary and the financial system. Macri wants to modernize the country's industry by diversifying exports with products such as biodiesel, wine and automobiles, as well as developing the service sectors. But this requires changes in the education system and employment relations.

The problem is that Argentina is a deeply divided country with serious structural problems. The logistical costs are among the highest in the world, almost half of the active people are working illegally, public education

is in crisis, the railways have been dismantled since the privatization of the 1990s and the population considers the judicial institution as one of the most corrupt of state bodies. Added to this is the fact that under Macri, the country has begun to take on heavy debt again abroad - and everyone knows from experience how this can end.

The labour movement and the left

One element does not enter bourgeois analysis: what will the labour and popular movement do? For counter-reform plans to succeed, the CGT must impose on workers the acceptance of the adjustment that is coming. This includes social protection funds, which represent considerable sums. But the bureaucrats are divided and, moreover, aware that to act as a dyke against contention, they do not have the same efficiency as in the 1990s. In recent years a layer of young activists has emerged who take on the traditions of the class-conscious and combative trades unionism of the 1960s/70s, launch wildcat strikes, occupy factories, refuse to recognize agreements negotiated by the union leadership and is led by the left.

There is also a mass social movement for human rights, born through mobilizations against the military dictatorship and attempts to amnesty its representatives. This movement, which is highly politicized, is expressed today in the demonstrations "Ni una menos" against the feminicides or demanding the truth on the disappearance then death of

Santiago Maldonado. During trade union demonstrations, these processions parade alongside leftist organizations, in opposition to those of the trade union bureaucracy.

The elections of October 22, 2017 showed that the left has begun to break through at the electoral level. The 1.3 million votes obtained by the FIT at the national level (the best result for the left in all its history), its two deputies in the national parliament after having beaten the FJ in the province of Buenos Aires, the provincial deputies and elected councillors across the country signify a remarkable advance. For years, the Trotskyist left had waited for the lead weight that Peronism had placed on the consciousness of the labour movement to drop. Now that this is happening, the leftist sector organized in the FIT is in a position to capitalize on it.

Macri says his plan is for twenty years, after which the country would be transformed at all levels. This is not the first time a president has made such promises. The last to have promised to bring Argentina into the "First World" was Carlos Menem, and the adventure ended with the popular uprising of December 2001. Twenty years is a long time, and if the Argentine people does not see results in the short and medium term, Macri's plans will end like those of Menem.

With that in mind, the working-class and popular masses now have in their favour two things that did not exist in 2001. First, a rich tradition of self-organization, the result of all the experiences of sixteen years. Secondly, the fact that there is today a possible political outcome through the FIT and the workers.

Crony Capitalism and Federalism in Syria's Reconstruction

5 December 2017, by Joseph Daher, Katty Alhayek

Joseph Daher (JD): Crony capitalism can be defined generally as when owners of big businesses use their links with the state and the government to gain a decisive advantage over their competitors.

In the region of the Middle East and North Africa, Crony capitalism has been strengthened by the patrimonial nature of the state in which the centers of power (political, military and economically) within a regime are concentrated in one family and its clique, just as in Syria with Assad's family.

In Syria's patrimonial regime, you have had the development of a form of crony capitalism in the last decades dominated by a rent seeking alliance of political brokers (led by Assad's mother's family) and the regime-supportive bourgeoisie. In other words, the circles close to the ruling family exploit their dominance to amass considerable fortunes. The main sectors of the economy in Syria, prior to the uprising, were dominated by businessmen with direct connections to the regime. This form of crony or mafia capitalism, in which economic opportunities were dependent on loyalties to the regime, alienated and marginalized some elements of the bourgeoisie that were not connected to the regime and therefore did not constitute a strong element of support for the regime. No deal or large venture was actually possible without crony capitalists linked with the regime.

Rami Makhoul, the cousin of Bashar al-Assad, represented the mafia-style process of privatization led by the regime. His economic empire was vast including telecommunications, oil and gas, as well as construction, banks, airlines, retail, etc. Makhoul was also the main shareholder of Cham Holding Company, the second largest holding company in the country, while holding more than 300 licenses as an agent for big international companies. The personal fortune of Rami Makhoul was estimated at close to 6 billion dollars. At the beginning of 2011, the British magazine "World Finance" actually extolled Makhoul's visionary leadership and his outstanding contribution to the Syrian economy, calling him a symbol of the positive

change at work in the country. According to different sources, he controlled directly or through indirect means nearly 60 percent of the Syrian economy, thanks to a complex network of holdings.

The Crony capitalists have been the heart of the regime coalition and its main supporters. At the beginning of the uprising, the crony capitalists first mobilized people to demonstrate in favor of the regime, and private media, owned by them, tried from the first days of the uprising to undermine the message of the protesters by defaming the protest movement and promoting the regime's propaganda. Moreover, they played an important role in the development of pro regime militias by funding them to make up for the lack of manpower in the regime's army.

The "business" of reconstruction is in this perspective no different from other sectors of the economy: The main contracts will benefit businessmen linked to the regime and will reward foreign allies for their assistance with a share of the market. There are already some early examples of this happening and in other sectors of the economy as well.

