



IV516 - January 2018

Never Forget Nagasaki

1 February 2018, by **Rory Fanning**

Experts say six is the age kids first begin to process the [concept of time](#). Time, the impact it has on our memories, our priorities, and our sense of responsibility for [the crimes](#) of our governments, is something I've been thinking about a lot.

Veterans for Peace sponsored Marine Force Recon veteran Michael Hanes, our translator Rachel Clark, and myself on a goodwill trip to Japan. I'm a two-tour veteran of the US war and occupation of [Afghanistan](#) with the Seventy-Fifth Ranger Regiment.

For the [second year](#) in a row, I traveled there to apologize, especially to the Hibakusha and their families. As insignificant as an apology feels seventy-two years after the bombing, it also seems like one of the most substantive things we can do to prevent such an attack from happening again.

Mike and I did not give the order to drop the bombs. We did not fight as soldiers in the war that dropped those bombs. However, we were [pawns](#) of the [US war machine](#) in its latest, longest war.

We both partook in wars that have [killed](#) over a million people, the [majority](#) of them civilians. We signed up to fight terrorism but soon realized we were the ones doing the [terrorizing](#).

We believe our role in the [war on terror](#) connects us in some way the 140,000 civilians who were killed within days of the atomic blasts. We believe that the deaths of so many civilians in both of these wars should never have happened.

The consensus argument holds that the United States dropped those bombs on so many civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki to end the war and save millions of lives. This claim [cannot be justified](#).

The war in the Pacific had ended by January of 1945. The Japanese were [starving](#) and the country could no longer manufacture what it needed to continue the fight. The United States had the ultra-secret purple and red Japanese cyphers transmitting this information. High-level government officials offered surrender terms to Douglas MacArthur a full seven months prior to the bombing, terms nearly [identical](#) to those accepted in Japan Bay on September 2, 1945.

This history remains largely untaught, just as the fact that the Taliban surrendered [within months](#) of the initial American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 remains untaught — to say nothing of the lies that led us into the Iraq War. Seventy years separates World War II and the global [war on terror](#), but the cliched line nevertheless applies to both: "truth is the first casualty of war." This sense

of being lied to, of being manipulated into participating in so much death and destruction, drove us to Japan.

As we uncovered the lies of the war we fought, we soon wanted to uncover the lies of other wars, especially the "Good War," the one that is so often used to justify others. Learning the truth can only provide so much closure; stopping the lies that lead to war became [our priority](#).

We hoped the trip would remind ourselves, those we met, and even those fighting in the United States' endless wars around the world that ordinary Americans, Japanese, Iraqis, Afghans, North Koreans, Syrians, Nigerians, Chinese — the list of countries the United States occupies and fights is [lengthy](#), so take your pick — have infinitely more in common with each other than with our nations' leaders. This message seems especially relevant in President Trump's world of nationalism, white supremacy, and [nuclear threats](#).

The Hibakushas' Words

So often, we're asked to remember the few times the United States has been attacked on its own soil. Never forget 9/11. Never forget Pearl Harbor.

Rarely are we asked to remember

when we dropped two atomic bombs on civilian populations. Maybe every American should visit Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Time makes people forget or at least take things less seriously, and that should never be the case with nuclear weapons.

When the Hibakusha found out two American veterans were visiting the country on a peace tour, scores of them greeted us warmly. Seventy-two years have passed since the bombing, but many survivors still feel unheard.

"This is one of the reasons your visit is important. We can never have another atomic bomb detonate, under any circumstances. Maybe, as veterans, your government will listen to you. We know American service members are treated with great respect in the United States," Junji Maki, an eighty-six-year-old survivor of the blast told me at a cafe in Hiroshima.

"Not that well, but, if you [follow US sports](#), I can see why you'd think that," I replied.

"We want you to take our stories back home with you. Our government does anything your government tells them to do. Our government, relative to the United States, has no real power. We feel like a colony," another survivor and friend of Mr. Maki said. Given that the United States has as many as fifty thousand troops across [scores of military bases](#) in Japan, it was hard to disagree.

We stopped at Nagasaki, where the US dropped the second atomic bomb on August 9, 1945, and spoke before Hibakusha at ground zero, where you can look up into the sky and see where the bomb detonated "something nearly impossible to imagine.

A large and haunting statue of a woman, wearing a dress of roses and holding a dead child, looms over every visitor. August 9, 1945 11:02 AM "the moment the bomb detonated" is the statue's only inscription. Some clocks around Nagasaki are frozen at 11:02 AM, regular reminders of this anniversary.

We apologized from our knees to scores of survivors at ground zero:

We are doing something both our

governments are too scared or ignorant to do, even seventy-two years after the fact. We are here to apologize to you for the dropping of the atomic bombs. There is no justification for such an act of terrorism. We are sorry.

We looked up and saw tears in the eyes of people old enough to be our grandparents.

We gave a short talk alongside two survivors, who accepted our apology, urged worldwide nuclear disarmament, and even apologized for what the Japanese government did to the Chinese during that time. Though not our intent, our apology seemed to trigger reflections on the Japanese government's crimes as well.

Following the event, we met with members of the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Survivors Council. One told us:

Not many people know that Nagasaki was a majority Catholic city during that time. It was a religious community, a sanctuary city for Christians who were persecuted in a largely Buddhist country, which is why the United States was so quick to bulldoze the few standing buildings immediately after the blast. They didn't do that in Hiroshima. Most of the remaining buildings in Nagasaki were the sturdily built Catholic churches. They didn't want Westerners to see that the Americans destroyed institutions their people belonged to.

In aerial pictures from immediately after the blast, Mike and I could make out the remnants of churches. Then, Mr. Moriuchi, another survivor, handed me a postcard with an image of the severed marble head of the Virgin Mary, her eyes blown out. "Wow, horrifying," was all I could muster, as a pit firmly lodged itself in my throat.

Ms. Fumie Kakita, only three at the time of the blast, said:

We knew this was a different kind of bomb but we had no idea the lasting affects it would have in our lives. My mother took us into town the day after the blast. We lived about two kilometers from the epicenter. We had

been starving. It had been days since we had eaten any rice, so we went into Nagasaki to pick up vegetables and to get freshwater, having no idea the water and food was contaminated.

My mom, she died a few years later, probably from cancer. My aunt who was a nurse drove from the countryside to Nagasaki to help care for the wounded. She also died within years of the blast.

Mike and I listened solemnly, shaking our head in disgust. I felt like I should say more, but whatever I said would have felt meaningless "possibly disrespectful" in the wake of such stories.

Mr. Moriuchi, an in-utero Hibakusha, spoke next:

Everyone who died within the few days of the atomic blast died a horrible painful death. Although not as many people consider that all of the Hibakusha have been plagued by a lingering thought that each year might be our last, as we watched many of our friends and family die over the years.

They say as many as 5,500 Hibakushas die each year from complications due to the blast. I go in for checkup twice a year. The Hibakusha have this little blue booklet that the government gives us. We have to go in for radiation poisoning checkups twice a year. But when we are diagnosed with cancer or die early deaths, the government says, "we can't prove this cancer is from the atomic blasts." It's a very unjust system.

We left the office and walked the grounds of the Peace Park to a monthly ceremony in front of an arched memorial for the American and Allied POWs who died during the blast. I asked why it existed. "Soldiers were humans too. Besides, few people talk about the Americans killed by the bomb. These stories need to be shared."

I knew [racism](#) played a big part in the decision to drop the bombs. How could it not? These ceremonies, and the many reminders Mike and I received that Nagasaki was a Catholic town reflected an understanding that

Americans might pay more attention to what happened if they felt like their people were slaughtered too.

Another survivor, Mitsushige Tanaka, began to tell his story:

I remember watching my uncle die. He hadn't eaten in days before he finally passed away. Even then, though hadn't eaten, he started throwing up. I looked down and could see his intestines on the floor. And this was a full two years after the blast. Even though I was only eight years old at the time, I remember the smell of all that dead tissue. You don't forget those kinds of things.

It's not just those who lived through

the blast that are affected. "My daughter has a disease called microcephaly, which means she has an abnormally small head. Many of the children who were born after the blast have mental difficulties." Said Ms. Fumie Kakita, a survivor. She went on:

And they say this was a weak bomb relative to the ones that exist today. I can only imagine the pain that would be caused by these newer bombs, whether they are drop intentionally or accidentally. This is why the only solution must be complete nuclear disarmament. Even if we avoid a direct confrontation it's a miracle, with so many nuclear weapons in the world, that there haven't been more accidents.

After the final ceremony of the day, we walked back to the hotel, exhausted. We had many more talks and ceremonies ahead of us. Each story made our apologies feel more urgent.

As we walked home I noticed large and powerful-looking trees lining our path. They were turning bright orange and red in the early December chill. I asked Rachel what they were. "Those are camphor trees. Despite being scorched and defoliated during the blast, somehow they survived. They still stand in large numbers throughout Nagasaki. Aren't they beautiful?"

[Jacobin](#)

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31 January 2018, by **robm**

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From Roe to Reproductive (In)Justice: Inequality, Reproductive Freedom, & Access

31 January 2018, by **Ashley Houston, Bayla Ostrach, Nechama Sammet Moring**



Economics of abortion access (Third Wave Foundation)

Beyond abortion, poverty impacts many aspects of reproductive health and agency, and is more likely to be experienced by women, people of color, trans and gender non-conforming people, immigrants, people with disabilities and others oppressed in our unequal society.

While perhaps less straightforward than simply safeguarding the legal right to abortion, ensuring true reproductive freedom is dependent upon righting economic inequalities that affect personal and community well-being - including expanding access to the full range of reproductive options.

Reproductive

Justice

Decades ago, Black feminist Loretta Ross coined the term [reproductive justice](#) to situate reproductive rights [within broader](#) social, political, and economic contexts. In this spirit, we present three stories, drawn from our collective research and activist experience, about the struggle for reproductive freedom in situations of economic and other inequality. They demonstrate the relationship between economic injustice, poverty, and the

power to set one's own reproductive course — the original impetus for Roe.

Nia's Story: *Nia, 28, is a queer, non-binary Black parent married to Alicia, a transgender woman. They use Masshealth (Medicaid). Nia had hoped for an unmedicated birth with their son, now 5, but felt hindered by frequent interruptions and rushed, unsupportive hospital staff, who [misgendered them](#), referred to Alicia as their sister, and made belittling comments and racist assumptions. Nia felt overwhelmed by staff's insistence that they comply with hospital rules (which weren't based on medical evidence), and overpowered by their doctor's insistence on frequent vaginal exams, which Nia, a sexual violence survivor, experienced as re-traumatizing. After 14 hours, Nia gave in to pressure to have a cesarean, for which they were not given adequate informed consent. They were later re-hospitalized for a [cesarean-associated infection](#) (a common complication after cesarean birth) contributing to the alarming rate of serious, preventable complications, especially among people of color in the U.S.).*

Now pregnant again, Nia wants a vaginal birth after cesarean (VBAC), and to be more in control of their experience. [1] They think this is [more likely to happen at home](#), with a midwife of color who understands their cultural and gender-related needs. However, Masshealth and private insurance don't cover homebirth, and they cannot afford to self-pay. Nia nervously prepares for another hospital birth, telling Alicia that if their next birth is as traumatizing as their son's, they will seek sterilization. The couple originally desired a large family.

Nia's story reflects the U.S.'s liability-avoidant and profit-driven approach to childbirth (as opposed to decision-making based on medical evidence or the informed desires of the pregnant person). This has resulted in both higher healthcare spending and [higher mortality](#) than any other high-income country, especially for infants and birthing parents of color. This crisis was intensified by white public health officials' [20th century push](#) to eliminate Black midwifery. Medicaid-pay patients and [patients of color](#)

receive lower-quality care and have higher rates of unnecessary interventions, including many that increase the odds of needing a cesarean, often resulting in trauma, hospital-caused injuries and [worsened outcomes](#).

As hospital policies ban or curtail access to [VBAC](#), typically a safer option than repeat cesarean, people who can afford it often turn to homebirth for [evidence-based](#), personalized care for physiologic birth. In [Massachusetts](#), where homebirth midwives are unlicensed, homebirth, as well as support, are not covered by Masshealth – and thus out-of-reach for many low-income folks. Efforts are currently underway to open a [Black-owned birth center](#) in Boston to address some of the constraints that limited Nia's choices.

Maribel's Story: *Maribel, 25, a U.S.-born daughter of low-income immigrant parents, was diagnosed with autism and a mild intellectual disability at age four. In school, Maribel was pulled out of her class for group tutoring, and missed the sexual health education her peers received. Maribel wasn't supported with college applications or attaining a living wage job. After graduation, she started work in a sheltered workshop for disabled people, [earning less than minimum wage](#). Maribel's [doctor assumed](#) that disabled people are asexual, and handed Maribel a contraception pamphlet (which she couldn't read) instead of providing the counseling and education she needed.*

When George, a middle-aged co-worker, began pressuring Maribel for sex, she didn't understand what was happening – or her right to decline – and she became pregnant. Unsure of pregnancy symptoms, she began prenatal care at 8 months. After Maribel gave birth, a postpartum nurse called the Department of Children and Families (DCF) when she noted the intellectual disability diagnosis in Maribel's chart. The DCF social worker [removed the child](#) immediately, without due process, under the assumption that Maribel would not be able to parent her daughter.

Maribel and her family couldn't afford

private legal counsel to regain custody, and the assigned social worker monitored Maribel closely, subjecting her to intensive scrutiny, but did not advocate for her or teach her baby care skills. Maribel's supervised visits with her daughter (now 2) are ending next month when the foster family she was placed with finalizes her adoption. Maribel is pregnant again and hopes that if she forgoes medical care, DCF won't learn of her next child's birth, allowing her to keep this baby.

Had Maribel gone to school in a higher-income district, she might have been [diagnosed earlier](#), and thereby benefited from early intervention, improving her reading. She might have received English Language Learner support, or a 1:1 aide, allowing her to remain in class with her peers during sex ed; lacking sex education increases disabled people's already high vulnerability to sexual violence. Economic justice in the form of accessible supports, equitable education, a living wage job, and legal counsel may have vastly improved Maribel's access to real reproductive choice. Finally, DCF's frequent but [erroneous assumption](#) that disabled people are unfit parents reflects historic eugenics-based practices attempting to limit parenting rights.

Taifa's story: *Taifa, a middle-aged mother of two, was circumcised in her native Somalia before immigrating to the U.S. Like other Somalis she knows, Taifa has had difficult experiences with U.S. reproductive health care. Taifa can only access one provider in the Boston area trained to provide care for circumcised women. Taifa's family members in other areas of the U.S., where there are no skilled clinicians, are unable to receive preventative reproductive care altogether. Luckily, when Taifa's children were born, she was able to work with a clinician who supported her desire to give birth vaginally. Yet, many of Taifa's friends were pressured into cesareans due to language barriers and the fact that their providers did not know how to deliver circumcised women vaginally. Taifa says this is a source of frustration in her community, as Somali women have been vaginally delivering while circumcised for*

hundreds of years. Taifa feels that American providers are unwilling to listen to Somali patients' needs and concerns, and has not been to a doctor in over five years.

Western clinicians are often unfamiliar, inexperienced, and, occasionally, visibly alarmed by [female circumcision](#), and often do not have gynecological instruments small enough for circumcised women. This leads to poor communication, mistrust, patient dissatisfaction, as well as low rates of preventive screenings, pre- and post-natal care and reproductive health disparities. These biases in healthcare reflect the [compound discrimination displaced Somalis face](#) due to skin color, Muslim religious identification, and/or perceived immigration status. Like Taifa, immigrant women are more likely to live in poverty and less likely to be represented in clinical settings or have access to appropriate health care.

Taken together, the stories of Nia, Maribel and Taifa represent some of the many ways that economic inequity limits reproductive freedom, especially for those of us who live at the margins. These stories also illustrate that, as Black reproductive

justice scholars point out, true reproductive freedom includes dismantling the economic and social inequities that eat away at access to multiple forms of reproductive care. It is time for reproductive justice to extend the victories of Roe to all.

What can YOU do?

â€¢ **Support reproductive and birth justice** in your community - be an ally to efforts like [Southern Birth Justice Network](#), [SisterSong](#), [SisterLove](#), [Birth Sanctuary Boston](#), and other community-based collectives such as those organized and led by activists, doulas, and midwives of color. Consider supporting coalitions advocating for Medicaid and insurance coverage of doula care and homebirth, to expand access for low-income folks.

â€¢ **Don't assume you know or understand someone's cultural background, gender identity, the terminology they prefer for sexual and reproductive health discussions, or what is best for people or their bodies in those contexts** - especially if you work in or around healthcare. Listen to people's

experiences, preferences, and questions. Become a queer and trans-friendly provider - [resources and training](#) are available.

â€¢ **Fund abortion**, through your nearest member fund of the [National Network of Abortion Funds](#). **Provide practical support** by volunteering on a hotline or to offer shelter or transportation for folks in need of solidarity to overcome logistical obstacles to abortion.