The reconstruction process will help the regime and crony capitalists consolidate their political and economic power, while also rewarding foreign allies for their support by granting them a sizable share of the market. As such, reconstruction will consolidate and even reinforce the patrimonial nature of the state.

The Decree 66, enforced in September 2012, allows for example the government to "redevelop areas of unauthorized housing and informal settlements [slums]." This policy will allow for the transfer of assets to private companies and regime cronies free of taxes. It will also provide the legal and financial framework for reconstruction by allowing for the destruction and expropriation of large parts of the country and the dispossession of a number of people. In addition, whenever there have been expropriation projects in Syria, compensation has been extremely low. It's a very clear dispossession of the lower strata. This is a transfer of

public assets, tax-free, to private companies and it will be a big boost to regime cronies. Secondly, the reconstruction process will also help the regime crackdown on dissent in certain areas. The government can leverage this decree to use reconstruction as a punishing measure against the part of the population known for their opposition to the regime. This is the case with the two large informal districts of Damascus (the first in the Mezzeh district and the other in a large area extending from Qadam to Daraya) and Baba Amro neighborhood in Homs, which are being rebuilt while the majority of its population is outside of Syria or in other areas of the country. In both cases, the most probable scenario is the replacement of these hostile Sunni impoverished constituencies by middle and wealthy higher classes, from various religious backgrounds, including Sunnis, less willing to oppose the government.

More generally, the regime's continuous policies in the socio-economic and political spheres will probably strengthen social and regional inequalities throughout the country, deepening problems in terms of development that were already present before the beginning of the uprising in 2011. We could add that the absence of independent trade unions and democratic rights for workers to defend themselves will probably lead to many cases of exploitation, irregularities, and lack of good conditions on working places for workers in the reconstruction process. The increasing reliance of private crony capitalist and foreign actors in this process will reinforce these problems.

Therefore, the absence of democracy and social justice, which were at the roots of the uprising, are still very much present and were even deepened.

Unfortunately, as I mentioned in the article, the absence of a structured and independent democratic, inclusive and social Syrian political opposition, which appealed to the popular classes and social actors such as the independent trade unions will prevent or render difficult the transformations of various struggles to come into

connected and organized political battles challenging the regime on a national scale.

KA: In your article, you indicate that any reconstruction efforts in Syria needs massive foreign funding. You referred that Iranian, Russian and Chinese capital might not be enough. How do you see the future of foreign investment in Syria reconstruction projects and do you think Western states and Gulf monarchies will be more involved giving the political changes regionally and internationally?

JD: The states that will benefit are definitely the countries allied to the Assad regime, particularly Iran, Russia and China. India and Brazil might also benefit from the reconstruction drive. Assad and Syrian officials have repeatedly declared that companies from allied countries will be rewarded, while European and American companies will first need to have their governments apologize for supporting the opposition before benefiting. Damascus has also adopted a similar position towards Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey for the current period. Assad in his speech in August 2017 went as far as to declare that the regime will not "let enemies, adversaries, and terrorists, through any means, accomplish through politics what they failed to accomplish on the battlefield and through terrorism".

On the other side, the so called "Friends of Syria" group, Western countries, Turkey, and Gulf Monarchies, in a side event in New York in September during the U.N. General Assembly) declared that "recovery and reconstruction support for Syria hinges on a credible political process leading to a genuine political transition that can be supported by a majority of the Syrian people."

The European Union had announced a similar position in April 2017, in arguing that they will be ready to assist in the reconstruction of Syria only when a comprehensive, genuine and inclusive political transition, negotiated by the Syrian parties in the conflict on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 2254 (2015) and

the 2012 Geneva Communiqué, is firmly under way. It is therefore hard to see or expect in the near future a high involvement of these states in the reconstruction process, except funding rather small-scale, local projects in areas outside the regime's control and without the regime's participation or consent. This is actually already the case for Turkey in some areas controlled by its armed forces and proxies for example in Jarablus and al-Bab, and for some Western institutions and states also providing some financial assistance, including support for local governance and for the rehabilitation of basic services, to regions under the domination of the PYD or some opposition held areas. These projects are however isolated and limited and can't replace a wide reconstruction process.

Changes on the international and regional political scenes can however occur rapidly as we witnessed on several occasions, so the doors are never completely closed one would say. For example recently, Saudi Arabia's Gulf affairs minister, Thamer al-Sabhan, visited Raqqa on September 19 after the capture of the city by Syrian Democratic Forces (an Arabic, Kurdish and Assyrian military alliance dominated by YPG, the arm branch of the Kurdish PYD), supported by US led international coalition, to meet with the civil council established six months before under the leadership of SDF and composed of local dignitaries and discuss the reconstruction of the city. No concrete plans were however set.

KA: Last year, you wrote an article discussing federalism as a political option in Syria? What was the goal of this article? How do you see federalism as a future solution for Syria in light of recent political developments?

JD : The article had the objective to promote the idea of federalism (or decentralization) in a progressive and secular framework in order to tackle a certain number of problems within Syria, including notably the Kurdish issue, social and regional inequalities and trying to encourage self-organization from below.

The Assad's regime and the mainstream opposition, represented by the Etilaf, oppose a federalist option, preferring a rather authoritarian centralized state.

The main opposition body today in the negotiation (and mostly linked to the Etilaf), the High Negotiations Commission (HNC) for "the Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces", has actually failed in providing any democratic and inclusive message, quite on the opposite. In Autumn 2016, its vision within an Executive Framework for the Political Solution in Syria that was far from offering an inclusive and pluralistic citizenship or of Syria as we can see in its first article:

"Syria is an integral part of the Arab World, and Arabic is the official language of the state. Arab Islamic culture represents a fertile source for intellectual production and social relations amongst all Syrians of different ethnic backgrounds and religious beliefs as the majority of Syrians are Arabs and followers of Islam and its tolerant message which is distinctly moderate".

This is of course exclusionary for all ethnic and religious minorities in the country, in addition to all people not identifying with these identities. This is without forgetting that the Etilaf has supported and supports the Turkish intervention in Syria against the Kurds in general and not only PYD.

The Etilaf and many of the personalities linked to it have also promoted a sectarian, racist (particularly against Kurds), and authoritarian discourses and behaviors. Similarly, when it comes to women, the Etilaf has completely neglected their large participation in the uprising, providing them with only "decorative positions" without any effective role in the decision making process.

The support for a federal state is a key issue today for trying to challenge the division among Arabs and Kurds today and re-establish trust and confidence between these parties. The demand for a federal system in Syria is a demand of the quasi majority of Kurdish parties in the country, despite

their political differences and rivalries. To this day, the majority of the Syrian opposition, even some democratic and leftist sectors, reject the demands of the far majority of the Kurdish people in Syria, or reduce it to a question of providing simply citizenship.

This is very problematic and unfortunately not new. We must remember that Kurds in Syria suffered decades of political, social and cultural repression and Arabization policies in the northern regions of

Syria imposed by the Assad regime and other oppressive measures since the independence of the country. Not to mention the silence of a large part of the opposition during the Kurdish uprising in Syria in 2004, while accusing some Kurds of serving foreign projects to weaken Syria.

That is why we must support the right of self-determination of the Kurdish people in Syria and elsewhere, which does not mean necessarily the

creation of an independent state, but that they decide their own future. Similarly, the support of the self determination of the Kurdish people does not mean being uncritical of the policies of the leadership of the PYD or any other Kurdish political party. I personally criticized the human rights violations by PYD armed forces in Syria against civilians or repressive policies against other Kurdish activists. I did the same regarding Barzani authoritarian and corrupt rule in Kurdistan in northern Iraq.

#MeToo is powerful but will fail unless we do more

4 December 2017, by **Hope Reese, Stephanie Coontz**

When strides are made toward equality – as when women and minorities gaining rights and social status – the result is often a backlash. For instance, in response to the women's liberation movement of the '60s and early '70s, there was a [strong attack](#) on *Roe v. Wade* and the Equal Rights Amendment. Those who fear change react by focusing new energy into maintaining their privilege. In doing so, they prevent progress.

The recent flood of sexual assault allegations against politicians, comedians, journalists, and artists casts a spotlight on gross misconduct by men in power. While these behaviors are nothing new, they are now leading to accountability, with men like Harvey Weinstein and, most recently, [Matt Lauer](#) losing their jobs.

To understand the historical significance of these allegations of sexual misconduct, I turned to professor Stephanie Coontz, a historian and frequent commentator on women's issues. Coontz taught family studies at Evergreen College back in the '70s – she founded the department – and is co-chair and director of public education at the [Council on Contemporary Families](#)

and a contributor to the New York Times's Sunday Review. She cautioned the current #MeToo movement to be wary of the potential for backlash. "Where we go next depends on how we take – or don't take – advantage of this moment," she said.

Here is our conversation, lightly edited for length and clarity.

Hope Reese: There has been an outpouring of allegations charging men from Harvey Weinstein to Louis C.K. to Roy Moore to Al Franken with some sort of sexual misconduct, ranging from statutory rape to groping. What is happening? Have the floodgates officially opened?

Stephanie Coontz: We're in the middle of a major sea change, one that's long overdue, but there's a lot of churn in the crosscurrent. I don't think there are easy answers. It's not as if men have been blindsided about women's objection to being treated as sexual objects and subjected to unwanted intimacies. That was one of the earliest critiques of slavery. Slavery activists, union women, have raised this [issue] for a long time. On the other hand, it's true that women have tended to accept that this is one of the

costs of being female.

Right up through the '60s and '70s, dating manuals and respected counselors were telling boys to push as hard as they can because girls are afraid to say yes, that sort of thing. We really didn't get any press coverage of the problem until 1975, when this woman at Cornell filed a claim for unemployment because she resigned from her job due to unwanted touching. They denied her benefits on the grounds that she quit for personal reasons. Then she formed an organization called Working Women United. They had a speak-out event that then got covered in the New York Times. We all know [the protest] was not dealt with seriously. A 1976 survey by Redbook found that 80 percent of respondents reported an encounter in sexual harassment on the job; again, mostly ignored.