â€¢ **Make sure your feminism is intersectional, inclusive and committed to true reproductive justice**, beyond the more widely discussed right to access contraception and abortion. Reproductive justice involves examining the context in which people make choices, and working to ensure that all people and communities have equitable access to true choice, including and especially people who are marginalized in our society, such as people of color, trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people, immigrants and people with disabilities.

January 30, 2018

[Solidarity](#)

The post-election political landscape

30 January 2018, by **Josep Maria Antentas**

And, between them, a self-proclaimed modest third space, that of Catalunya en Com  -Podem: 326,360 votes (7.45%) and 8 deputies. Within each camp a conservative party is in a hegemonic position: Ciudadanos, indisputably, for the constitutionalist bloc, in the face of a collapsing People's Party (PP) and a Party of Socialists of Catalonia which, despite slight progress, has failed to emerge from its peripheral role in Catalan politics; and Junts per Catalunya (Together for Catalonia), for the independentist bloc, albeit in a much more precarious way and practically

on par with the ERC (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya - Republican Left of Catalonia). As usual, the independentist forces gained more votes in Catalonia in the interior, and in small and medium-sized cities and the big city centres and gained less votes in the greater metropolitan area of Barcelona and Tarragona (especially in traditional working-class neighbourhoods) and other (post) industrial enclaves. However, they suffered a slight decline compared to 2015 in some of their traditional bastions (certainly due to hyper-mobilization at the time)

while progressing very slightly, especially thanks to the ERC, precisely in the urban centres and neighbourhoods where they are traditionally weaker and where their influence is below their national average.

2. In the context of the defeat suffered when it reached its peak, independentism has managed to keep disconcerted social base mobilized, and it achieved its highest score to date, comparable to that of the "Yes" vote on October 1st, 2017 (2,044,038 votes) and slightly higher than the elections of September 27,

2015 (1,966,508 votes, 47.8%) and that of the Yes-Yes vote during the non-binding citizens' consultation of November 9, 2014 (1,897,274 votes, although the mode of scrutiny was different then and does not allow valid comparisons). The strength of independentism depends on its consistency and endurance, but its weakness lies in its prolonged structural stagnation since 2014. This does not detract from the indisputable fact that it won more votes than the opposite bloc. Despite the mismanagement of the Catalan government during the events of October 1st and the culminating point of the proclamation of the Republic on October 27, the independentist people have been overwhelmingly loyal to their majority political and social organizations of reference. The repressive offensive of the state led the independentist base to retaliate by closing ranks, probably with less illusions and less candour than in the previous period. However, this reflects, in a deeper way, a constitutive character of the movement that appeared five years ago, with the exception of the decisive days of September 20 and October 3: its strong institutional logic, especially after the elections of September 27, 2015, its weak disruptive capacity and the effectiveness of the framing provided by the ANC (and Æmnium).

3. Against all prognoses, the rivalry between the ERC and Puigdemont turned out to the advantage of the latter. The limits of the party led by Junqueras and Rovira have again blatantly emerged. Without a cutting edge, it is the clearest expression of the unabashed politics of official independentism. Politics conceived not as "an art of the counter-time, of the conjuncture, of the propitious moment that must be seized", a form of Leninism in the manner of Daniel Bensaid, but as a permanent lamentation of the lost opportunity. and the renunciation of making the most of the potential of the concrete situation, a form of politics of abstention as a strategic substratum. The rise of Puigdemont is explained by the legitimacy of the presidential figure in exile. It is therefore partly a conjunctural vote for the President, who had the foresight to set up an electoral system in partial autonomy

in relation to the PdeCAT (European Catalan Democratic Party) - whose daily management can only provoke friction between the various power clusters of the Catalanist right - and to adopt a discourse of a somewhat epic style compared to that of the ERC - albeit fundamentally just as lukewarm - with studied accents studied in the manner of an unclassifiable maverick, capable of asserting that what was at stake was not so much his personal candidacy as the legitimacy of the institution itself which he embodied and that of the day of October 1st. Puigdemont managed to merge his own person and the representation of the presidential institution and the Catalan people themselves, at least the independentist people. The *procés* initiated in 2012 suffered from hyper-presidentialism, with a constant enthronement of the presidential figure, Mas first and then Puigdemont, as the keystone of all strategic architecture. This proved decisive on 21D. But the hyper-presidentialism of independentism has a very specific character, more related to the institution than to the person (despite the ridiculous and repeated attempts at glorification and cult of the personality to which its representatives are subject). Artur Mas can attest to this. And Puigdemont has embodied it to the full.

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4. The success of the Puigdemont operation is a new proof of the undeniable instinct for self-preservation of the Catalan right which, although having obtained the worst results in its history, has not definitively lost hegemony in the Catalan nationalist camp, thanks to its institutional and social anchors forged during decades of the exercise of power which allowed it to benefit from a clear advantage against its competitors in the independentist camp. An ability to survive and structural weakness go hand in hand for a right whose neoliberal model prevents it from stabilizing a solid social base and which can only be partially galvanized by the proposal to create its own state, at the price of a confrontation with the central state which is increasingly difficult to manage.

The Catalanist right came to power in November 2010 with an ultra-neoliberal governmental project that soon experienced a collapse without popular appeal and legitimacy. The independentist process that developed from 2012 offered it a discourse and a problematic to cling to, an epic vision which it lacked and a *raison d'Être* it had lost. But without escaping two inevitable and interlocking contradictions: the contrast between the strategic discourse advocating a movement to easy and painless independence and the real difficulties of this path, and the tension between the real project of the movement (independence) and that of the Catalan government (using independentism to renegotiate relations between Spain and Catalonia). These two immanent contradictions in the project, combined with the economic crisis and the anti-establishment potential specific to the movement of the Indignados (15M), have prevented the Catalan right from consolidating the social base of its new project and crystallizing a new social bloc. . This is where its weakness lies.

5. For five years, Convergencia has lost influence to the benefit of the ERC, more credible in terms of independence, and less identified with the old regime, neoliberalism and corruption. It was on the question of independence that a change occurred, due to ERC's hesitations during the campaign, the reformulation of the debate in terms of presidential legitimacy and the relative autonomy enjoyed by Puigdemont. But his list, Junts per Catalunya, actually contains an important component of headlong rush and conjunctural tactical and strategic improvisation, which accelerates that undertaken in 2012 during the turn to independence. The ex-Convergent right still oscillates between an unfinished refoundation and its own Ponzi scheme strategy. Junts per Catalunya can in no way be considered as a successful project and depends totally on the uncertain choices of Puigdemont who will fight not to remain a symbolic figure sentenced to prison or exile. Its electoral success does not mean that the Catalan right has finally managed to rebuild successfully after the failure of the creation of PdeCAT in July 2016.

But it is in better conditions to achieve it.

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6. The victory of Ciudadanos - 1,109,732 votes (25.37%) - is due in large part to the capture of the right-wing Spanish centralist vote at the expense of the PP and to an increase in participation, which allowed it to channel much of the abstentionist vote of the working and popular layers. It benefited from a logic of the useful vote and an anti-independence strategic vote, with good results both in wealthy areas and in the working-class neighbourhoods of large urban concentrations. It is as much an identity vote as a vote motivated by order and fear. Its progress expresses a fundamental double dynamic: the infernal combination of a national identity-based logic of exclusion and of a political-cultural destruction of the working class. But an important component of this vote is conjunctural or, at least, specific to elections circumscribed to the autonomous region, and should not be confirmed in other types of elections such as municipal or general elections. The success of Ciudadanos is based on a mixture, in the first place, between a discourse of democratic regeneration and neoliberal modernization that attracts the dominant classes as well as the most conservative sectors of the traditional political working class who have been won over to a meritocratic and individualistic mentality, and secondly, the activation of an anti-independence identity-based drive, historically built on the reference to origins and language (Catalans of Spanish origin and Spanish-speaking) as a factor of individual configuration and collective political identity. It is, broadly speaking, a Macron project of mainstream neoliberal modernization that can claim to be outside the traditional political class, even if the identity-based reference of this vote and the identity-based construction of its politics are reminiscent of the logic of the European far right (even if it is not a question of claiming a national identity vis-à-vis the foreigner, but a dominant Spanish national identity in the face of the Catalan national identity which should dissolve itself therein).

7. Independentism won the election,

but without a clear road map nor even the appearance of one. A victory without a plan, then. Managing the 21D verdict will be complex, now that the hypothesis (the official public narrative) of an easy independence and disconnection by agreement has been refuted. The movement that emerged in 2012 is unprecedented in its massive and ongoing nature. It has obtained the greatest support in its history after having suffered a serious (and arguably self-inflicted) political defeat on October 27 (27-O) and having badly mismanaged the referendum vote of October 1 (1-O). [2]

But its foundational strategy is exhausted. The policy of first independence, later the rest, the policy of delinking the national and social questions, is a worn-out paradigm, responsible for the collateral damages inflicted on the movement, the effects undesired by its promoters. It will not help to create a broader social majority or to shape a project that guarantees economic and social change. And it has boosted the identitarian polarization promoted by Ciudadanos in the working-class neighbourhoods.

But it does so on the basis of the social devastation caused by a neoliberalism that has relied to a large degree for its implementation on the complicity of the left and the workers movement. Added to the obliviousness toward independentism in the popular neighbourhoods is a long tradition of insouciance that started in the institutionalization of the workers movement after the Transition and its turn to social-liberalism, conservative Pujolist nationalism centred on the middle class and the less urban parts of Catalonia, and the social-liberal Catalanismo of Maragall that sought to attract support from the former Convergència middle sectors but on the basis of excluding the working-class peripheries. [3] The new left that arose after 15M [the May 15 occupation movement that began in 2011], Podemos and the Communes, owed much of its success to the recovery of support in the popular neighbourhoods, but it did not go beyond doing this with a superficial electoral-media model that was not deeply rooted and is therefore very

limited in its ability to reverse the historical tendencies of social, cultural and political destructuring, and vulnerable to changes in the overall context.

8. Newly minted in 1968 by Josep Benet, the slogan *un sol poble* [a single people] has been a constituent part of the political imagination of Catalanism, a recurring presence in diverse but decisive junctures, among them October 2017. In its original meaning it had a dual aspect, both social and national, that at the time expressed the will for national integration under a project of social integration of the Spanish immigration from the rest of Spain that had come to Catalonia. [4]

But by the end of the Transition, the articulation between national and social had been disassembled by a dual and combined process: on the one hand, the rise of Pujolism with its identitarian vision of the nation, suitable to economic neoliberalism, seesawing around the middle classes and relegating to a subaltern role the working class that had been the sustenance of opposition to Francoism; on the other hand, the decomposition of the workers movement as a result of the impact of neoliberal restructuring and its particular process of institutionalization and bureaucratization. Hollowed out from below, with a dismembered social base, and integrated into the state from above, the historical workers movement ceased to embody a project either of social transformation or of dynamic articulation between class and national identity. And with this, a structural part of the Catalan working class was relegated to a peripheral position both socially and in the national narrative, one of the most visible, albeit superficial, manifestations of its significant disaffection with respect to Catalan institutionality being its well-known differential abstention in the autonomous territory's elections.

9. Contemporary independentism has likewise taken up the idea of *un sol poble* but with a meaning distinct from the original, shorn of its class dimension. This has been noted by the historian Marc Andreu, a great

authority on the anti-Francoist workers movement and the historical evolution of the working-class neighbourhoods, although he overlooks the responsibility of the left and the effects of its bureaucratization and social-liberalization in the desynchronization between the social and national. The contemporary delinking between the national project and the social question splits in half the idea of a single people, smooths the way for its fracturing along identitarian lines and boosts Ciudadanos. If there is to be a single people, in the sense of a minimal social consensus around some socio-cultural references and a collective identity, there must also be a single people in terms of equality and social justice.

Herein lies the Achilles heel of the foundational strategy of independentism. In 1845, the British Conservative politician Benjamin Disraeli published his novel *Sybil*, or *The Two Nations*, on the squalid situation of the English working class. The idea of two nations is a recurrent one in history, referring to social fracture. It is useful to resort to it in the current debate in Catalonia as it points to the close link between the social and national questions that is requisite for strategic thinking about what is meant by *un sol poble* if that idea is to have an emancipatory content. And the very idea of *un sol poble* needs to be updated in the context of the social transformations in Catalonia, the social fragmentation, the cultural changes, the process of individualization, and in particular the impact of the new immigration from outside the Spanish state. ¿Un sólo pueblo plural? ¿Un pueblo de pueblos? Whatever the case, it expresses the desire to find a basis of shared references within a framework of pluralism and cultural diversity. To work in that direction presupposes going beyond the strategic limits of independentism and the passive politics of those within the ranks of the left who have stuck closely to emphasizing those limits without having a plan to intervene in the real processes.

10. The immediate road ahead for independentism is bifurcated. Either it clings to an exhausted strategic

paradigm that spectacularly collides with the state, or it is refounded to keep alive the flame of the rupture. In other words, the choice is between a strategic stagnation “flavoured with a paradoxical combination of the unreal foundational illusionism and a new self-image as the victim following the October 27 defeat” or a general refoundation-reformulation. Strategic quietism will mean entering into a political death-agony, albeit dissimulated in the short term by a defensive anti-repression logic in which independentism can end up evolving into a movement with a project for a break with the state disconnected from any road map and short-term objective. That is, dissociating its formal objective from its more prosaic day-to-day practice and converting itself into the protagonist of a structural conflict of Catalan and Spanish politics but without any presumption that it will be resolved.

On December 21 the winner was an “independentism without independence” as conservative commentator Enric Juliana put it, an independentism that could not realize independence but still with a formal project to proceed to independence albeit without a convincing plan even from the propagandistic standpoint (strategically, its limits were always apparent). The question is whether it will be forced to proceed toward a stage not only of independentism without independence but of independentism without an independence project, and whether it will locate itself traumatically in a climate of defeat and demoralization mixed with an exclusively defensive anti-repression dynamic, or whether it will be able to do this in the context of a strategy for struggle holding out for a new phase.

This could occur simply through the solidification of an independentist bloc too weak to win but too strong to be definitively defeated, generating a continuation of the conflict in the context of a normalized instability and used by the leadership of both contending blocs to keep its social base intact and mobilized. But it could also remake itself through a global reorientation of the perspective and objectives of independentism in a

sense that helps to overcome its basic weaknesses and its more contradictory aspects.

11. The road toward a strategic reformulation involves, as we have emphasized in many previous articles, tying the independentist agenda to anti-austerity policies and defending a constituent process compatible with an independentist and confederal future. This dual turn is decisive to the urgent two-fold job facing independentism: to expand its social base while articulating an alliance in Catalonia with the federalist partisans of the right to decide and who are opposed to the 1978 Regime, and to break the persisting isolation throughout the Spanish state that has smoothed the way for the repressive route taken by Rajoy.

This fits very poorly with Puigdemont's leadership within the independence movement and with an ANC [Catalan National Assembly, a mass nationalist organization] that since October embodies better than anyone the strategic crisis of independentism, on the one hand permanently locked into the foundational paradigm of first independence, later the rest, and on the other hand having subordinated itself completely to the Catalan government and its president. In reality, if the ANC wants independence for Catalonia, the first conclusion it would have to reach would be the need to free itself from its initial paradigm and from the Catalan government itself. In other words, the independentist strategy requires strategic independence from its own limits and from the Catalan executive.

However, it is certainly not easy to implement a strategy of disconnection with its foundational hypotheses and with the excessive institutionalization-governmentalization of the *procés* (in particular post-2015). And there is no signal that things are evolving in that direction. But faced with the paralysis of the major political and social organizations of independentism, posing this necessary reorientation must be the central task of the independentist left grouped around the CUP (which involves questioning its own strategy as well) and the non-

independentist left represented by Catalunya en Comú-Podem (which presupposes abandoning passivity as a permanent orientation).

12. Beyond its concrete capacity to transcend its own real limits and its strategic impasse, independentism has become a structural given of Catalan society and a durable mass social-political movement reflecting a substantial transformation in relation to the traditional objective of Catalanism under its different variants, reform of Spain. It has solid roots, to take up a Gramscian terminology, inside “civil society” and “political society”. But it is affected by a triple fundamental problem: firstly, the dialectic between the social and the political has evolved towards a growing subordination of the former, which has facilitated the displacement of the political leadership of the *procés* towards the institutional sphere in a phase where it has been dominated by moderate currents; secondly, independentist “civil society” has been solidly structured by the ANC (and to a lesser extent by *Àmnium*), the veritable skeleton of a movement equipped with an admirable constancy and cadence, but deprived of punch and bit, and strategically armed with what we could call immaterial hypotheses, constitutive of a kind of strategic idealism ill designed to face the material reality of relations of power. It was only in the period from September 20 to October 3, in the brief electrifying phase of the movement, that a disruptive “civil society” emerged; and thirdly, the independentist “civil society” is subject to significant distortions: distortions of class with a shift towards the (old and new) middle classes and public sector employees; socio-spatial distortions, with a localisation in medium sized towns, centres of big urban concentrations and small localities; and generational distortions with a concentrated implantation among youth and young adults.