At home, remember, even forcible sexual intercourse didn't have a name yet and wasn't criminalized. Rape was defined as a forcible intercourse with a woman other than your wife. This was still a period when it was considered funny to have fortune cookies that said, "Confucius says when rape is inevitable, sit back and enjoy it."

Now we have this situation where women are emboldened to speak out. Yes, the floodgates have been opened.

Hope Reese: What could happen as a result of this outpouring? Have there been any precedents that can shed light on this moment?

Stephanie Coontz: The reason historians don't like to predict the future is it depends on what we do now. If we allow these salacious details to take over everything and don't get at the root of why women, for so long, did not feel able to express this, we will either have this blow over or have it continue "and it will be a convenient way of bloodletting every few years.

For those who did not cross a line into actual assault [but still acted inappropriately], it's extremely important to encourage them to admit and apologize. We must ask why women previously did not feel that they were in a position to admit [harassment and assault]. It's not just because we've been socialized to be accommodating and spare people's feelings. It's because we lack protections and power in the workforce.

Hope Reese: Do you see this as real progress, or could it be an illusion of progress? Do you worry about a potential backlash?

Stephanie Coontz: People have finally recognized that this is a major problem that has been systematically covered up. Where we go next depends on how we take "or don't take "advantage of this moment.

If we just focus on the sexual abuses of individual men, we could have something similar to a downside of the progress we made in race relations. When everybody started saying that discrimination is a bad thing, people then started to argue that discrimination is over "the argument being that because we say it's bad, we no longer have to do anything about it. The parallel here is that you could say it means we just need to teach men to behave better, and go after individual men instead of talking about women's lack of power in the workforce.

Hope Reese: At one point, people thought that saying they were "colorblind" was a good thing...

Stephanie Coontz: The analogy to colorblind would be that even if we got rid of the sexual exploitation, it would not solve the fact that women are discriminated against in other ways. Somebody who is very sexually proper in their relationships may still engage in the outright sexism of thinking that women are less competent than men, or engage in benevolent sexism, thinking that women need to be protected and not exposed to these terrible situations.

Hope Reese: Sometimes we'll see something happening in the tech world or entertainment and say, "Sexism and harassment is rampant in this industry." It seems that it's touching politics and arts and culture, all these different areas. Do you see any distinctions? Should we treat all these harassments the same way?

Stephanie Coontz: It's pretty pervasive, and it's especially pervasive in occupations where women are without resources "the lowest-paid ones, such as hotel maids. It used to be assembly line workers; I think unions have protected that to some extent. So very vulnerable women. But it also seems to be very prevalent in high-paid, high-prestige occupations where men have this tremendous sense of entitlement. I think it's everywhere, but I think it's particularly [present] when you have power imbalances.

Hope Reese: The allegations cover such a huge range of behavior. In the most extreme cases, it's the allegations of coercion and force against Harvey Weinstein or R. Kelly. Then there's the still-not-appropriate but lower-level stuff like the groping. Should all of these different behaviors be lumped together? How can we separate them?

Stephanie Coontz: I think that's a danger. We have to come up with a way of distinguishing between men who are simply jackasses and ones who are outright predators. These are all on a range that are connected to

the ways in which even people who haven't groped women have devalued and objectified them for so many years. This is a wild thing to say, but in some ways, we might need to work toward something like the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission [a thorough reckoning of violent crimes during apartheid that offered offenders a chance for amnesty from prosecution in 1994, in an attempt to unify the country] for the men who fall short of actual rape and assault to find a way to get them to apologize and to move on.

Hope Reese: What about politicians, specifically? What kind of behavior should we not tolerate? Today we're discussing Roy Moore and Al Franken, but the conversation has also circled back to Bill Clinton.

Stephanie Coontz: First of all, we need to make a distinction between bad behavior like infidelity that is consensual on the part of the two offenders, but not the same as predatory behavior. To what extent do we want to use that human failing, which is more common than many of us realize outside politics, as our bar for whether somebody is able to run for office or not?

I do think that we need to recognize how extraordinarily pervasive the devaluation and objectification of women has been "meaning discounting women's opinions, ignoring their preferences, overriding their objections, and expecting them to smooth everything over "for so many years.

Someone like Bill Maher, why does he have to call Trump a whiny little bitch, as opposed to a whiny little loser? There all of these built-in, longstanding devaluations of women, objectification of women that is even shared by many women. On the one hand, we absolutely take it on. But getting too punitive about it could really backfire.

We'll do best if we recognize that it is a hard dilemma, and that we're dealing with things that we've allowed to go on for so long. There are cases, many cases, where it seems to me we're going to have to accept

apologies and move on. But we should demand those apologies first.

Hope Reese: In this era where so many people are distrustful of media and disagree about facts, are the accusations being heard equally? It seems that whether victims are believed often comes down to what side your politics fall on.

Stephanie Coontz: I think you're right. First of all, this comes at a time when people are being much more political in their decisions about what new stories they will accept and what they will not accept than in the past. I think we could be vulnerable to a backlash that will give people some excuse for disbelieving. It could prevent us from winning over many men and women who might otherwise be willing to join us in a zero-tolerance position from this day forward.