13. What will be the outcome? After reaching its apogee, independentism has failed strategically and suddenly all its weaknesses have become apparent. Incapable of sustaining a confrontation with state, a

confrontation which ontologically rejected its fraudulent hypothesis of “disconnection”, it has not succeeded in making the state bend, although it has not itself suffered a decisive defeat either. Are we heading towards a phase of normalization of an undecided conflict which is transformed into a major structuring element of Catalan politics and to a large extent of Spanish politics? It’s impossible to say at the moment. Paradoxically, independentism has acted simultaneously as the main opponent of the 1978 regime and as the scapegoat that has facilitated a temporary institutional blockage from above, as defensive as it is authoritarian and aggressive, in the form of what we have called elsewhere an offensive resistentialism, whose very nature is nevertheless continuing to fuel the fundamental factors of the regime’s crisis. The political crisis and the permanent crisis of legitimacy as a form of authoritarian governance is both a manifestation of strength (the ability to manage the crisis and use its contradictions to gain the active support of a part of society) and weakness (the impossibility of stabilizing a new social bloc and a new hegemony capable of generating a non-confrontational “normality”). Rajoy and the dominant regime are taking advantage of the relative easing of the economic situation and the end of the 15M cycle to use the Catalan question as an element to isolate Podemos and put an end to the crisis of the regime. Although successful in the short term, this policy is more like a temporary solution than a structural remedy and could be very fragile, especially if the economic situation deteriorates again. But beyond its capacity to aggravate the reactionary nature of the political situation and orchestrate a counter-offensive, the dominant power bloc is currently unable to articulate a “passive revolution” in the Gramscian sense, which completes self-reform from above and reintegrates/disables a part of Catalan independentism and the social base of Podemos as part of a new social, political and state project. The first would require a reform of the state that comes up against the hard core, the source code, of the 1978 Constitution and the identity of Spain. The second is conditioned by a new

cycle of economic growth and purchasing power that would represent a credible future (half real, half imaginary) for the middle classes and youth. As long as this is not possible, the breach leading to democratic change and rupture will remain open, beyond the difficulties of the moment, marked however by the risks of an involution as authoritarian as it is reactionary.

14. From the standpoint of those who favour emancipatory social change, the two most negative results of 21D are the poor showing of the CUP and Catalunya en Comú-Podem, two forces whose mutual exclusion in their respective alliances is already an initial signal of strategic gridlock. Contrary to the conventional journalistic commentaries, electoral results cannot be the sole way in which to assess the success or failure of the project and orientation of a political force. These must be considered in relation to the general political influence of a party, its capacity to define the political agenda and condition the public debate, and whether or not it acts as a general political-cultural reference for broad social sectors with their own possibilities to organize and mobilize around their political initiatives. Analytical electoralism, in this sense, is as superficial as strategic electoralism.

The relation between electoral success and the correctness of a party’s political orientation is complex, too. There can be situations in which a party has poor results that are the consequence not of a mistaken political line but of the fact that it defended what is correct in a complex situation. Going against the stream may on many occasions be the only commendable and, in retrospect, courageous course. But it can prove costly in the short run. On the other hand, the contrary is also true: adapting to the pressures of the context may in certain situations save the situation but at the price of laying the basis for a later political defeat of greater scope. Reformist parliamentarism is a true master at this.

The complexity of the relation between political orientation, project

and electoral results, however, cannot be used to fall into a minority mentality that makes a fetish of resistance and self-justification when things go badly. Aspiring to build a party with majority support must be a constant objective and, precisely, understanding the non-linear nature of this link is a necessary condition to avoid slippages, a tendency to self-complacent resistance, or an obsession with results that lack content. And in both cases that concern us, CUP and Catalunya en Com  -Podem, the disappointments of 21D should encourage a self-evaluation both of the political line that was followed and of the project itself.

15. The drop in the CUP vote was clear: from 336,375 votes (8.2%) and 10 deputies in 2015 to 193,352 votes (4.45%) and 4 deputies now. It lost primarily in the metropolitan area of Barcelona. Many of the lost votes were “loaned” to the ERC by voters who did not want to vote for Junts pel S  , but it appears as well that the CUP lost votes to Junts per Catalunya in the Catalan interior. For many voters a “useful vote” for oficialista (outgoing government) candidates, in particular the ERC, outweighed a critical assessment of how the Catalan government had managed the October 1 vote.

The CUP’s poor results, largely in the major urban areas, reveal the CUP’s limits as a political and organizational force. Beyond the question of its

orientation, the 21D vote is suggestive of problems of a more structural nature in its project which, despite everything, is an exceptionally strong one in comparison with the other European anti-capitalist parties. Overcoming those problems means considering popular unity as a broad strategic project that transcends what is popularly referred to as Unitat Popular and requires alliances and interface with other realities of the political and social left which, moreover, is not necessarily wedded to independentism. This in turn means engaging with the proc  s from both within and without and not working exclusively inside it in a context where it is essential to redefine its foundational premises.

16. The result of Catalunya en Com  -Podem, 326,360 (7.45%), was also disappointing: less than the total vote obtained by its predecessor, the unsuccessful coalition between Podem, ICV and EUiA, and Catalunya S   que es Pot (CSQP), 367,613 votes (8.94%). [5] Caught in the electoral polarization, it proved unable to create a space for itself, and may well have lost votes to both left and right, to ERC (and CUP) and to PSC (and Ciudadanos). The basic question is not so much the orientation it adopted in this election campaign, but the entire political line adhered to since its irruption in Catalan politics from December 20, 2015 onwards, in which its tactic was one of strategic passivity, hoping that independentism would soon collapse, instead of trying

to be an active influence in the particular context by developing a constituent and anti-austerity proposal for Catalonia that could lead to a convergence between the impulse generated respectively by 15M and the pro-independence movement.

But besides its orientation in the independentist debate, the future of the Commons project as a whole is at stake. Having lost the initial boost of the two victories in the general elections (20-D 2015 and 26-J 2016), and without the militant impact of the launch of Barcelona en Com   in the summer of 2014, Catalunya en Com  , founded in April 2017, has failed to take off organizationally or politically since then, becoming embroiled in a poorly managed row with Podem, which it remained entrapped in until October 1. In the few months it has existed, it has taken shape as an electoralist, institutionalized party without lively internal debate and lacking in territorial and social influence or, worse still, without a project to obtain it. [6]

In this new stage, its leading team will have to decide whether it is permanently located in the historical-strategic continuity running from the Moncloa Pacts (1977) to the tripartite government (2003-2010) or whether it is located in the slipstream of the constituent challenge of 15M. A crystal-clear dilemma, to speak openly, which allows many tactical nuances but tolerates no strategic ambiguity.

Workers’ resistance at Ryanair

29 January 2018, by **Socialist Democracy**

Solidarity

The pilots and crew’s struggle with Ryanair is a lesson in what constitutes effective trade unionism. On the ground activism, self organisation and above all practical solidarity, in this case international solidarity. It was this which put ‘the skids’ under the

self professed “tough guy” of Irish industrial relations.

The workforce, welded together by the Europe wide airline network, began to flex its considerable muscle on the back of labour shortages which saw thousands of flights cancelled. Instead of staff which are normally divided by which trade union they belong to, or

their geographic location Ryanair found itself confronted by workers across its entire European network. The establishment of that network, the physical reality of Ryanair as a European wide business, created the material basis for a powerful unified workforce. In that sense it created the objective conditions for the

international solidarity that confronted it.

Pan European fightback

The summer and Autumn of 2017 was marked by waves of strikes and industrial unrest among Pilots, Air Traffic Controllers and ground staff across the European aviation industry revealing the potential power of a European working class united in action. The prospect of pilots stopping work in France, Germany, Ireland, Italy and Portugal simultaneously raised hopes for a co-ordinated fightback against “poverty wages”, while the strikes which went ahead in Italy added palpable substance to that potential.

Ryanair pilots had been working towards creating a “pan-European union” which voted to take industrial action during the Christmas period. A central committee had been formed to replace the Employee Representative Committees (ERCs), small fragmented groups representing individual airports, in order to “oppose the longstanding strategy of divide and conquer that Ryanair has applied in its dealing with pilots” and they announced that they were prepared to take “casualties” in a long struggle requiring “stamina and commitment from every pilot”.

So what drove O’Leary to officially recognise trade unions was a determined self-organised workforce and their threat of an effective strike, proved in this case

by their clearly exhibited organisational ability. It was the spectre of this pan European unity and international co-ordination that caused O’Leary to look around for a way to deal with his unruly workers and he concluded that official union recognition was the best way to do that, making it explicitly clear in the process that he did so in order to avert a strike. This is not as ironic as it first appears, only a cursory look at the trade union bureaucracy’s leadership record reveals their unerring ability to quickly turn workers action into negotiations

and ultimately into disappointing outcomes.

The Ryanair workers’ victory

The victory over the arrogant anti-union ethos spearheaded by Ryanair is a victory for all workers in Ireland and throughout Europe. Apart from the ‘political’ nature of the victory official recognition undoubtedly brings more mundane but nevertheless important benefits. Certain protections are afforded to the workers now, there is more chance that due process will be observed in issues of discipline, there will be more security in employment and now the exploitative anti worker nature of the contracts which pilots and cabin staff work under can be more openly campaigned against by the staff on the ground.

On the other hand, the planned series of international strikes, which would have been a masterclass in the effectiveness of co-ordinated industrial action, has been headed off into a series of national agreements on recognition of unions at the various European locations which the bourgeois press hopefully reported will give Ryanair “some leeway to negotiate separately”.

It is clear that breaking up this international co-ordination and solidarity is behind O’Leary’s insistence that “Ryanair will not engage with pilots who fly for competitor airlines in Ireland or elsewhere” as he seeks national union agreements to undermine the pilots’ central committee and to break down the possibility of solidarity spreading across the European aviation industry.

Workers must retain control

The advances achieved are to the credit of the workers themselves. By their own actions they have bent the company's will to the workers agenda. But with the ensconcement of the bureaucrats, the game has changed. These battles have culminated only in recognition for the union bureaucracy to negotiate on the workers' behalf. The grievances still exist, remaining to be argued out now in a boardroom rather than through mass confrontation and industrial action. The decision making process and leadership has taken a step away from employee level.

Although the employee's determined actions have given a boost to whatever team of bureaucrats takes over the task of further negotiation on their behalf, their fate, if they allow it, will now be removed subtly from their own hands. No longer will industrial relations be conducted by self-organised pilots and staff threatening international strike action, it will be the business of appointed full timers and certain "rules" and "considerations" apply.

Not only will that bureaucracy act as a full time professional team, conveying the staff's grievances to the management, they will convey the management's demands directly to the shop floor, usually dressed up in the language of

"realism". The full time bureaucrats' role as mediators means they have, according to the mantra, a "responsibility" to the company to ensure its "future profitability" as an "important employer" going forward. Any trade union member that has experienced the lay-offs, pay freezes or cuts of the last decade will recognise this "two way" process which in reality grants continual concessions to aggressive employers and to the fiscal terms dictated by the state.

If the pilots and cabin crew relinquish control of the agenda to the bureaucrats, periods of confrontation with the company will result in the same familiar pattern followed by the rest of the trade union movement. Frustration becomes the threat of strike action, which in turn is quickly diverted into arbitration, in practical terms binding, and demobilisation. A pattern repeatedly witnessed, most recently by the Bus Eireann, Dublin Bus and Iarnrod Eireann workers.

The prospect of solidarity

The prospect of working class solidarity across Europe is what O'Leary fears most and he has his eye on this as he continues with what the pilots central committee described as his "divide and rule strategy". He attempts to exclude the possibility of solidarity with

other groups of pilots, seeking to gain "leeway" by breaking the negotiating body down into national segments. This is a rearguard action designed to break the workers organisation down into national negotiating committees that resemble his beloved ERC's and remove the aspect of the struggle which gave the initial phase its power. In this, Ryanair management faces little resistance from the various self interested national union bureaucracies.

In their struggle with employers, workers need to stamp their own authority on their trade unions and overcome the bureaucratic layer that sits atop them by self-organised rank and file activity. As the union bureaucracy takes its place at the table with Ryanair there are high expectations. Their weaknesses will appear all the more starkly in the eyes of workers that have behind them the experience of a well organised and protracted struggle with an aggressive employer.

Ryanair workers have provided evidence that the most practical and effective answer to the power of international capitalism is international solidarity. Thanks to their struggle, we caught a fleeting glimpse of that potential just before it was arrested and diverted by O'Leary's tactical retreat. The struggle now for the pilots and crew of Ryanair is to resist O'Leary's plans for separate national negotiations and to maintain their independence and international self-organisation, it has already proved successful and can be again if applied in the coming battles.

24 January 2018

After six months of Macron

28 January 2018, by **Christine Poupin**

A transformed political landscape

All the dominant parties in Europe have been riven by the transformations imposed by capitalist globalisation and neoliberal counter-reforms. France has, in its turn, experienced this crisis of hegemony, this growing inability of dominant parties and classes to obtain popular consent for their policies.

In this context, Macron played on the idea of being a non-party candidate, exonerating himself from the balance sheet of five years of PS government, although he was the only candidate to essentially embody the legacy of the governments of Ayrault and Valls (the two successive prime ministers under Hollande's presidency). He was deputy secretary general to the Presidency from 2012, where he was behind the CICE (Crédit d'impôt pour la compétitivité et l'emploi, a tax bonanza of 20 billion euros per year to enterprises without control or counterpart) and the pact of responsibility, then Minister of the Economy, introducing two widely unpopular laws, the one which bears his name and the so called El Khomeri employment law, named after the then minister of labour). Champion of the polls and the media, filling the halls for all his meetings, he rallied support from elements from both the PS and the right. His electoral campaign was waged effectively, with business style methods of media communication and marketing, and a party-enterprise selecting candidates for the assembly elections like a "headhunting" consultancy. Macron and LReM offered a way out of the crisis of representation of the dominant classes and constitute, at least at this stage, a political tool to take up the legacy of the PS and the right and continue the work begun by previous governments, whose brutality had precisely led to the erosion of the personnel and apparatuses in place. Emmanuel Macron, an unforeseen candidate

without troops or party, won the day and his formation, only just created, has imposed itself. However, his legitimacy is weak, and he only won the support of 18% of registered voters in the first round of the presidential elections, rising to 43% in the second round against Marine Le Pen.

A forced march to societal change

Basically, his policies do not fundamentally differ from those of his predecessors of the right, Nicolas Sarkozy, or the PS, François Hollande. There is a remarkable continuity in the ambition to put an end to what remains of the social compromise imposed by the relationship of forces immediately following the Second World War. But in terms of form, he chooses to go quickly, very quickly even, so as to succeed where previous governments had not gone far enough, to remedy what capitalists consider to be France's "backwardness" and vanquish the "resistance to change". Macron expressed it very clearly in August 2017: "The French hate reform" and added "so it is necessary to explain to them where we are going, to propose a deep transformation to them", all punctuated with a contemptuous hand gesture. To do this he is using one of the anti-democratic tools of the Fifth Republic. From early August he has obtained Parliament's agreement to decrees on employment law which he signed in September and which were ratified by the deputies on November 28.

Down with the Employment Code!

The first priority is the destruction of the Employment Code, with a new employment law called "XXL ", which meets still more the demands of the employers' organisation, MEDEF. Increasing the precarity of employees

is at the centre and the instrument for this is creating greater competition between them.

Increased precarity takes several forms. First, the right of employers to dismiss workers without fear. What the government and the employers call the end of "legal insecurity" concerns the damages granted by the "tribunal des prud'hommes" (tribunals which rule on respect of the employment contract) for employees who are the victims of abusive, and thus illegal, dismissals. The employment law fixes a scale for these damages allowing rogue bosses to budget the cost of an illegal dismissal, while there has been a drastic reduction in the deadlines within which employees can appeal to this tribunal. The previous employment law had already significantly reduced the number of complaints from employees. Also, the conditions of contrats à durée déterminée (CDD - fixed term contracts) can henceforth be degraded at enterprise level. Worse still, the contrats à durée indéterminée (CDI - open ended contracts) have been changed (this is already the case in the building industry) so that employees do not know when or why the contract is ended - this is now at the exclusive discretion of the employer.

In terms of easier dismissal, there is also the change to collective agreements which allows the employers to free themselves of the "constraints" of a redundancy plan by obtaining "voluntary" redundancies and through the restriction of the perimeter, which becomes national including in the case of international groups, to judge the economic "difficulties" of an enterprise justifying economic layoffs.

The inversion of the "hierarchy of standards" has the objective of destroying the Employment Code as it has been constructed since 1945. According to this hierarchy, any branch agreement or collective bargaining can only derogate from the Employment Code to improve the

situation of employees. A collective agreement can specify more paid leave or minimum wage rates higher than those of the SMIC, the national minimum wage, for example. Also, an enterprise-level agreement can only improve on a branch agreement. This new employment law breaks this hierarchy (already undermined by various counter-reforms, for example on working time), while reversing the priority given to the enterprise level agreement over the branch agreement, and that of the branch agreement to the law. The "negotiation" at the enterprise level, where the relationship of forces is more unfavourable, allows employers to impose reductions in wages or benefits, increase working time, worsen working conditions - in the name of saving the enterprise, thus jobs, faced with competitors - competitors who in their turn will impose the same attacks - in order to be competitive. It is a formidable machine for destroying the rights and protections of employees. Low wages and poor working conditions become an essential parameter of inter-capitalist competition.