We have to be very careful about how these charges can be used selectively, and we have to be attentive to the civil rights of the guys who are charged with doing these things, open to understanding contextual factors and ambiguities. It's vital for women to

speak out loudly and forcibly, and to share their pain and outrage. But it's also important that we turn this into a teachable moment, not a bloodletting.

Hope Reese: Over the course of history, when we think about progress, it's not a straight line — there have been downturns along the way. Where are we now? Is this a major dip?

Stephanie Coontz: Yes. Here's another sense in which this is a two-sided thing. I want to be absolutely clear that I think it's overdue for these men to be called to account. On the other hand, this particular kind of accounting [concerns] only the sexual abuse and objectification of women, as opposed to the other ways that women are discriminated against.

It's cover for people who get indignant about sexual immorality but are perfectly at ease with economic discrimination, with exploitative behaviors toward women in other ways, with just refusing to acknowledge the fact that another part of women's reproductive systems means that they actually need paid maternity leave. It allows them to ignore and even excuse paternalistic

restrictions on women's behavior, like taking women's reproductive rights and contraception.

Hope Reese: So much discrimination of women, when it's not blatantly physical, can be difficult to pinpoint. How can we make sure we pay equal attention to the subtle discrimination?

Stephanie Coontz: Yes, it's the same for the kind of policies that allow [lead poisoning](#) [which has been linked to infertility] to go on — not investing in the kind of clean infrastructure that protects women's reproductive powers.

It's a real dilemma for us, and it's incumbent upon us to channel the outrage and to not let it take over all the other ways in which women are silenced or discriminated against, and drown out the differences between people, for example, who behave badly as individuals but have actually voted for things that help women get equal pay. The dramatic nature of these accusations can crowd out other sources of inequality.

[Vox](#)

What was behind the North Korea missile launch on November 29

3 December 2017, by **Tadashi Kinoshita**

Overview and background of North Korea missile launch on November 29

In the early morning of November 29, North Korea launched a ballistic missile toward Japan for the first time in 75 days. The missile dropped to the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of

Japan. This is the 17th missile launch for North Korea. On August 29 and September 15 this year, a missile was launched from Pyongyang Sunan International Airport near the capital city. But this time, in November, the missile was launched from a frequent-used position: the border area near China. North Korean missiles have passed over the Japanese archipelago 7 times, including this time.

This missile launch test is different compared with the past. First, this missile was launched without advance

notice about the launch direction. From the Hwasong-12 ballistic missile launch of August 29 this year, North Korea does not give advance notice to neighboring countries.

Second, this missile was launched in the early morning. It seems like they assumed a surprise attack strategy.

Third, the flight distance of the missile was unprecedented: with a distance far beyond 5500 km. Following is the comparison between the missiles launched in the past and this time:

Flight distance of August 29 missile: 2,700km

Flight distance of September 15 missile: 3,700km

Flight distance of November 29 missile: far beyond 5500 km

Flight distances have increased little by little. And the distances from Pyongyang to the cities of US are as follows:

From Pyongyang to Guam: about 3,400km?

From Pyongyang to Alaska: about 6,000km?

From Pyongyang to Washington: about 11,000km

As of September 15, North Korea missiles will reach Guam. And this time, North Korea missile will reach US mainland: Alaska.

On November 29, a government statement reported by Korean central news agency said that they succeeded in launching the new intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) Hwasong-15 which can reach US mainland. North Korea has crossed the "red line" which may lead to military action by US President Donald Trump. East Asia is in a critical tense situation.

Conclusion

North Korea will not stop missile launch tests and nuclear development if there is a threat to their national security and will continue to launch missiles in the direction of Japan and US, avoiding friendly nations such as Russia and China, which stimulate Japan and US to increase their military power.

South Korea will also continue military counteraction against North Korea. In the past, South Korea launched their ballistic missiles (Hyunmoo-2B) to Japan Sea after the North Korea missile launch of September 15. This will also create a part of an escalating crisis in East Asia where a large number of US troops are stationed. [17]

On the other hand, Japan and South Korea do not have any ways to apply effective pressure on North Korea. But China has many ways to apply effective pressure on North Korea. Interrupting crude oil supply from China to North Korea will end people's lives in North Korea.

Song Tao [18], a special envoy of Chinese President Xi Jinping, went to Pyongyang from November 17-20. He met senior North Korean officials on November 18. According to North Korea's state media, the two

exchanged views about issues of mutual concern on the situation of the Korean peninsula and region, as well as bilateral relations.

Some reports suggested that Song might meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. But he did not meet with Kim Jong Un. And the North Korea missile launch was resumed just after the return of Song Tao to China. There are many unclear points about his visit to Pyongyang. Imminent situation will have been occurred around November 17. [19] The worst-case scenario was temporarily avoided in Korean Peninsula.

In the tense situation of the Korean peninsula, what is to be done to break through the crisis?

First of all, the US army should stop military provocation against North Korea to alleviate tension in East Asia. North Korea should also stop nuclear development and frequent missile launches. Peoples' movements are responsible for alleviation of military tension in East Asia. And radical anti-war forces including Fourth International should also play a critical role in movements to abolish nuclear weapons.