Finally, the law suppresses the existing institutions "représentatives des personnels" (IRP - staff representative institutions): délégués du personnel (DP - staff delegates), comité d'entreprise (CE - enterprise committee) and comité hygiène sécurité et conditions de travail (CHSCT - health, safety and working conditions committee) and replaces them with a single body, the comité social et économique (CSE - economic and social committee) in all enterprises (this single body already exists in small enterprises). Each of these bodies has its specificity, and those elected to them gain training and know how: managing social and cultural activities, understanding economic information, conveying everyday demands or monitoring the application of regulations in the area of health and safety, and so on. A single body means multi-function representatives, professionalised and more distanced from their colleagues. Above all the CSE means the death of the CHSCT, which had become a relatively effective tool in the hands of trades unionists who have learned to

defend the health and safety of employees intransigently.

These measures weaken and endanger all employees, but they target first and foremost those in small enterprises, in sectors with a weaker trade union presence, and where the workforce is predominantly female.

A radicalisation of neoliberal policies on all fronts

Macron presented himself as a candidate "of the right and of the left", he is a president "of the right and of the right". A President unapologetically "for the rich", he practices a politics of shock. He has reduced the Aides personnalisées au logement (APL - personalised housing aid) accorded to the poorest or to students, suppressed tens of thousands of subsidised jobs, undoubtedly precarious and underpaid but indispensable, at the same time removing the impôt de solidarité sur la fortune (ISF - wealth tax) to the benefit of the richest. In the same week of November, on Monday, the deputies restored the "waiting day" for civil servants (the first day of sickness leave being unpaid) and on Wednesday he presented to the Council of Ministers a selection project which will have the effect of excluding school students from poorer backgrounds from access to higher education.

The increase in the CSG (contribution sociale généralisée - generalised social contribution) of 1.7% constitutes a dead loss for pensioners (above 1200 euros/month). Civil servants will see a simple compensation for this increased, without it being linked to any wage increase after years of a pay freeze. For employees in the private sector, it will be partially "compensated" for by the lowering of unemployment and sickness social security contributions. The CSG created by a left government is the Trojan horse for the state take over of social protection. Effectively social security contributions are the socialised part of the wage, pooled to finance social protection (sickness,

pension and so on) The objective of the employers is the total suppression of social security contributions by the taking over by the state of social security which eventually will only ensure a minimal cover for the poorest, the remainder being entrusted to private insurance.

The unemployed are the next in the line of fire. Unemployment insurance based on contributions will give way to a scheme financed by the CSG. Macron presents this new unemployment scheme as a "universal right, for more equity and fluidity on the labour market. Under the apparent generosity of the enlargement to those resigning (once every 5 years after five years seniority in an enterprise) and to the self-employed (artisans, traders, liberal professions, farmers and so on), its model is the minimum flat rate for the greatest number and private insurance for those who can pay it. Concretely this will be ever lower amounts for a shorter time period and more policing to combat not unemployment but the unemployed themselves. A project which will increase poverty and stigmatise the poorest!

Macron washes greener

Like Hollande, who posed as a champion of the fight against climate change during COP21, Macron has made ecology a point of pride. The election of the climate change denier Trump offered him the occasion to "Make our planet great again". The nomination of Nicolas Hulot, a star TV presenter and the incarnation of market ecology as minister of ecology was a trophy.

Announced as the "first climate law", the so-called law on "the banning of the exploitation of hydrocarbons" only envisaged their "progressive end", enacting neither the non-renewal of concessions, nor the immediate banning of unconventional hydrocarbons. The exploitation of hydrocarbons in France will remain possible beyond 2040 "with a view to attaining economic equilibrium".

Whereas the still timid reduction to 50% of the share of electricity of nuclear origin by 2025 was enacted in 2015 in the energy transition law, in early November, Hulot announced the postponement of the target date. Thus, EDF can continue the operation of ageing power stations. He has, moreover, the cheek to justify his retreat by defence of the climate and his desire not to open the door to a return to coal. Cynically, the government attempted to suppress in the next finance law an allocation of 22 million euros intended to finance projects fighting the effects of climate change in the Pacific islands (solar panels, anti-flooding shelters and so on). A parliamentary vote was needed to restore this "equivalent green funding".

On December 12, 2017 (anniversary of the Paris agreement), Macron organised the One Planet Summit, a climate-finance summit with a lot of finance and little climate, with the likes of AXA and HSBC given places of honour in the sacrosanct private initiative. Grandiose statements and small decisions (glyphosate) cannot die the profoundly productivist and destructive policy of the Macron-Hulot duo: pursuit of motorway projects and other big destructive projects (at this time we still do not know the decision concerning the planned airport at Notre-Dame-des-Landes), support for industrial agriculture.

Permanent state of emergency

France is the only European country to have installed a state of emergency in response to terrorist attacks. Although ineffective against the attacks, it has been renewed six times in 22 months. Some hundreds of bans on demonstrations have been issued. Discrimination and racial profiling has multiplied and with this police violence.

On the pretext of ending the state of emergency, the Macron government rushed through a text "strengthening internal security and the fight against terrorism" which brings into common law the main provisions derogating from basic rights and essential

liberties which characterised the state of emergency. This is the twelfth security law in fifteen years. It authorises the administration and the police, outside of any legal control, to impose house arrests or "bans on appearing" in a specific place, searches and seizures, the extension of identity controls, searches of baggage and vehicles over vast "perimeters of protection", the closure of a place of worship on the sole grounds of the "ideas and theories" that would be diffused there. The police have escaped the control of the judges and suspicion replaces proof.

Crackdown on migrants and state racism

When Macron vowed last July to have "no more people in the streets or in the woods" by the end of the year, it was obviously understood that his government would accentuate the crackdown on migrants, systematically dismantle all the places where they could try to land, pursue and criminalise their supporters. The ministry of the interior is preparing a draft law "for a guaranteed right of exile and a controlled immigration" for 2018, its goal was announced by Macron in early September in a speech to prefects which promised measures "to allow improvement of returns to the countries of origin". A promise which will undoubtedly be kept!

But institutional racism extends well beyond the scandalous treatment of migrants. A recent episode illustrates it. Taking up a campaign initiated by the far right, the minister of national education, Jean-Michel Blanquer, has publicly attacked on twitter and before the National Assembly the national SUD Éducation 93 trade union for a union training course on anti-racism in schools. The motive was that two workshops (out of nine) were non-mixed so as to deconstruct the mechanisms of racist oppression. The minister moreover threatened to sue the union for libel for use of the words "state racism", as if his intervention was not an illustration of it! Racism in general, and Islamophobia in

particular, occupy a determinant place in the strategy seeking to legitimate the state of emergency.

A global reactionary offensive

Hollande's discourse on the loss of nationality, a true marker of the far right, the anti-Roma statements of Valls, his support to the Islamophobic campaign against the burkini waged by far-right mayors and police violence, shocked many who thought that, at least on the democratic terrain, there remained a difference between the PS and the right. Valls, who has now rallied to Macron, has made a speciality of taking the most retrograde positions, based on a combative secularism which is generally only the mask of a scarcely veiled Islamophobia. More globally, there are the campaigns like that against the independent website Médiapart and its director Edwy Plenel who have fought against the prevailing climate.

On the right, François Fillon won the primary election for LR by mobilising the most reactionary sector of the right-wing electorate, that of "the Manif for Tous" (against gay marriage), of Sens Commun (which had organised these reactionary demonstrations), of the Catholic right, traditionalist, homophobic and racist. The power of this faction and the absence of any alternative solution allowed him to remain candidate even after he became embroiled in the "fake jobs" scandal. His 20% vote in the presidential elections, despite the scandal, shows the weight of this ultra-reactionary pole. After the electoral defeat, with Laurent Vauquier this faction has a grip on what remains of the party.

The far right

Certainly the 21.3% vote received by Marine Le Pen in the first round of the presidential elections was lower than predicted, but with 7.6 million votes, the far right obtained the best result of its history in a first round. Even in

the second round, it won more than 10.6 million votes. The scores for the parliamentary elections can be seen as a relative setback, but eight FN deputies were elected, four of them from the former mining areas in the north of France, where they have built a real implantation and an electoral fiefdom.

With this electoral sequence, the FN has again put down more roots and, above all, succeeded in its operation of banalisation. Its presence in the second round did not lead to sizeable demonstrations. This normalisation is attributable to a global shift in political discourse, a contagion by words and measures previously associated with the far right but now representative of almost all political discourse.

The FN remains fascist in terms of its history, its references and the composition of its leadership. Its electorate is a conglomerate, stretching from a fraction of the popular classes hit by the ravages of neoliberal globalisation, to fractions of the bourgeoisie with contradictory class interests. The result of the elections revives the internal debate between advocates of an alliance with the most reactionary right and supporter of a “neither left nor right” line of exit from the euro, targeting the popular classes. Its discourse can then take on real inflexions, as for example on Europe, as it has in the past (from a Reaganite advocacy of the free market to a rhetoric of pseudo anti-neoliberalism). Nothing would be more dangerous than to underestimate the danger it represents, since the underlying causes of its ascent are still present – the destructive effects of neoliberal policies and the decline of the workers’ movement, its collective tools of organisation, references and culture. The policies followed by Macron only radicalise and render systematic those followed by previous governments, and will only increase precarity, competition among employees and individualisation.

The first six months of Macron’s government have been marked by the adoption of counter-reforms, heavy with consequences for the exploited and oppressed. The regressions are

anti-social, anti-ecological and anti-democratic. If the mobilisation was equal to the regression, of its multiple and grave dangers, this neoliberal tsunami would lead to a popular insurrection. We are not there yet, far from what is necessary.

An inadequate response

Resistance exists, but the decrees on employment law XXL have been passed. Paradoxically, these measures are massively unpopular and Macron himself has fallen very rapidly in the opinion polls, but the riposte has been relatively weak.

The trade union response has been weaker than that of 2016, in relation to the previous employment law. The desertion of the confederation Force Ouvrière, one of whose leaders is directly a member of the employment minister’s cabinet, has reduced the field to the CGT and Solidaires, with the FSU (the majority union in teaching) largely absent. Initially, before the summer, the trade union organisations were slow to react, leaving the field free to a caricature of consultation: unions received separately, texts hardly drafted, and so on. However, a one-day strike and demonstration on September 12 was announced before the summer holidays, allowing union teams time to prepare it. It was quite successful, in particular with a good mobilisation in the private sector, including in the smaller enterprises. But the absence of the big battalions of the public sector reduced the size of the demonstrations. A new date for mobilisation was fixed very rapidly fixed on September 21, but the broadening hoped for did not take place, on the contrary the numbers were down by a half to two thirds according to the town. With 60,000 participants the national demonstration called by Jean-Luc Mélenchon’s France Insoumise was a success without being the tidal wave predicted. On October 10, the inter-union appeal only concerned public sector workers who mobilised on quite a massive scale. On the other hand, the few sectors (federations in the private sector or departmental unions)

who called for a broadening did not succeed in making it into an inter-professional day. The last day, on November 16, was predictably a setback.

The evidence is that there is no plan of mobilisation, rather a succession of days of action without real coherence. Political and trade union unity has been lacking. We have not succeeded in convincing people of the use of mobilising and the possibility of winning, and the previous defeats on the employment code or on pensions weigh heavily.

The neoliberal counter-revolution is reflected in mass unemployment, the fragmentation of big units of production, the destruction of work collectives inside enterprises, temporary work and all forms of precarity, subcontracting – all elements which render the working class more heterogeneous and fragmented, without any fraction of it being able to agglomerate the others around it through its centrality. The question of unity is then first and foremost that of the unification of sectors divided by status, conditions of employment or non-employment, age, oppressions of gender or origin and so on, and this unification can only be political, against the government, its decrees and “their world” (an expression taken from the struggle “against the airport at Notre-Dame-des-Landes and its world” by the movement against the employment law in 2016). Even a partial victory depends on the ability to generate a political crisis which stops Macron from applying his programme. Such a political crisis can only be the fruit of the convergence of several factors, including strikes obviously, a powerful youth movement of the type virtually absent so far, the eruption of democratic aspirations and all forms of self-organisation, the re-appropriation of discourse and of politics.

In recent months, some often hard and long struggles indicated a real among the most precarious and feminised sectors, like cleaning, commerce or private health. Many activist groups (associations, parents of schoolchildren, teachers and so on) have ensured the hosting and legal

defence of immigrants. The demonstration in Menton on December 15 is a first step towards giving a national visibility to this struggle. Beyond the symbolism of the struggle against the airport project at Notre-Dame-des-Landes (the governmental decision will come in January) dozens of collectives are mobilising against destructive projects, dumping of nuclear waste, motorways and shopping centres.

On the left

On the traditional social democratic left, there is now virtually only the movement of Benoit Hamon, "Génération.s". The PCF remains in crisis, with its continued electoral decline, even if it succeeded in saving its parliamentary group, and politically zigzags between absorption by the FI and a sectarian reassertion of identity.

The high score (more than 19%) achieved by Jean-Luc Mélenchon in the first round of the presidential election was the result of a class vote against austerity, against big productivist projects, against the state of emergency and the crackdown on immigrants. But electoral success is one thing, the construction of an emancipatory alternative another.

The first internal consultation of France Insoumise was held on November 25-26, 2017. It shows both the potential strength of the movement with 69,000 voting online to choose which national campaigns to prioritise, with the fight against poverty, a shutdown of nuclear power stations nearing the end of their life cycle and opposition to tax fraud and evasion coming out on top. But this is one of the major contradictions of FI - whereas the movement's "Principles" affirm "a collective and transparent movement", in fact an online

consultation is taken on all debates to determine its main orientations and campaigns. So instead of the exchange of arguments, mutual conviction and collective elaboration, we have the approval (or not) of the leadership's proposals. The organisation of "action groups" (which replace the support groups of the campaign) is far from the autonomy promised, with rules which deprive them of any real power. The number of participants cannot exceed fifteen members, while "no group or gathering of groups can constitute permanent intermediary structures", and they have no financial autonomy. A vertical and hierarchical reality which is far from a "citizens' revolution". This mode of functioning renders fundamental debate on the key issues, from the Keynesian reflation seen as a magic remedy, to international questions or the European Union, impossible. The lack of solidarity with respect to Danièle Obono, an FI deputy subjected to a revolting racist campaign, is the illustration of these profound cleavages which cannot be discussed.

And yet the struggle against racism and Islamophobia, intransigence on equal rights, internationalism, the fight against French imperialism and the right to self-determination of colonies, are not supplements to the reconstruction of a left alternative, but unavoidable components of it.

Finally, the very concept of FI as a movement substituting for other forms doomed to disappear, inspired by the idea of a "people" realised following their Leader, justifies the absence of any unitary approach. This was the case for the demonstration of September 23 against Macron's "social coup d'état". FI's deliberately isolated and identity-based approach spoiled a good idea. The social movement as a whole needed a successful demonstration of force. A national demonstration against Macron and his polices was a good

idea, if it had been prepared on a unitary basis, at the rank and file level, with determination, as a point of departure for a reconstruction of the collective tools of struggle, organisation and solidarity.

A hegemony to be reconquered

Macron is implementing a global project of society, that of a "pure capitalism". To break the infernal cycle of defeats, we need to build a common front of social and democratic resistance at local and national level, to rebuilt the tools of unitary and federative mobilisation, to bring to life a radically alternative federative and unitary project based on a society of "living well", which links wages to lives, with the free satisfaction of basic social needs, reduction of the time of work and control over its content, organisation and goals, real democracy and equal rights.

This emancipatory project cannot be drawn up apart from mobilisations, experiences and partial alternatives which can confront and enrich each other. It is about recognising and respecting these different forms of action but also of understanding how they are indispensable to an overall critique of global capitalism which is not reducible to the exploitation of wage labour but reorganises and strengthens for its profit the exploitation and destruction of nature and all forms of oppression and discrimination. It is a hegemonic eco-socialist project to reconquer by the reanimation of the desire for equality starting from individual aspirations, by the capacity a common world based on well-being, by the articulation between the strategy of confrontation with power and the organisation of life itself.

Catherine Deneuve, 'puritanism' and women's

freedom

27 January 2018, by Lidia Cirillo

"Puritanism uses arguments about protecting women and their emancipation in order to better chain them to a status of eternal victims, of poor souls dominated by sexist demons, just as in the period of witch hunts." (...) while "public confessions and the interference of self-proclaimed prosecutors into the private sphere is equivalent to a crime worthy of a totalitarian society."

The first observation to be made is that the letter is politically mistaken and seems to reflect the thinking of women who do not really know in what world they are living. In reality, in the last few weeks we are celebrating the end of the legitimacy of a generalised phenomenon - that of the sexual molesting that every woman experiences in her life. Here we are not talking about murdering women nor of rape but something else which is not the persistent or clumsy flirting which the letter brings up and absolves.