The escalating crisis in East Asia is not an issue only for East Asian people but also for people across the whole world.

From the Women's March to #MeToo, Building Feminist Solidarity in the Age of Trump

2 December 2017, by Sarah Leonard

Donald Trump's election represented the violation of many norms of a decent society. "I'll spare you the litany of outrages, which The Nation and others have reviewed exhaustively over the past year, but his treatment of women certainly ranks high among them. Before the election, some of us

had fooled ourselves into thinking that our humanity and worth was something we could take for granted. But Trump's victory, enabled in part by 53 percent of the white women who went to the polls, told us: "Nope, you've got it wrong. We see the pussy-grabbing, the beauty-pageant-

leering, the creepy borderline daughter-groping, and the multiple allegations of sexual assault, and we care not at all." Not only was Trump creepy, but he had casually said that women should be punished for getting abortions. It felt like we had entered a new dark age.

Then came the wave of feminist protests that has carried us to our present moment of resistance to sexual harassment and assault. The day after Trump's inauguration, the Women's March would become one of the largest demonstrations in American history. The politics of the march were amorphous and sometimes contentious. Its name was changed early on from the "Million Women March," after activists noted the appropriation of the name of a huge 1997 march by black women in Philadelphia. Nonetheless, the march drew together hundreds of thousands of women from across the country, along with the men who supported them, to protest gender oppression. Many of these women returned home from the march and got involved in organizing for the first time in their lives.

Less than two months later, on March 8, American women celebrated International Women's Day with a one-day strike in solidarity with women across the world, notably the Ni Una Menos ("Not One Less") movement against gender violence in Argentina and Poland's massive grassroots movement against the elimination of abortion rights. In one Virginia school district, so many teachers called in sick that the public schools shut down. These protests were smaller than the Women's March but more politically focused. Organizers highlighted how the vast majority of women struggle to get by. As inequality has grown and the social safety net has shrunk, women have been forced to work longer hours for stagnant or declining wages, while simultaneously taking on a larger burden of care for their families. [20] Members of the New York State Nurses Association were at the head of the march in the Big Apple, emphasizing the role of labor in protecting women's well-being.

When The New York Times exposed Harvey Weinstein's predations, it felt cathartic for women across the country. "There is no doubt that having an accused sexual predator in the White House is hanging over this," the activist and author Jaclyn Friedman told the Times. "People feel like they can't do anything about that right now, but at least they can do something about this." The New Yorker's story about Weinstein, published almost simultaneously, focused mainly on actresses who had since become successful and wealthy, and who were largely white and glamorous. The #MeToo moment at first ignored the outsize role of black women in creating both the legal (think Anita Hill) and the activist framework for dealing with sexual harassment: Tarana Burke, a black organizer and youth-camp director, turned the phrase into a rallying cry years ago. [21] But those early 2017 marches laid the groundwork for a broader critique of women's oppression in the workplace. Soon, female farmworkers were expressing their solidarity with actresses (and implicitly asking for theirs in return), and new investigations had begun to expose harassment and assault in the restaurant industry, in home care, and in other workplaces across the country. The Nation has always reported from the forefront of working-class movements, and in the year ahead, we plan to focus our sexual-assault reporting on the abuses that plague those doing low-wage and unglamorous work.

We know that in these less glitzy industries, naming and shaming will not be enough. Where the bosses are and, more importantly, the workers aren't famous, Twitter is only of limited use. Labor Notes has documented the abuses in myriad working-class industries, as well as

some solutions. Hotel workers in Chicago with Unite Here Local 1, for example, have pioneered a "Hands Off, Pants On" campaign to combat rampant sexual harassment and assault by hotel guests; their demands include access to panic buttons for anyone working alone. Members of the worker organization Restaurant Opportunities Centers United have mounted a campaign called "One Fair Wage" to eliminate the low minimum wage for tipped workers, which forces waitresses to overlook harassment from patrons and managers in order to ensure that they'll be paid decently. The Coalition of Immokalee Workers in Florida has built language against sexual harassment and assault into its hard-won contracts and has actually managed to get abusive managers fired. These are struggles that we can learn from, and they must be expanded.

One way for them to grow: by channeling the largely unfocused female solidarity demonstrated at the marches earlier this year into concrete collective action. If those who showed up at the Women's March with signs like "Pussy Grabs Back" meant what they said, they should now create more collective power by supporting or participating in unionization efforts, or by working to make labor organizations much more feminist than they currently are. High-profile women should get behind the campaigns of those less famous, to make #OneFairWage the next phase of #MeToo. And journalists should dig into the pervasive problem of sexual abuse, which working women have fought for decades without acknowledgment. The biggest blow we can strike against our predator in chief would be to turn the outrage he has engendered into a true mass movement for equality.

Source [*The Nation*](#).

Dennis J. Banks, Naawakamig (1937-2017)

1 December 2017, by Julian Brave Noisecat, Nick Estes

Naawakamig “In the Center of the Universe” was his Anishinaabe name. But to most, he was known by his Anglo name: Dennis J. Banks.

Born on the Leech Lake Reservation in 1937 Ojibwe territory in present-day Minnesota Banks became a force in a world where Native people rarely mattered.

He cofounded the American Indian Movement (AIM) in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1968 and, along with AIM, played a starring role in the liberation of [Wounded Knee](#) in 1973 a radical, insurgent moment of [indigenous revolution](#). Under Banks’s leadership, AIM became the most powerful Native movement of the twentieth century, galvanizing indigenous people throughout the United States, Canada, and beyond.

“We were the prophets, the messengers, the fire-starters,” Banks wrote in his autobiography, *Ojibwa Warrior*, cowritten with Richard Erdoes. “Out of AIM came a new breed of writers, poets, artists, actors, and filmmakers.”

Banks “who passed away last week in Rochester, Minnesota at the age of eighty” spent his earliest years crammed into a small house with his extended family on the reservation. The lone luxury item in his grandmother’s home was a battery-powered radio that delivered news of the World War his father, Walter Chase, a man he only met a few times, was off fighting.

When Banks was just five years old, a Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) agent kidnapped him and his siblings, wrenching them from their grandmother’s home, kicking and screaming, and taking them three hundred miles away to an Indian boarding school. When they arrived, they were stripped of their clothes and doused with DDT. Their long hair was cut. Over months and years, their Anishinaabe language was quite literally beaten out of them.

“I could not wait to go to bed,” Banks later wrote in his autobiography. “I pretended in my daydreams that I could fly fly through the air to my old Indian home.”

Scores of Native families and children had the same horrifying experience. Removal was standard government policy, the latest front in a centuries-long war against Indians.

Banks did not see his family for nine years after his abduction, and it took even longer before he could return to his old Indian home with the battery-powered radio.

In 1954, at the age of seventeen, Banks enlisted in the Air Force to escape dire poverty. While stationed in Japan, he witnessed protests against the United States’ occupation. He abandoned his post in the occupying force and fell in love with a Japanese woman, Machiko Inouye, whom he married. They had a daughter together, Michiko. He was eventually arrested, court martialled, and shipped back to the United States for going AWOL, leaving behind his Japanese family, whom he never saw again.

Banks returned to Minneapolis, remarried, this time to Jeanette Banks, and had four more children. But money and jobs were scarce in the Twin Cities especially for the Native underclass. Banks was arrested multiple times, often in violent police raids on the Indian bars that dotted the blocks of the “Red Ghetto.” Like hundreds of other Native people, mostly young men, Banks churned in and out of the criminal justice system. The jail cells of adulthood replaced the boarding schools of his youth.

In 1966, he was indicted on burglary charges for stealing groceries to feed his family. When he violated parole, he was sent upstate to Stillwater prison. There he read about indigenous history and was inspired by the revolutionary zeitgeist of the late 1960s.

“Sitting in that jail cell I began to understand there was a hell of a goddamn movement going on that I wasn’t a part of, the antiwar movement, the Black Panther movement, the civil rights movement, the Students for a Democratic Society,” Banks remembered. “I began to see that the greatest war was going to go on right here in the United States, and I began to realize that there was a hell of a situation in this country all these different kinds of people trying so hard to straighten this country out.”

The war against Native life “which permanently shaped his own life” weighed on Banks’s soul. “The chances for creating an effective Indian rights organization were passing us by,” he recalled. “Are we going to sit here in Minnesota and not do a goddamn thing?”

On the evening of July 28, 1968, just two months after Banks got out of prison, two hundred people packed the basement of a rundown Minneapolis church for a meeting about Indian civil rights. Heated conversation turned, almost immediately, to a radical plan to stop police brutality. It was out of this discussion that the American Indian Movement was born.

AIM’s founders “Banks, Pat Bellanger, George Mitchell, and Clyde Bellecourt” envisioned more than just a protest movement. They aimed to not only end police brutality, but also poverty, housing, and employment discrimination, and the forcible removal of Native children from their homes.

Before the braids and shades, AIM was an institution builder in the urban communities it served, founding [survival schools](#) that taught Native history and culture and provided employment, housing, and legal advocacy for Native families. After AIM arrived on the scene, police raids on Indian bars all but stopped. At the same time, a more subtle cultural transformation was afoot: the

downtrodden of the Red Ghettos were proud to be Indian again.

Part of that newfound confidence sprung from a new generation of strong leaders. In 1969, at an education conference, Banks befriended Russell Means, a firebrand Oglala orator and organizer. The two men, handsome and sharp, became the spokesmen of the movement (often overshadowing the central roles of women like Phyllis Young, Madonna Thunderhawk, Nilak Butler, Mabel Anne Phillips, and many more).

Soon, AIM would begin to make its mark outside of Minneapolis.

AIM Goes National

In February 1972, two white men beat Oglala elder Raymond Yellow Thunder to death in Gordon, Nebraska, a town bordering the Pine Ridge Reservation.