Someone has written on Facebook that importuning someone and flirting are not synonyms and has published the respective dictionary definitions. Importuning someone means to molest, to disturb, to pester, to bother ten times a day. Having our bottom pinched, touching to which we haven't consented on the underground, being followed and - what is obviously more serious, the blackmail of male power over women's aspirations - are all part of our daily lives.

During the very same days that extracts of the letter began to circulate, the Italian press reported on the Bellomo case - the magistrate who wanted girl students to wear miniskirts. The fact that all this is beginning to be challenged is just one of the long term consequences of feminism which is now embedded in society and has been able to change

behaviour and everyday consciousness. As in all revolutions, there is revolutionary excess and processes that at times we may dislike, but any judgement must distinguish between what is primary and what is secondary.

At the same time, as the signatories of this letter are unable to relate to the real world, they also overestimate the results of the campaign against harassment. At least on this side of the Alps we are still taking the first steps and this criticism of feminist excess has come before such 'excessive' positions have been thought up even less put forward. Furthermore, the letter makes the error of naturalising a cultural phenomenon: sexual desires - it says - are by their very nature offensive and savage. This may be the case, but harassment is something else. The fact that this is tolerated, on display or even encouraged is part of culture as can be seen from the fact that its degree and frequency changes over time as contexts mutate.

The problem is that victories are often recuperated by questionable leaders and this also happens with the campaign opposing violence against and the harassment of women.

Take for example what has happened with respect to the dramatic reality, the murder of women. Ten years ago a banner in a big women's demonstration explained that the 'assassin has the house keys'. At that time, this was not generally accepted because the myth still persisted that it was usually a stranger who raped and killed women. It was thanks to our demonstrations, our explanations and our insistence that the prosecutors began to investigate the actual places where the assassins were hiding in the majority of cases. It was only later that we saw the media take up and even

sensationalise the harassment of women; the identification of male violence against women as criminal acts; the supposed feminist campaign on Berlusconi's TV stations and all the rest that we know so well

We should not forget that the success of the 25 November 2017 demonstration was partly helped by the way the media has taken the issue up in a big way and we should not apologise for this. But the problems of the victories oblige us to keep our guard up. The Italian *Non Una di Meno* (Not one less) movement has kept up its guard and has not fallen into the fatal trap of demanding more laws and more repression. We should adopt the same approach for the campaign against harassment, within which there is a real risk of what the letter calls the 'new puritanism'.

But we need to be careful. Some women in Italy (Angela Azzaro for example), while not agreeing with all the content of the letter, have supported at least the denunciation of moralism as a worrying effect of the campaign. It would be better not to use the appeal signed by Deneuve as some sort of bulwark against this phenomenon we fear. This 'puritanism' goes far beyond any 'revolutionary excess' of the campaign against harassment. It has led to a call for the total ban on surrogacy and the prosecution of prostitutes. It has given form to a prescriptive feminism which claims to be following a 'feminist ethics' that it seeks to impose on others through developing an orthodoxy of our desires. On the contrary, women's freedom presupposes above all the recognition that in reality a *Woman* does not exist but rather *women with diverse* desires and with various positions in society. Let us continue to discuss these issues but only after binning this letter!

11th January 2018

Solidarity with Afrin, al-Ghouta, Idlib against all military attacks

26 January 2018, by **Alliance of Middle Eastern and North African Socialists**

Solidarity with Afrin against Turkish military intervention

Since January 20, 2018, Turkish military assisted by pro-Turkish Syrian opposition militia groups have launched a large scale air and ground offensive, dubbed « Operation Olive Branch » on Afrin province located in northwest Syria with a Kurdish majority population and controlled by the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its People's Protection Units (YPG). At least 30 civilians have been killed since the beginning of the operation.

Afrin has welcomed many Internally Displaced Persons from other regions of the country which has led to a doubling of its population to 400,000 and 500,000, because it was relatively spared from the war and aggressions of the Assad's regime forces.

This attack comes after months of tensions and aggression by the Turkish military against Afrin. The Turkish army used as a pretext, an announcement by a military spokesman for the US-led global coalition against the Islamic State (IS) to build a 30,000-strong border force under the command of Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) led by People's Protection Units (YPG). In Ankara's opinion, the US decision meant that the US-YPG partnership would not end with the collapse of the IS, as the Turkish government had hoped.

Ankara considers the People's

Protection Units (YPG) and PYD in Syria, as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which the United States, the European Union and Turkey have labeled a terrorist organization.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the Afrin operation would be followed by another against Manbij. Erdogan also threatened any critical voices in Turkey against the « Operation Olive Branch », notably stating in reference to pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), « that wherever you go out on the streets our security forces are on your necks ». With the exception of the HDP, the rest of the main parties in Turkey, including the fascistic National Movement Party (known as MHP) and the Kemalist Republican People's Party (known as CHP), support Turkey's military intervention.

Despite a statement from the Russian Foreign Ministry expressing "concern" and calling on the parties « to show mutual restraint », Moscow, which controls large parts of Syrian air space, has actually given Turkey the green light for this invasion and has withdrawn its forces from the areas targeted by Turkish forces. Russian officials had demanded that the YPG hand over Afrin to the Syrian regime to « stop » the Turkish attacks on the region.

The USA has remained rather passive, only urging Turkey to exercise restraint and ensure that its military operations remain limited in scope and duration. At the same time, Russian, Iranian and Turkish diplomats met to prepare for the Syrian « National Dialogue Congress » to be held in Sochi, Russia on January 30, and seek to consolidate a

so-called peace process in which the Assad regime's structures would be maintained.

The Syrian National Coalition Of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (known as the Etilaf), composed mostly of liberal and Islamic conservative and fundamentalist groups and personalities, have not only supported the Turkish military intervention and continued their previous chauvinist policies against the Kurds in Syria, but are also participating in this operation by calling on Syrian refugees in Turkey to join the Syrian armed opposition groups fighting in Afrin.

The current Turkish military operation against Afrin and the very recent failed Kurdish independence referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan, have shown that international and regional powers have no willingness to see any Kurdish national or autonomist aspirations come to fruition. It is evident that the previous support of Moscow and Washington for the YPG, and the YPG's support for the Russian air and military campaign alongside the Assad's regime launched at the end of September 2015, did not prevent Ankara's military aggression against Afrin.

More broadly, the Afrin operation reflects the weakness of all democratic and progressive actors in Syria in the face of the Assad regime and its allies' destruction of the Syrian revolution, and the consequent renewed power of this regime which has received acceptance by all International actors.

Solidarity with Idlib and al-Ghouta against the attacks by Assad's regime forces and its Russian ally

At the same time, we condemn the Assad regime's attacks on Eastern Ghouta and Idlib, areas which are supposedly considered "de-escalation zones" according to the Astana "peace" negotiations, led by Russia, Iran and Turkey.

Since mid-November 2017, the nearly 400,000 people in Eastern Ghouta have been subjected to airstrikes, shelling and bombardment on an almost daily basis by regime forces and its allies. At least 21 civilians have been killed by regime airstrikes and shelling of Eastern Ghouta between January 20 and 22. This brings the death toll to more than 200 civilians since the regime escalated its offensive against this area on December 29. According to the local Civil Defense, regime forces reportedly fired nine shells carrying

suspected chlorine gas on Douma city on January 20 and injured 21 people. As a reminder, this region has been under siege by the Syrian regime and allied militias since 2013.

Opposition groups in al-Ghouta have also shelled various districts of Damascus, resulting in the killing and injuring of a dozen civilians these past few weeks.

In addition to this, following regime advances, in southern Idlib and northern rural Hama, over 200,000 civilians have been displaced in the past month. While more than 100 people were killed in the fighting.

In both Idlib and al-Ghouta, socialists need to stand in solidarity with the civilians against the authoritarian rule of Salafist and Jihadist movements, respectively Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham and Jaysh al-Islam.

There has been a consensus between all the international and regional powers on the necessity to liquidate the revolutionary popular movements initiated in Syria in March of 2011 and to stabilize the murderous and authoritarian regime in Damascus with Bashar al-Assad at its head in the name of the "war on terror." It is

this consensus which has given the latest "carte blanche" for these crimes.

In the face of this counter-revolutionary consensus, what is desperately needed is solidarity between all (Arabs, Kurds and all other ethnic minorities) revolutionaries who are against the Assad regime and all the regional and international imperialist powers and support the struggles for social justice, women's rights and the rights of oppressed minorities.

The Alliance of Middle Eastern Socialists supports the right of self-determination of the Kurdish people in Syria and in other countries. This does not mean that we take an uncritical stand on the policies of Kurdish parties leading these struggles, whether the PYD or the Kurdish Democratic Party or others, notably regarding violations of Human rights against civilians.

Oppose all forms of sectarianism and racism

Our destinies are linked

[Alliance of Middle East Socialists](#)

January 23, 2018

Indigenous Womxn's March

25 January 2018, by Johanna Brenner

A year ago, the Portland Women's March organized many thousands. This year, the Portland Women's March did not take place. As organizers of the Indigenous Womxn's March explained on their facebook page,

"Portland's Woman's March has NOT been cancelled, it has stepped aside to support in solidarity and to create space for Indigenous Womxn to be seen and heard. Come March with us in SOLIDARITY for the Womxn Warriors who were before us and who are still paving the path for us to

march forward!!! The matriarch will continue taking the streets on our Indigenous lands wearing red."

In response to this call, more than 700 people, many wearing red, braved a rainy day (which turned sunny as the event began), to engage in an afternoon of ceremony, prayers, dancing and speeches.

Candi Brings Plenty, a two-spirited Portlander who is Oglala Lakota, took the initiative to call for the march and worked with a small committee of Indigenous women to make it happen.

The purpose of the event, she said, is to empower all women who are warriors because they lead in their everyday walks of life.

Marchers walked to the Columbia River where a ceremony highlighted the connection between assaults on the earth and on the women water protectors, who have put their bodies on the line.

Jacqueline Keeler, a Native-American journalist and writer, spoke about assaults visited upon Indigenous women in the US who are 2.5 times

more likely than white women to be victims. In comparison to other women of color, whose assailants are most likely to be their same race/ethnicity, seventy-five per cent of perpetrators of violence against Native American women are white.

Candi Brings Plenty also called upon the crowd to write Oregon Senators to demand they come out in support of

ending all U.S. funding to the Honduran military.

Several speakers addressed the oppression and marginalization of two-spirited people within their Tribal communities and called on allies to support their struggles for change.

Indigenous women played leading

parts in some of the marches and rallies held around the country on Saturday. In Seattle, Indigenous Women lead the march. In Chico, CA and Phoenix, AZ marchers also wore red to signal their solidarity with Indigenous Womxn Warriors.

January 23, 2018

[Solidarity](#)

One year later and twice as pissed off

25 January 2018, by **Nicole Colson**

"Last year it felt like a funeral. This year it feels like a resistance."

Those words—from one of the many hundreds of thousands of protesters who took to the streets on January 20 as part of the massive Women's Marches marking the shameful anniversary of Trump's first year in office—summed up the political mood.

In two words: Pissed off.

The sheer size of the marches—smaller overall than last year's turnout of some 3.5 million, the largest single day of protest in U.S. history, but not by much—caught organizers and longtime activists off guard: as many as 300,000 in Chicago; 200,000 in New York City by the official count, but possibly twice that; half a million in Los Angeles; 65,000 in San Francisco and 50,000 across the Bay in Oakland.

Smaller towns and cities, including in reliably red states, turned out big time: some 8,000 in Omaha, Nebraska, for example.

In New York City, there were so many people that it took hours for the back of the march to step off—side streets that fed into the march were stuffed with people who waited hours to enter the main artery.

Like last year, the marches were made

up mostly of individuals, families and friends who self-organized to turn out, as opposed to contingents. Also like last year, homemade signs gave expression to the many messages that women and men wanted to send after a year of enduring Trump.

This was something that lead organizers of the Women's Marches nationally had hoped to contain.

Initially, the 2018 events were supposed to center around a Las Vegas conference, with a "Power to the Polls" theme, reflecting an emphasis on promoting votes for Democratic candidates in 2018. This would "harness our collective energy to advocate for policies and candidates that reflect our values," [the website noted](#).

But the balance swung the other way as pressure built among people determined to register their disgust with Trump in their own cities. Just like last year, when established liberal organizations were missing in action, newer or unaffiliated activists stepped in to make sure there was a Women's March 2018.

Of course, the "Power to the Polls" theme was a major message wherever the marches were held—it wasn't likely to be any other way given the bitter hatred of Trump and the hope for a consistent alternative from Democrats, [despite the party's long record of betrayals](#).

But for every "Grab him by the polls" sign, there were two or three or five or 10 times more about urgent political issues—immigrant rights and the defense of the DREAMers, opposition to Islamophobia, challenging sexual violence, taking on racism and many more—around which a different kind of resistance could take shape.

In some cities, march organizers reportedly attempted to exclude voices from this year's marches. In Los Angeles, [a Palestinian group withdrew its support for the local march](#) in protest of actor Scarlett Johansson, a devoted opponent of the boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign against Israeli apartheid, being a featured speaker.

In Philadelphia, [organizers announced "heightened security measures"](#) negotiated with police, including searches of bags and metal detectors. By contrast, organizers in other cities explicitly challenged measures to limit participation, particularly from people of color.

But these debates, while important, contrasted with the mood of the crowds in city after city, by all reports. The spirit of solidarity predominated, with crowds of people chanting by turns against Trump, for immigrant rights, against racist violence, and for democracy and freedom.

In spite of the efforts of organizers to

restrict the message to this coming year's elections, [the powerful account of a mainstream Philadelphia news outlet](#) is telling about the feelings of the people who took part:

A stranger called Stacy Shilling her "hero" on Saturday. Dozens of others asked to take a photo of her. That's because Shilling was donning a "Women's March on Philadelphia" hat and wearing a sign around her neck that read: "Nobody asks what my rapist was wearing."

"I have my voice back," [Shilling] said. "And I want to help other women find their voice, too."

In Washington, D.C., the crowd was smaller than last year's massive 500,000—but far larger than the one that turned out to celebrate Trump's inauguration in 2017.

But of course, that didn't stop Trump from [sneering at marchers on Twitter](#) that it was "Beautiful weather all over our great country, a perfect day for all Women to March...Get out there now to celebrate the historic milestones and unprecedented economic success and wealth creation that has taken place over the last 12 months."

If Trump doesn't have to eat those words, he ought to. "People were pretty damn mad last year, and they're pretty damn mad this year," [Tamika Mallory, co-president of the Women's March board, told The Associated Press.](#)

At the heart of that anger is the #MeToo campaign against sexual harassment and violence that began several months ago. The references were everywhere on the marches. "#MeToo is coming for you," one sign on the New York march warned.

In San Francisco, where 65,000 turned out, 16-year-old marcher Joan spoke powerfully about why she wanted to march: "I was raped. I was victim-blamed all throughout high school, and it ruined me. But we're going to keep pushing and fighting. And I'm just tired of it."

"We were out here last year, and we're here again this year, and things

haven't gotten better," said another marcher named Maria, who spoke about the need for sustained organizing to create lasting change. "[T]he key is we need to show up every single day. It's not just about going to a march or two—we need to show up for ourselves and for each other, and continue this battle wherever it takes us."

For others, there was a sense of collective relief that women can finally begin to talk about their experiences. As San Francisco marcher Luz Perez summed up:

When #MeToo broke out, I was scared that women were not going to be taken seriously about this issue, and I was scared for that disappointment. That's why it's important that we have to keep working really hard and keep talking about it with co-workers, friends, family, men, young, older and tell them, "Life is different through the eyes of a woman."

In Seattle, where more than 80,000 were in the streets, members of the "Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women" group led the march, and one of the largest contingents was the Reproductive Justice contingent, organized by Seattle Clinic Defense, Legal Voice and the Gender Justice League, among others.

Perhaps the most poignant image came from a march [in the Canadian town of Whitehorse in the Yukon.](#) Holding a red dress aloft to commemorate First Nations women who are missing, murdered or sexually assaulted, a group marched through the snow in temperatures well below freezing.

THE #METOO wave that has continued to give voice over the past several months to deep anger about sexual assault is opening a larger conversation about the need for social change.

That sense of collective injustice goes well beyond the issue of sexism: to the need to defend reproductive rights and fight for workplace justice and equal pay; stand in defense of immigrant rights; fight for LGBT

rights; to build the anti-racist struggle and the fight against police brutality—in short, to stand in solidarity against oppression in all of its many forms.

Many people at the marches were deliberate in highlighting the need to build this idea that an injury to one is an injury to all.

"Fight ignorance, not immigrants," read a sign carried by trans activist Janet Mock at the march in LA. Another photo from the same march showed [young women carrying signs arguing for intersectional feminism and solidarity](#): "We march for ALL women: Black, immigrant, Muslim, disabled, poor, LGBT. Real feminism is intersectional."

In New York, a "Free Ahd Tamimi" contingent drew attention to the case of the Palestinian teenager who has been jailed for defending her family against the brutality of Israeli apartheid—and underlined that the fight for women's rights has to stretch to every corner of the world.

These are visible examples of a deepening political consciousness for a layer of people who are becoming active through #MeToo and the current anti-Trump sentiment, and who feel compelled to mobilize because the stakes seem so high—not just for women, but for all of the marginalized and exploited.

In Boston, where 5,000 gathered on Cambridge Common, high schoolers, families and others carried signs that read "If it's not intersectional, it's not feminism," "We are all DREAMers" and "End mass jailing and sanctioned murder of people of color."

One of the most electrifying speeches of the day was given by a woman from the Poor People's Campaign, who argued for Martin Luther King's vision of connecting racism, militarism, and materialism in the fight for sexual liberation.

In some cases, young people took the lead, like in Montpelier, Vermont, where 3,000 people rallied at a "March for Our Future" organized by grammar and high school students.

Other marchers were part of a

previous generation who have protested before, but feel compelled to come out again. "I'm old," 63-year-old Debbie Droke [told NPR at the Washington, D.C., march](#). "I was doing this in the '70s. I was walking with Gloria Steinem. And I never thought in a million years that I'd have to be doing this again to bring focus to women's rights."

AT EVERY march, of course, there were messages about throwing Trump and the Republicans out of office—reflected not only in the "Power to the Polls" theme of the marches and the post-march conference in Las Vegas, but also in the signs that many carried.

Accompanying that was the push in favor of the Democratic Party. In Chicago, Democratic Mayor Rahm Emanuel—who has led the attack on Chicago schools and the women-led Chicago Teachers Union, and presides over a police force that routinely brutalizes young men of color—[declared that he was "proud to join" the march](#).

Many march attendees were enthusiastic both about marching in the streets and about voting—despite the record of the Democratic Party's broken promises and betrayals.

For socialists and other radicals who participated in the protests, that can be an ongoing discussion with co-workers, friends and family. So should the actions of organizers—in Los Angeles and Philadelphia, for example—that effectively excluded voices from the message of the marches. Anything that limits our struggles and creates obstacles to

solidarity should be challenged.

But it's important for the left to attempt to confront questions and shape actions like these on the ground. In some cases, we can make the difference in helping argue for politics that stand against divisiveness and bigotry.

It was important, for example, that the left in New York helped lead a pro-Palestinian contingent on the Women's March.

In Boston, the presence of socialists and left-wing activists was critical when 20 members of the far-right group "Resist Marxism" attempted to march through Cambridge Common with hateful messages about "saving" women from "illegal immigration" and Sharia law.

Initially, there was confusion in the crowd about whether the group and its hateful message should be ignored. But left-wing activists brought people together in the moment, and after an intense and vocal confrontation, the bigots turned tail and left, proving the importance of not ceding political space to the right.

The left can't afford to abdicate responsibility for participating when people want to take action to oppose Trump and the awful reality of the status quo in American politics. There are important debates that start with what can be done beyond days of protest, however massive, like Saturday's. And the conventional message that many organizers tried to impose on the Women's Marches doesn't speak for all those who mobilized to participate.

One year ago, [left-wing author Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor challenged one reaction on the left to last year's massive demonstrations](#):

Liberals become radicals through their own frustrating experiences with the system, but also through becoming engaged with people who became radical before them. So when radicals who have already come to some important conclusions about the shortcomings of existing systems mock, deride or dismiss those who have not achieved the same level of consciousness, they are helping no one.

Think of what it would mean if only a part of the power and energy on display on Saturday were harnessed to struggles to stop the deportations and raids when ICE invades our communities; to defend abortion clinics when the right attempts to shut them down; to build mass resistance when the Republicans pass legislation like the giant tax-cut giveaway.

One year after Trump, the opposition to hate and reaction is going strong, fueled by the #MeToo phenomenon that is finding new forms of expression, including people taking the streets.

Now our task is to help build the connections between the many grievances and struggles represented on Saturday—and organize the resistance in the months to come.

Caty Caldwell, Nisha Cirino, Paul Fleckenstein, Kristen Martin, Natalia Tylim, Melanie West and Jenna Woloshyn contributed to this article.

January 22, 2018

[Socialist Worker](#)

"The promised economic miracle never happened"

24 January 2018, by [Gilbert Achcar](#)

Originally from Lebanon, which he left in 1983 for Paris, Berlin and now London, at the School of Oriental and African Studies, where he is professor of international and political relations, Gilbert Achcar has been observing the upheavals of the Arab world for two decades. The author of *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising* (London, SAQI, 2013) and *Morbid Symptoms: Relapse in the Arab Uprising* (London, SAQI, 2016) takes a Marxist approach to the analysis of the uprisings of 2011. According to him, the current protests are a logical extension of them.

How do you analyse this new Tunisian revolt?

It was quite predictable. Because all the ingredients of the 2010-2011 explosion are still there. Some factors, such as youth unemployment, have even worsened. In the last two years we have seen localized eruptions occurring all over the place, in small towns in Tunisia and in neighbouring countries. These are the beginnings of a second wave of regional protest. In Morocco, anger has been rising since last year. In Sudan, there has been a protest movement of unprecedented magnitude since the beginning of the year. Even Iran has had a social revolt. All these events have as common denominator the implementation of the measures recommended by the IMF: the reduction of public expenditure, the reduction of the number of civil servants, the abolition of subsidies on fuel or basic commodities, etc.

Why does Egypt, which applies these same measures, remain silent?

Because it is coming out of a terrible repression. Al-Sisi maintains a climate of terror. People are confronted with a catastrophist discourse, they are told that in the event of a revolution, their country will turn into Syria or Libya. But this threat only works for a while. It is not impossible that the Egyptian

people will succeed in overcoming this paralysis. The fear of a scenario like Syria is not a dissuasive argument in itself, except in the face of a very brutal power that can carry out a massacre. Fortunately this is not the case in Tunisia. The social discontent is stronger than anything else. Repression can stifle movements, but it doesn't solve anything. All it does is postpone the problems.

In 2011, the Arab Spring combined social anger and democratic aspirations. The political demands, this time, seem to have been relegated to a secondary role...

The explosion has always been social and political. From the moment a social movement takes on a certain magnitude, it inevitably becomes political. But it takes a variety of forms. In the time of Ben Ali, the protest was aimed at the overthrow of the dictatorship. Today, the discontent is more social because there is a political vacuum. The Tunisian left has jumped on the bandwagon to present itself as the leader of the protest, but the disappointment of the youth regarding the parties is obvious. The General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT) could have played this role, but the Union did not fulfil its function of counter-power, it rather sought accommodation with the government. In Tunisia, however, the trade union movement is historically powerful and, at the grassroots level, has a real autonomy with regard to government. It was a unique case in the region. The unfortunate thing is that this force, instead of pushing strongly towards a radically different socio-economic policy, has made the choice of concertation and compromise. As a result, the UGTT has now been overtaken by events.

Things have not advanced quickly enough since the revolution?

The Revolution of 2011 was a revolution of the young... and it produced the oldest president in the

world (Béji Caïd Essebsi is 91 years old). There's something wrong! Without even talking about age, he is a man of the old regime, who applies the same methods, with the same circles as in the past. With Ben Ali, the Tunisians eliminated the tip of the iceberg. No one is fooled in Tunisia: the old regime is back. People only wanted to see a peaceful and successful revolution, but there are obvious symptoms of a deep malaise in Tunisia. It is the country in the region that has the greatest number of young people engaged with the Islamic State, for example!

Why has Tunisia failed for years to reduce unemployment?

The IMF retains the mastery of the broad economic guidelines. However, these guidelines allowed the development of the conditions of the explosion of 2011. The IMF has timidly made its mea culpa, but has not changed anything fundamental. Since 2011, there have been even more restrictive austerity directives, drastic reduction of public expenditure, support for the private sector... Tunisia did it, Egypt did it, Iran is doing it. But from these shock therapies, the populations have had only the shock and not the therapy! The promised economic miracle never happened. This can only cause frustration, and an explosion.

Should other eruptions be expected in the coming months?

What was called "Spring" in 2011, imagining that it would be a passing phase, is in reality a revolutionary process of long duration, with ups and downs, accelerations, confrontation, sometimes even civil wars... There will be no stability in the region in the medium term as long as socio-economic policies are not radically altered.

This interview was first published in the French daily *Libération* on January 14, 2018.

State Racism meets neoliberalism

23 January 2018, by Carlos Sardiña Galache

Last year saw the almost complete [ethnic cleansing](#) of the Muslim [Rohingya](#) minority in the northwestern state of Arakan. More than 600,000 Muslims fled to overstretched refugee camps in Bangladesh. Meanwhile, wars between the *Tatmadaw*, as the Burmese Army is known, and several ethno-nationalist armed groups [continued to rage](#).

The government's civilian wing, led by [Aung San Suu Kyi](#) and her National League for Democracy (NLD), seems unable to offer a vision for the country that differs from the "discipline-flourishing democracy" envisioned by the military junta that ruled Burma for five decades.

The generals who once controlled the nation have accomplished an astonishing feat. Most of the population opposed them, but now a large section of the Buddhist Bamar population (the country's majority group) and the Buddhist Rakhine population (the majority in Arakan) support "even cheer" the military's "clearance operations" against the Rohingya. Meanwhile, the civilian government either [covers up](#) or [flatly denies](#) the atrocities while trying [to move toward peace](#) with other armed ethnic groups. Suu Kyi doesn't control the military, but her government appears too timid to make meaningful change anyway.

The elected government operates under a *Tatmadaw*-drafted constitution that grants the military wide powers and complete autonomy from civilian oversight. But these institutional constraints don't fully explain the NLD's shortcomings. Indeed, the party seems to share much of its ideology [with the military junta](#) it once resisted.

The National Question

If Burma has a hegemonic ideology, it's the concept of "national races" (*taingyintha*) and its corollary, which holds that only members of those groups belong in the country. This set of beliefs is founded on an understanding of race that separates ethnic communities into discrete groups, attached to a particular territory and endowed with more-or-less unalterable cultural and often psychological traits.

No single legal text fully captures the [taingyintha ideology](#), but it finds its most pristine expression in the 1982 Citizenship Law, which created three layers of citizenship and gave full rights only to those ethnic groups that "settled [in Burma] ... from a period anterior to 1185 B.E., 1823 A.D." The cutoff date is significant, as it predates the first Anglo-Burmese War, in which the British conquered Arakan and the southern province of Tenasserim, by just one year.

The government ostensibly enacted the new citizenship rules to protect the national races from encroachment by foreigners, particularly Chinese and Indians. Partly the result of popular consultation, the law seems to enjoy as wide support now as it did when first written.

In 1991, the government issued the current list of national races, which has met with some controversy ever since: it [arbitrarily excluded](#) the Rohingya, subsumed some groups under others with which they have little or no linguistic relation, as is the case of many Shan "subgroups," and subdivided others, like the Chin and the Kachin, into several smaller categories that some ethno-nationalist politicians see as an attempt to divide and rule the population. Despite these

objections, few have contested the existence of such a list.

Different groups approach the *taingyintha* ideology in different ways. For Bamar ethno-nationalists, it founds a civilizational hierarchy that puts them at its apex, while Kachin ethno-nationalists see themselves as belonging to Kachinland first and Burma second.

Indeed, nationalist narratives vary widely among different groups. As anthropologist Laur Kiik [has shown](#), Kachin nationalism looks forward to freeing its members from the constraints imposed by the Burmese central state. Rakhine nationalism, in contrast, hinges on recovering the glories of a largely imagined past as an independent and relatively powerful kingdom. This [retrotopian](#) project has already started taking advantage of the Rohingya ethnic cleansing by settling poor farmers in the previously Muslim-majority areas of Northern Arakan. Their [stated purpose](#) is reestablishing the "demographic balance" that purportedly existed in the region before World War II.

While the *taingyintha* ideology failed to provide a sense of common nationhood to Burma's ethnic groups, it does serve as a common idiom that determines who can make political claims. According to the government, the military, and most Burmese, the Rohingya are Bengalis, illegal immigrants from what is now Bangladesh trying to invade and Islamize Arakan. Thus, they have no right to participate in Burmese politics "either in parliament or in the battlefield."

Indeed, when compared to armed organizations like the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) or the Shan State Army-South (SSA-South), the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), [the newly established](#)

[Rohingya insurgent group](#) has met with [particularly extreme](#) repression, even by the *Tatmadaw's* brutal standards. While the KIA and the SSA-South are technically illegal, and the police can arrest anyone suspected of having links to them, the state nevertheless sees them as valid participants in peace negotiations. But ARSA is beyond the pale. It's clear that the Rohingya are not a population to be subdued, like the Kachin, but a population to expel.

Burma's fault lines are fundamentally ethnic and communal; class is conspicuously absent. This is not to say that a crony-capitalist nation with gross inequalities, in which a tiny elite controls most of the wealth and where exploitation and land grabbing are endemic, does not have sharp class differences, but rather that class does not function as a political category.

This came to be thanks to a long process in which ethnicity has taken center stage at the expense of almost every other political issue. The transition to democracy only exacerbated the situation, playing out as an alliance between two elite groups — the military and the intelligentsia, a paradoxically depoliticized pro-democracy grouping that orbits around Suu Kyi's NLD — that has provided few benefits for ordinary Burmese.

Colonial Legacies

[British domination](#) left a poisonous legacy from which Burma has yet to recover. The making of the modern state depended on two forces — one centripetal and the other centrifugal. On the one hand, the British put territories that had never been unified under a single political authority; even though they divided Burma between a central administrative unit, "Burma proper," under direct rule, and the "administered Burma," under indirect rule leaving to the elites of the so-called hill tribes the management of their internal affairs. On the other hand, [colonial rule](#) deepened interethnic divisions and solidified identities that had historically been [more diffuse and fluid](#).

Using censuses and other modern

state technologies, the British fit the complex array of ethno-linguistic groups into water-tight boxes, often introducing policies that discouraged interaction between them. For example, because the colonial rulers didn't trust the Bamar majority, they recruited Kachin, Chin, and Karen — the supposedly martial races — into the armed forces. As a result, the country's unfinished political unification was accompanied by the atomization and disaggregation of its constituent parts.

Further, until 1937, the British ruled Burma as a province of India, encouraging millions of Indians to immigrate, which turned Rangoon into an Indian-majority city by the thirties. The colonial elite favored Indians as administrators, policemen, and doctors. They also had disproportionate power in finance. As a result, Burmese nationalists bitterly resented the Indian population, much of it Muslim, and saw them as stooges of the empire. By the twentieth century, according to colonial administrator and scholar J. S. Furnivall, Burma had become a "plural society," in which "there was a racial division of labor" and "all the various peoples met in the market place, but they lived apart and continually tended to fall apart."

Muslims also entered Arakan from the Chittagong province in Bengal, but this migration had a different character. These mostly seasonal laborers joined an already sizable Muslim population that had arrived in precolonial times. Further, they came from a geographical and cultural space largely continuous with Arakan, which has historically served as a [border area](#) between the Burmese and the Bengali worlds, in which they mixed for centuries. The claims by Rakhine and Burmese nationalists that the Arakan Muslim population arrived with the British — or even later — is simply untenable.

The tensions simmering between all these groups exploded with Japanese invasion during World War II. Most of the Indian population fled in a [gruesome exodus](#) that cost tens of thousands their lives. Burmese nationalists, led by Aung San, Suu Kyi's father, initially sided with the

Japanese before changing sides at the end of the war. Ethnic minorities, including the Karen, the Kachin, and the Chin, fought on the British side. At times, Aung San's army clashed directly with those groups. The Rakhine majority in Arakan supported Aung San and the Japanese, while the retreating British armed some Muslims in hopes of slowing the much-feared Japanese advance into India. Arakan soon descended into a brutal civil war that pitted Muslims against Buddhists. At the end, the north was ethnically cleansed of Buddhists as much as the south was cleansed of Muslims.

When Burma gained independence in 1948, it was devastated by war, with a very weak state and militias freely roaming the countryside. In the hectic two years after the end of the war, Aung San served as the main interlocutor with the British. To this day, the Bamar majority sees him as the architect and hero of independence, despite the fact that he didn't live to see a fully independent Burma: a political rival assassinated him, along with his entire cabinet, a few months before independence.

Aung San

It's difficult to pin down the ideology of Aung San and his followers. He was not an intellectual but a man of action single-mindedly pursuing independence. "[Burma's Challenge](#)," a booklet containing several speeches given after the expulsion of the Japanese and published in 1946, perhaps best captures his vision.

He aimed to build a "true democracy," free from the "dictatorship of the capitalist class." Distancing himself from a classic model of liberal democracy, he defended socialism and communism because "they only seek the wider connotation of democracy." His social model called for nationalizing crucial industries and means of production at some point, though he admitted that the economic conditions in Burma made it impossible to establish socialism.

On the question of race and ethnicity, he drew mostly on Stalin's [Marxism and the National Question](#). Applying

this model, he claimed somewhat arbitrarily that only the Shan constituted a national minority. But in his version of nationalism, race, language, and religion “which he hoped to keep separate from politics” didn’t constitute a nation. Only the “historic necessity of having to lead a common life” did. He was willing to accept the Indians, Chinese, and Anglo-Burmese living in Burma at the time as citizens with full rights.