AIM sprung into action. They brought a thousand Native people to Gordon, and won convictions for the two men, who would have faced little to no punishment otherwise. The impressive mobilization helped AIM, a primarily urban organization, earn the respect and trust of Lakota country — solidarity that endured into the [Wounded Knee](#) days. (During the Yellow Thunder protests, Banks also met his future wife, Darlene Kamook Nichols, with whom he would live for fourteen years and have four children.)

Later that year, in November 1972, AIM and seven other Native organizations from the United States and Canada led a cross-country [“Trail of Broken Treaties”](#) to Washington, D.C., carrying a twenty-point position paper and asserting Native demands for sovereignty and justice. Government officials refused to meet with representatives of the caravan. In response, Banks and AIM led an occupation of the BIA offices.

“All of us are political prisoners,” said a defiant Banks at a press conference during the occupation. “Only with general assembly approval will we release this building. The other alternative is for them to take it by force.”

The occupation won Banks and AIM few supporters among the liberal establishment. It did, however, herald their arrival as a national movement.

By the early 1970s, there were seventy-nine AIM chapters and sixteen survival schools across the country. Like the [Ghost Dance](#) of the late nineteenth century, an anticolonial, pan-indigenous movement was sweeping like prairie fire through North America. Radical and emboldened Native resistance put AIM on the radar of the international press — and of the FBI’s notorious [COINTELPRO](#) program.

But it was the occupation of Wounded Knee that would truly thrust AIM into the public spotlight.

The episode originated as a pitched battle with the tribal chairman at South Dakota’s Pine Ridge Reservation, a domineering man named Dick Wilson. The Ogala Sioux Civil Rights Organization, tired of Wilson’s authoritarian ways, called on AIM to help remove him. They obliged, showing up in a fifty-four-car caravan and seizing control of the reservation. The confrontation quickly went federal, though, and the US military swept in to try to dislodge the militants.

During the seventy-one-day standoff that ensued, federal marshals killed two people: Cherokee activist Frank Clearwater, shot in his sleep during a firefight, and Oglala activist Buddy Lamont, gunned down by a federal sniper during a ceasefire. While the militants finally surrendered, the battle had energized the indigenous movement around the world.

In the aftermath of Wounded Knee, Wilson led a violent crackdown on AIM and its supporters, a dark time known as “the reign of terror.” At least fifty-seven Native people were murdered on the reservation as the FBI turned a blind eye.

Not content to just look the other way, federal law enforcement also worked to systematically dismember the organization. The FBI infiltrated AIM’s ranks and hit its members with a litany of charges designed to put defiant fists in handcuffs. Law

enforcement spun more than 400 arrests and 275 indictments out of Wounded Knee. Few of these charges stuck, but the strategy proved highly effective. AIM members turned on each other. Banks’s own bodyguard, Doug Durham, turned out to be an informant.

“There was a lot going on that made the paranoia believable,” Banks told the [New York Times](#) in 2014. “It became impossible to trust anybody.”

Darlene Nichols, Banks’s wife, became a paid FBI informant in 1988. Decades later, Nichols and the late AIM leader John Trudell testified that Banks had knowledge of the death of two figures: Ray Robinson — a black civil rights activist who went missing during Wounded Knee and was never found — and Anna Mae Aquash, an outspoken Mi’kmaq activist from Canada who was found on the Pine Ridge reservation in 1976 with a bullet in the back of her skull.

Yet if the FBI had solid evidence against AIM leaders, they undoubtedly would have been charged. Banks never was. To this day, we have more narratives of dubious origin than hard facts about what actually happened to either Robinson or Aquash. Banks, for his part, maintained his innocence.

“However these people got put up to putting the bullet in Annie Mae, I already know all I need to,” Banks told the *Times*. “The government set the stage for anybody in the movement to think that Annie Mae was a fed.”

Banks’s Legacy

Banks spent a great deal of his life on the run — from authorities, but also, perhaps, from personal struggles. He lost and remade homes around the world, from Leech Lake to Japan, from California to Kentucky. Along the way, he fathered nineteen children.

In 1984, he surrendered to authorities, spending a year in prison. Later in life, he applied his good looks and charisma to a few movie roles. And he continued to organize. In 2006, he led the Sacred Run from Alcatraz to Washington, DC. In 2016, he ran as vice president for the Peace and

Freedom Party, a socialist ticket in California.

Throughout his eighty years, Banks embraced a wide variety of struggles — Palestinian resistance, Irish independence, the South African anti-apartheid movement. He opposed American wars in the Middle East and supported the Cuban and Venezuelan revolutions.

Banks made history — but history also made him. He brought pride and progress to Native people. To

generations more distant from AIM's heyday, he is regarded as a hero. During the stand against the Dakota Access Pipeline last year, Banks imparted courage to the Water Protectors, who flew the AIM flag and sang the AIM song.

The struggle for Native liberation bookended his life, from cradle to grave. His actions were, to some, regrettable.

But whatever his limitations, this

much is inescapable: he was a Red Ghetto rebel, authentically of his people. And he fought for the indigenous the only way he knew how — perhaps the only way one might expect a man to fight in the face of abduction and abuse, grave poverty built on land theft, and generations of despair gathered in crowded homes and dark bars with only the spirit of his ancestors and a radio to his name.

11 June 2017

[Jacobin](#)