The British wouldn’t grant independence unless the ethnic minorities agreed. Aung San rushed this difficult task as much as he could, creating the Panglong Agreement, signed in Shan State in February 1947. Despite its obvious weaknesses, the deal has acquired an almost mythical status as the foundational document of modern Burma.

Rather than a definitive agreement, the text reads like a declaration of intentions. Only the Kachin, the Shan, the Chin, and the Bamar actually signed it. The Karen attended as observers, and Aung San persuaded the Rakhine to wait to discuss their sovereignty until after independence. Moreover, he preferred to deal with the leaders the British had designated, rather than the younger, more progressive representatives, with whom negotiations would have taken more time. In any case, the agreement accepted, “in principle ... full autonomy in internal administration for the frontier areas.” The constitution, adopted that same year, granted different degrees of autonomy to the frontier areas and gave the Shan and Karenni states the right of secession.

The Burmese Way to Socialism

Many Burmese regard Aung San’s assassination as the moment when everything went wrong. But, even if he had lived, the country was thrown into independence in extremely difficult circumstances.

Several insurgencies quickly exploded, and the weak state wasn’t equipped to control its territory. The Communist Party went underground and declared

war against the government; the Karen also rebelled and almost took over Rangoon itself. In Arakan, which also had an active Communist presence, a mujahed rebellion arose, demanding to join East Pakistan. To make things worse, the Chinese Kuomintang, having lost to Mao Zedong’s People’s Liberation Army, established bases in Shan State near the Chinese border with the help of American intelligence.

With the Communists resorting to armed struggle, the Anti-Fascist People’s Freedom League (AFPFL) dominated politics. But factional divisions split the party by 1958. Aung San’s promises to minorities were left largely unfulfilled, pushing even more groups to armed uprising: the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) was established in 1961, after thirteen years of frustrating peaceful struggle to win autonomy for its people. That same year, the government defeated the mujahed rebellion and recognized the Rohingya as a national group.

U Nu and General Ne Win were the period’s key figures. A firm believer in the nonalignment movement, U Nu supported a mixed economy and was also a pious Buddhist who made his faith the state religion in 1961, alienating the Christian and Muslim minorities. When he reversed course, promising to amend the constitution to assure the people that their religions would be protected, radical Buddhist monks torched mosques in Rangoon.

In 1962, Ne Win staged a coup d’état against U Nu’s government. The putsch was relatively bloodless compared to others in the region. With a population tired of the democratic era’s instability and factional disputes, Ne Win’s power grab elicited little opposition in the central Burmese cities. Only students, an important political force since the thirties, rebelled.

Ne Win launched a brutal crackdown, killing scores of protesters. He demolished the historic Rangoon University Students Union (RUSU), which had served as the center of student political activity for decades. Throughout his dictatorship, Ne Win maintained tight control on the

universities, stunting one of Burma’s longest-standing political focal points.

The secular Ne Win immediately reversed the decision that made Buddhism the state religion. He also strove to put the Buddhist monastic community under government control. But he was a Bamar supremacist, and he adopted an almost purely military approach in the war against the ethno-nationalist armed groups.

Ne Win closed down the country in hopes of isolating it from the Cold War upheavals running through Southeast Asia. He succeeded, but stalled the country’s development in the process. He adopted what he called “the Burmese way to socialism,” which consisted of a centralized, autarkic economy and one-party rule.

When his government embarked on a nationalization process, it wasn’t aiming to redistribute wealth among the poor but to deprive so-called foreigners of their share of the economy. Rather than a Burmese way to socialism, his system was a socialist way to Burmese-ness, in which the economic system helped reach a patriotic end. As a result of the nationalization, hundreds of thousands of Burmese of Indian origin were pushed to the subcontinent.

The “Dragon King” operation launched in 1978 in Arakan was part of this plan. Ostensibly set up to screen illegal immigrants coming in from Bangladesh, the project pushed up to 250,000 Rohingya into the neighboring country. Burma accepted many back after a bilateral repatriation agreement “and the Bangladeshi pressured many Rohingya to return to Arakan” but the operation nevertheless marks the beginning of decades of oppression.

In the 1974 constitution, Ne Win proclaimed the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) as the only party, but he could never build a strong enough organization to establish one-party rule. The BSPP leadership came from the military and turned into a mere appendage of the Tatmadaw. By 1988, an uprising motivated by crippling economic conditions was repressed brutally but still managed to overthrow Ne Win

and the BSPP. They were replaced by an even more oppressive military dictatorship.

The Burmese Way to Capitalism

The military junta that took power after Ne Win's fall called itself the State Order and Law Restoration Council (SLORC), changing its name to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1997. The junta always presented itself as a provisional government that would create the conditions for a constitutional order to replace it. Until then, it would govern mostly by decree in a permanent state of exception.

The junta soon abandoned the previous regime's socialist veneer and ruled by pure force. Lacking any ideological rationale to maintain their power and with no popular legitimacy, the generals postured as the heirs of the ancient Burmese kings. They made Buddhism the de facto state religion, portraying themselves as its protectors by funding pagodas and monasteries.

The generals also began a process of economic liberalization, but it didn't take off. Western powers had imposed sanctions in response to the regime's human rights violations, so the junta had to court its neighbors — particularly China, which had withdrawn its support of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB).

In fact, the Communists had imploded in 1989, when the majority-minority rank and file rebelled against the Bamar-dominated leadership. Fitting Burma's increasingly race-based politics, an ethno-nationalist group arose from the CPB's ashes: [The United Wa State Army](#) (UWSA), which remains the best-armed and strongest militia in the country, thanks to its lucrative narcotic business and support from China.

The economic opening meant Burma depended more and more on Chinese investment. It also created a new class of wealthy businessmen: the infamous cronies who now own huge conglomerates and control most of the

economy alongside the military-run mammoths.

The powerful chief of military intelligence, Khin Nyunt, signed a series of ceasefires with several armed ethnic organizations, including the Wa and the Kachin. These agreements were not meant to signify a political settlement, which the military junta deferred until a "legitimate government" could decide the long-standing question of ethnic minorities' political autonomy. But, in territories like Kachin State, the generals took advantage of peace to expand their businesses and take control of valuable assets in a process Kevin Woods has termed "[ceasefire capitalism](#)."

In Arakan, the junta decided to [use the 1982 Citizenship Law](#) against the Rohingya population. Because the legislation limits full citizenship to those who belong to one of the "national races" and because the "definitive" list does not include the Rohingya people, they were denied citizenship. The law does recognize those who could claim citizenship under to the 1948 law, which would cover many Rohingya. But state authorities confiscated most Rohingya's documents, promising them new identification cards that never came. Thus, the overwhelming majority of Rohingya became stateless.

During its rule, the SLORC/SPDC crushed Aung San Suu Kyi's democratic opposition, lured armed ethnic groups into fragile ceasefires — or fought them with increasing violence — and strengthened the army and the state bureaucracy, which was completely subordinated to the *Tatmadaw*. In the meantime, it stuck to its plan for a "discipline-flourishing democracy," which Khin Nyunt designed in 2003, before he was purged the next year by junta supremo Senior General Than Shwe.

This road map included a new constitution, which would, of course, maintain the military's preeminent position. In November 2010, the SLORC/SPDC held an election. The NLD didn't take part, and the junta's proxy, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), won by an

implausibly large margin.

A few months later, the SPDC dissolved itself, and former general Thein Sein assumed the presidency. The transition, which many international observers cheered, had begun in earnest. The *Tatmadaw* was starting from a position of strength that nothing — not even the NLD's 2015 victory — could easily challenge.

The Burmese Way to Neoliberalism

Aung San Suu Kyi rose to national and worldwide prominence in the wake of the 1988 uprising against the Ne Win regime, eventually embodying the Burmese people's aspirations for democracy and human rights. Her authority at first came from her parentage and personal sacrifice, including almost fifteen years under house arrest. She was an attractive icon for the international press as well — an Oxford alum with perfect English, gracefully fighting a bunch of thuggish generals. She provided a clear-cut narrative of good against evil in a country whose complexity very few understood.

Since the transition began in 2011, she has built good relationships with the generals rather than mobilizing the people whose support she simply takes for granted — apparently rightly so, since they voted for her enthusiastically in the 2012 by-election and the 2015 general election, when she took power.

Her rapprochement with the military shouldn't come as a surprise. In her [first major speech](#), back in 1988, she said that she felt a "strong attachment for the armed forces," as they "not only were they built up by my father, as a child I was cared for by his soldiers." The personal is often political when it comes to "the Lady," a nickname she earned since saying Suu Kyi out loud used to get people into serious trouble.

In that first speech, she also plead for unity "between the army which my father built up and the people who love my father so much." But the ideal

of unity [has been dubious](#) throughout Burma's history as an independent country. The military, the democratic opposition, and the ethnic leaders have made the concept nearly sacred, so that any act of dissent appears as a frontal attack on the nation.

Suu Kyi's approach to the transition has made her party an ineffective political force. By throwing all her weight behind her positive relationships with the generals, she has made the NLD merely reactive. The generals have stayed at the helm since the transition started, and the NLD has played the part the former junta scripted.

This strategy reveals Suu Kyi's deep distrust of participatory politics. She has met the [genuinely democratic protests](#) against land grabbing with indifference and veiled hostility. The irony, of course, is that she owes her power to the wave of mass protests that she came to symbolize.

Suu Kyi has met the wave of sectarian violence and the confinement of tens of thousands of Rohingya Muslims in concentration camps with studied silence and ambiguous statements. Confronted with these events, [she responded that](#) she "started in politics not as a human rights defender or a humanitarian worker, but as the leader of a political party," establishing a false dichotomy between human rights and politics.

More important, however, her lack of

response to the ethnic cleansing goes against her previous positions. When I [interviewed her](#) in 2011, I asked her to describe the kind of democracy she aspired to build. She vaguely answered that there is democracy "when people's voices are heard," so I pushed her on the concept's ideological underpinnings. "The universal declaration of human rights," she replied.

This answer reveals the poverty of her politics. Feted for years as a human rights icon, [she has become a politician](#) who has to make calculations in order to win or maintain power. Indeed, many defend her passivity over the Rohingya as a politician's strategy: she's willing to sacrifice an unpopular minority in order to establish democracy in the country as a whole. But it's become increasingly clear that she and most members of her party share the deep prejudices against the Rohingya that the military and many Burmese and Rakhine nationalists also hold.

However, the real problem with Aung San Suu Kyi "apart from her racism and her authoritarian streak" is that she's not political enough. Her vision for the country isn't political: it's moral. As she put it more than two decades ago, she wants "revolution of the spirit," and a [very puritanical one](#) at that. Her politics amount to a collection of vague phrases like "national reconciliation," "rule of law," "peace," and "development." She has

put forward no policies that would benefit the mass of impoverished Burmese to accompany this rhetoric.

In Suu Kyi's worldview, every Burmese must do their duty without challenging the nation's socioeconomic structure. A couple of years ago, she assured the cronies who had amassed huge fortunes during the SLORC/SPDC period that she would not [threaten their position](#), though she asked them to "act fairly" and "work for others." Suu Kyi doesn't think change will come from a systemic overhaul, but from the moral redemption of those at the top and the sacrifices and hard work of those at the bottom, all united in a spirit of national solidarity.

Aung San Suu Kyi puts personal responsibility at the center of her "political" vision. In that sense, she is a [neoliberal](#) of a [particular kind](#): while she doesn't seem to believe in collective action unless it follows the dictates of a strong leader "herself" she holds everyone responsible for their own situation.

In this way, she's actively blocking politics from developing in Burma, as neoliberalism does all over the world by rendering political action impotent against the market. Such depoliticization creates a vacuum, readily filled by the kind of xenophobic ethno-nationalism so prevalent in Burma and elsewhere today.

[Jacobin](#)

Emergency in Mindanao (Philippines): the humanitarian crisis is spreading - A progress report on the situation and the solidarity campaign

22 January 2018, by [Pierre Rousset](#)

We received two calls for solidarity after the passage on December 23 of

Typhoon Temblin/Vinta [7], then a third alerting on the consequences of

armed conflict. [8] We supported them and then, on January 7, we launched

our own international call for financial solidarity taking into account all the causes of the state of humanitarian crisis and all its victims [9]. This campaign extends the one we conducted in 2017 to support families who had to flee in emergency, last May, the city of Marawi because of the violent fighting between the army and jihadist groups.

Since December, we have transferred to the Philippines ₱10300 including 3300 via Mihands coalition and ₱7000 via Tripod Association [10].

Mihands [11] and Tripod thank the donors. In this first period, these funds have largely contributed to the development of the initial activities without which it is impossible to intervene effectively: distributions of aid in the most easily accessible areas, but also coordination meetings, surveys and collecting information, lobbying government agencies, solidarity campaigns in the Philippines itself (donations in kind or money), etc. Gradually, activities will move on to a next stage, with communities self-organizing so that they can regain control of their present and their future, when this is not already the case.

The militant networks we support are engaged in humanitarian aid and victim protection over a vast territory in northern and central Mindanao. All their forces are mobilized to face a state of crisis of exceptional magnitude. They do not have yet the possibility to make an overall assessment of the situation and their action. However, we have received a number of information that we summarize here.

They intervene in particular in the provinces Lanao (North and South), the Zamboanga Peninsula, Maguindano, North Cotabao, Sultan Kudarat.

The response to typhoon Temblin/Vinta and

displaced populations

It is still too early to assess the material and human consequences of the typhoon, because the state of the roads does not allow access to many localities. Municipalities lack adequate equipment to clear them (trees ...) and repair them (crevasses ...) - to operate in the hinterland, these machines must be light, small. In one given area, the damage can be very different if there has been, or not, a landslide. Destruction concerns in particular infrastructure, agricultural land and aquaculture, housing, equipment and services (water, electricity ...), goods, etc.

In the province of Lanao de Norte [12], at the end of December, emergency aid was provided to villages of peasants and fishermen (food, clothing, hygiene products ...) via local social movements (DKMP and LAFCCOD), then a medical needs assessment was conducted. A medical team intervened for three days with 14 volunteers in the municipality of Lala with their health partner, NADA Philippines (in an informal evacuation site and in one locality). As usual, it had to convince survivors of the typhoon of the effectiveness of alternative treatments (acupuncture, etc.) and of how the community itself could appropriate them in the future. The results of this mission are considered very positive on various levels: physical illnesses, psychological traumas and depressive states ... Five volunteers undertook to animate on the spot an Alternative Medical Center of Mihands to follow up.

Mihands is being asked to send medical missions elsewhere to Lanao del Sur to an evacuation center and to Mindanao State University in the city of Marawi.

Mihands coordinates its activities with local authorities and relevant agencies to include them in the overall balance sheet of humanitarian activities. The type of disaster caused by the typhoon is quite unusual in Lanao (massive floods in the hinterland, sudden floods of rivers ...) and local government

units such as field associations must learn to respond effectively.

Military conflicts and mountain communities

The multiplication of military conflicts particularly affects lumads - tribes or ethnolinguistic groups [13]. Armed forces of all kinds regularly occupy their territories to seek refuge, to operate from the heights of several neighbouring provinces, to open their access to economic lobbies ... The imposition of martial law only worsens the situation of Indigenous Peoples [14]. The government accuses them of serving as a support base for the guerrillas of the CPP-New People's Army and Duterte has been threatening to bombard their schools retaliatory [15]. In fact, the lumads have their own internal governance [16], displayed or secret, and aim above all to protect their communities from abuses, preserve their ancestral domains, avoid being driven off their lands and forests at the risk of finding themselves poor among the urban poor (which means their cultural death). If their territories have become war zones, it is not their fault [17]. They suffer from a long history of colonialism, exclusion, marginalization and dispossession. As a general rule, they only defend their rights.

On December 24, 2017, the BIFF attacked with mortars lumads' communities in the province of Maguindanao [18]. The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) is a more or less autonomous faction of the MILF - the MILF is currently negotiating with the government an agreement on the creation of a Moro administrative entity. The BIFF wanted to position itself in the area of Mt Firis [19] during a violent clash with the army.

On 9 January, Mihands and Tripod assessed the situation in the affected Maguindanao-Cotabato area and called for solidarity. 61 lumads' houses were burned, at least 7 people were killed and contact was made with 203 displaced families (but it has not

yet been possible to reach the majority of the affected localities). The investigation work was going on. The mountain communities concerned are Teduray, Lambagnians and Manobo Arumanon; there are also Muslim Moros and Christians among the displaced people.

In the provinces of Cotabato (North and South), the lumads are threatened by fighting between the CPP, government forces, paramilitary groups of large companies. An IPVoice Council member was killed in Arakan. IPVoice (The Voice of Indigenous Peoples [20].) organized a ritual in which 21 hill tribes participated and want to engage, at the beginning of February, a dialogue with the army and the CPP-NDF-NPA.

It is hoped that at least some areas will be protected from multiple armed conflicts that contribute to fuelling the humanitarian crisis (forced displacement of people, destruction of their property and resources ...), but the fate of families who have fled fighting in the Moslem City of Marawi shows that the stigmata of war do not disappear naturally. The battle of Marawi lasted 5 months (May-October 2017), but most of them have not yet been able to return to live in Marawi - and they are now suffering the effects of typhoon Temblin/Vinta.

Support the activity of activist networks

Responding to the humanitarian crisis is conceivable only in the long term. It

demands a constant struggle for lasting peace, such as the one pursued by the Mindanao Peoples' Peace Movement (MPPM [21]) and thus effective coordination between organizations working on a range of terrain: response to more or less natural disasters, defending the rights of communities and affected populations, protection from military conflicts, commitment to rehabilitation and reconstruction beyond the emergency aid, support for victims' self-organization and respect for their decisions

The operational network linking dozens of grassroots associations makes it possible to combine efforts, exchange know-how, create bridges between movements, cover a vast region, and help each other to maintain the action over the long term. ESSF therefore supports these networks (in this case Mihands), rather than just financing very specific projects (which, of course, can also be very useful). In Mindanao, these associations operate under harsh and dangerous conditions. We wish to salute here the quality of their commitment.

Pierre Rousset
ESSF

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State and Labour During the AKP Rule in Turkey

20 January 2018, by **Mehmet Erman Erol**

A Balance Sheet of 15 Years

Conventionally, the first two terms of the AKP government (2002-2011) were identified with democratization, reformism and progressive economic policies. The fact that the government's authoritarianism reached inconceivable levels post-2011 (especially during and after the Gezi protests of 2013), and the fact that Turkey is governed under the state of emergency since the failed coup attempt of July 2016 which resembles an 'exceptional state' form, have made conventional accounts to argue that Turkey is sliding toward 'authoritarianism'. These accounts simply share the 'good AKP goes bad' view, and 'class' or 'labour' is absent in their analyses.

In distinction, I sustain the argument that, 'neoliberal authoritarianism' or 'authoritarian neoliberalism' marked the post-1980 military coup which aimed to remove labour as an agency from the political sphere, and in fact the AKP's general economic and political stance reflected a continuity with this orientation. There is no doubt that there might be some type of a 'qualitative' shift in the form of authoritarianism post-2011 or post-coup attempt, however this is not a 'deviation' from neoliberalism and should be contextualized within the capitalist social relations of production and restructuring of capital-labour relations.

In this light, this piece attempts to critically review these 15 years from a labour-centred perspective and shed light on developments in labour market and labour movement. The topics are as follows: economic policy-making, the legal context of labour relations, unionism, unemployment, and indebtedness.

Economic Policy-Making

Neoliberal economic policy-making is anti-democratic; and constantly attempts to remove democratic and working-class participation from policy-making processes. The intellectual origins of this orientation go back to the diagnosis of the crisis of capitalism in the 1970s by neoliberals that the excess of democracy had weakened the 'liberal' resolve of the state and its authority (Bonefeld, 2017). Hence, under neoliberalism, state managers constantly attempted to insulate certain policies and institutional practices from popular dissent, which is an authoritarian tendency in itself (Bruff, 2014).

Economic and political developments in Turkey under neoliberalism reflect this tendency. However, the 2001 crisis, and the AKP's takeover of the power in 2002 amounted to the strengthening of these tendencies. Certain institutions were depoliticized and de-democratized through extra-democratic technocratic institutions (i.e. Central Bank, Independent Regulatory Institutions), and attempts were made to present certain policies 'out of influence' by introducing 'binding rules' (i.e. IMF agreements, debt ceilings, primary surplus targets, EU conditionality). The state of emergency in the last 16 months has strengthened this stance, and with the introduction of new institutions such as the Turkey Wealth Fund and the further decreasing role of parliament, policy-making is almost completely isolated from democratic interference.

Legal Framework of Labour Relations

Following a protracted demand from capitalist circles, the AKP introduced a

new Labour Law in 2003 (Law No. 4857). This law introduced and institutionalized new forms of flexible employment and increased the control and disciplinary power of employers in the workplace, as well as reducing the extent of 'job security'. It paved the way for further precarity, insecurity and de-unionization in the labour market whose political economic consequences will be dealt with later in this piece. In 2012, the AKP introduced a new Trade Union and Collective Bargaining Law (Law. No. 6356). Despite being presented as a 'progressive' step from the previous law by the government, it simply kept the post-1980 authoritarian union policy intact and did not bring about any progressive change to labour relations. Hence, the overall aim of the labour legislation in this era - reflecting the characteristic of authoritarian neoliberalism - was 'individualizing labour laws and weakening collective bargaining processes and institutions' (Clua-Losada and Ribera-Almandoz, 2017).

Aside from these major legal developments, the AKP government has also used omnibus bills to restructure labour relations in order to make labour more flexible and competitive. More recently, following the coup attempt, statutory government decrees are used for restructuring of state-capital-labour relations, which makes the management of labour power even more anti-democratic.

Trade Union Policy and the Condition of Unionism

As mentioned above, the AKP government took over the authoritarian neoliberal orientation of the Turkish state post-1980, which aimed to 'put an end to class-based politics' (Yalman, 2009). From the very beginning, the AKP's trade union policy was authoritarian, even during the so-called 'democratization' era

of 2002-2011. Hence, as de-unionization and weakening of collective bargaining power was a crucial aspect of this era; unionization levels decreased by 46% between 2001-2011, making Turkey the least unionized country in the OECD area, with union density in 2011 at just 5.4% (Aşelik, 2015). The number of workers covered by collective agreements also decreased by 50% from 1990s to 2010s (Labour Ministry statistics), despite the number of workers at work having significantly increased. Currently, the union density is around 11% and membership rates appear to be on the rise. This, however, is due to the government's corporatist union strategy which promotes unionism in AKP-friendly unions.

Another aspect of authoritarian union policy is strike bans and police violence toward workers' protests. 13 strikes were 'postponed' or, more correctly, banned by the AKP government since 2002. Five of them occurred during the state of emergency following the July 2016 coup attempt. President Erdoğan himself declared that the government is making use of the state of emergency to ban strikes, in a speech made to the businessmen. During its rule, the AKP government has not hesitated to use police power in order to disperse workers' resistances and occupations. Moreover, May Day celebrations in symbolic Taksim Square were banned between 2003-2008, and again after 2011.

Unemployment

Following the 2001 crisis, unemployment levels increased to double digits, and remained in double digits for the most of the AKP rule. Officially, unemployment currently stands at around 10-11% officially. Unions, however, argue that it is actually higher than the official rate. Also, youth unemployment is around 20%, which is alarming. The high unemployment rate is directly related to the AKP's economic policies. Following the 2001 crisis, inflation targeting and achieving anti-inflationary credibility became the most important objective of the Turkish state managers, and therefore

there was no meaningful employment strategy in place. Hence, the high growth years were actually amounting to what is known as 'jobless growth', depending on 'hot money' flows and financialization and exacerbated by AKP's aggressive privatization policy. As the official unemployment rate increased to an alarming 16% in February 2009, the government took some measures. However, these were mostly aimed at making the labour market more flexible, as the government's National Employment Strategy (NES-2014-2023) suggests. Unemployment remains as a significant problem for the current labour market in Turkey.

Rising Indebtedness of Workers

Turkish political economy witnessed a new development during the AKP rule: the rising indebtedness of households and/or shifting of the debt from the state to the households. Two elements played a significant role in this development. First, following the 2001 crisis, austerity policies meant that the government debt and deficit decreased, and the banks could not finance government deficits anymore. They had to find new ways (Karaçimen, 2014). Second, the condition of labourers deteriorated significantly in this period. Real wages decreased in manufacturing, and the minimum wage did not show any meaningful increase. Unemployment and precariousness increased significantly. These all paved the way for rising indebtedness of workers. Indeed, the ratio of household debt to disposable income was insignificant in 2003 (7%), but increased to 55% in 2013. Moreover, this trend rather affected the low-income households most, as 42% of the borrowers of consumer loans were people earning less than TL 1,000 per month (Karaçimen, 2014).

The AKP had to take some measures in 2013 to limit credit expansion, and these measures controlled rising indebtedness to some extent. However, following the economic

contraction after the 2016 coup attempt, the government again had to rely on credit expansion for economic growth and household debt began to increase again. Overall, during this period, rising indebtedness added a new dimension to capital-labour relations in Turkey, and functioned as a disciplining mechanism.

Concluding Remarks

The 15 year AKP rule cannot be fully examined without taking the question of labour into account. This short paper attempts to do that. I argued that the AKP era represented a direct continuity with the post-1980 authoritarian management of labour power. Conventional accounts which identify earlier periods of the AKP with democratization, reform, and progressive economic policies fail to assess the anti-democratic and authoritarian neoliberal management of the economy and labour relations. In this context, any democratic struggle against the current authoritarian/exceptional state form should prioritize the issue of class, specifically labour, in order to achieve democratic outcomes.

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The Austrian Anti-Social Coalition

19 January 2018, by **Joachim Becker**

The new Chancellor, Sebastian Kurz, had ended the coalition with the Social Democrats in order to form a right-wing coalition after fresh elections. In the change of direction, Kurz enjoyed the support of the Association of Industrialists which represents the big, often foreign-owned capital groups in Austria. The party wing close to the small- and medium scale capital organised, in the Chamber of Business, was side-lined in this process, but has welcomed certain of the announced pro-business policies.

In order to gain voters from the FPÖ-electorate, Kurz embarked on an aggressive anti-immigrant and anti-refugee election campaign that stigmatised Muslims. He borrowed rhetorical figures both from the Austrian FPÖ- and from Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

But this anti-immigration stance has not been the only area where a rapprochement between the new dominant forces in ÖVP and the FPÖ- can be observed. Key elements of the economic programmes of both parties – like the weakening of labour interests, the flexibilisation of working time and lower corporate taxes – overlapped and were in line with the long-held desires of the Association of Industrialists.

The allure of anti-labour policies

Not surprisingly, the Association of Industrialists is rather enthusiastic about the government's programme. The institutional power of labour will be reduced. In particular, the capacity of the Chamber of Labour to impact economic and social policy formulation

and to back up trade unions' activities with research and advice will be curbed. But small- and medium scale capital would also stand to lose political influence through a reform of the Chambers system as well. The big capital groups will see their power increased both vis-à-vis labour and smaller enterprises.

While the FPÖ- had initially demanded the end of obligatory membership in the Chambers and, thus, the de facto dismantling of the Chamber system, resistance to such a radical change was strong in the ÖVP which is well represented in the Chambers, particularly the Chamber of Business and the Chamber of Agriculture. The compromise between the two parties points in the direction of the reduction of membership fees which would reduce the Chambers' room for manoeuvre.

Presently, the Chambers are more than just service organisations for their members; they have considerable expertise in economic and social policies and are able to intervene effectively into policy debates. The Chamber of Labour is able to provide background expertise for collective bargaining. Due to the obligatory membership in the Chambers, the coverage of collective agreements is close to 100%. The details of the reform of the Chambers have not been fixed in the government programme.

Business has for a long time demanded the flexibilisation of working hours. In the old coalition, the Social Democrats had blocked this demand. The new government, however, intends to permit peak working times of 12 hours per day and 60 hours per week. The trade unions are clearly opposed to such policies

that reflect the practices of the nineteenth century. In a similar vein, the new government intends to weaken the labour inspectorates.

One of the most concrete items of the tax proposals is the reduction of corporate taxation. It is quite obvious that the new right wing government wants to increase "competitiveness" by lowering standards and taxes. This is a strategy of dependent capitalism. And Austria is to some extent a dependent country. Its export industry is to a significant extent a supplier to German export manufacturers and is partially German-owned. The German nexus is acknowledged by FPÖ-. Though its electoral basis is EU-sceptical, the party no longer questions the eurozone.

Dismantling the welfare system

In social policies, the ÖVP-FPÖ-government is to some extent copying regressive German practices. In its programme, it announced its intention to reform the unemployment benefits. Inter alia, unemployed persons should get benefits for shorter periods. Afterwards, they should be relegated into the social welfare programmes. The new government envisages a more restrictive and stigmatising approach to social welfare. Social security payments are to be severely cut for refugees. As it already has been the case in the region of Upper Austria where ÖVP and FPÖ- govern, the discrimination of the most vulnerable group is only the gateway for more general cuts and deteriorations.

Social welfare is increasingly to be provided in kind instead of through

monetary transfers. The upper limit for social welfare payments is to be €1500 irrespective of the size of the family. Though the new right-wing government highlights its family policies, the support for families with children is targeted at the middle strata. Its main instrument is a family bonus on tax payments. Many single-parent families, however, are below the set income threshold.

Both in its focus on the middle class and the conservative orientation of its family policies and the stigmatisation of the poor, the new Austrian right-wing government shows clear parallels with Fidesz in Hungary. A clear tendency in the programme is the discrimination of migrants, including those from the EU, in labour market and social policies. In this

regard, the new Austrian government promotes a more exclusionary form of welfare state nationalism than other West European governments which are supported by nationalist, anti-immigrant parties. While the nationalist right in West and Central-East Europe share an anti-immigration agenda, concrete measures against EU migrants in the West create rifts with the nationalist right in Central-Eastern Europe.

The new Austrian government shares a repressive bent with Fidesz in Hungary and the PiS (Law and Justice Party) in Poland. The far-right FPÖ will take over the Ministries of Interior and Defence and the control of the secret services. The Austrian President, Alexander van der Bellen, who, according to the constitution,

plays a certain role in the formation of the government, insisted successfully that the Ministries of Interior and Justice may not be controlled by the same party. The President wanted to avoid a situation in which all the Ministries dealing with repression would be in the hands of the FPÖ.

In the heart of Europe, a new "Mitteleuropa" is in formation. It is quite different from the liberal-democratic visions of Mitteleuropa which Milan Kundera and others had nourished in the 1980s and early 1990s. The renewed axis between Austria and Hungary rests on anti-social policies, the stigmatisation of the poor and of specific migrants and other minorities.

[LeftEast](#)

Hugo Blanco: The Future Is Indigenous

18 January 2018, by **Ted Hamilton**

On a gray Saturday afternoon in Lima, Peru, this past April, I received a phone call from Hugo Blanco, veteran guerilla and survivor of multiple death sentences. "You wanted to talk?" he asked. "Come over now." An hour later, after a ride through the city's torturous streets, I was in the plaza in front of his house, an unpretentious single-level in a middle-class neighborhood north of the colonial center. I knocked and collected myself; I hadn't actually expected him to respond to my request.

Blanco is a peer of the Marxist Latin American revolutionaries Fidel Castro and Che Guevara (he and Guevara were on opposite sides of a few debates). In the early 1960s, he organized peasant unions to seize land from feudal-style hacienda owners in the central Andean sierra. He was imprisoned for years by the Peruvian government, charged with the murder of a policeman who was killed during the struggles (Blanco has denied the charge). While in prison, he wrote *Land or Death*, a book that proposed

how to build a communist insurgency on the back of land reform efforts in the Andes. His radical ideas earned him death threats from many quarters, and he spent years in exile in Chile, Sweden, and Mexico. In recent years, he's been able to return to Peru.

What drew me to Blanco was not so much his insurgent past as his activist present. Spurred by the global environmental crisis and the encroachment of private industry on native-held land—a pattern that played out recently in the confrontations in the US at Standing Rock—Blanco has become an advocate for indigenous movements across the world.

Blanco grew up in the Cusco region of Peru, speaking the indigenous language, Quechua. In 2007, he founded the periodical *Lucha Indígena* (Indigenous Struggle), which covers the political and economic forces that conflict with indigenous groups. He continues to trumpet the successful ways in which indigenous communities have countered global

neoliberal forces that threaten the environment. "The indigenous movement is in the vanguard," Blanco told the journal *Sin Permiso*. "[I]t's the most advanced sector in the struggle against the system and in the construction of an alternative organization of society."

Now, at eighty-three years old, Blanco told me that he doesn't get out much anymore, even though he had just returned from a month-long trip to Mexico to visit anti-mining activists. His home was sparsely decorated, filled with old books and magazines; his manner was low-key and inviting. We sat alone at his dining room table. In conversation, he is polite but direct, anchoring his ideas with anecdotes culled from years of travel and exile.

The era of Latin American Marxist insurgency may seem distant now, but Blanco sees connections to the issues of today. During our discussion, in Spanish, he spoke passionately about Trump, global warming, nature rights, and the significance of indigenous movements in today's global political

climate.

â€”Ted Hamilton for *Guernica*

Guernica: For years you've focused your efforts on wealth distribution and social justice. Why is climate change a pressing issue for you now?

Hugo Blanco: I've always fought for social equality. But now there's a more important problem: the survival of my species. One hundred more years of rule by transnational companies and they're going to exterminate the human species as they've exterminated other species.

The objective of these large transnational companies is to make the greatest amount of money possible in the shortest time possible. To this end they attack nature. They use technological and scientific advances with this objective, including in the United States, where fracking poisons the water that people have to drink. Governments, to a greater or lesser degree, also represent the interests of international companies. Even the progressive ones capitulate to them.

Guernica: You've said that indigenous groups can play an important role in combating global warming. How so?

Hugo Blanco: These days the attack on nature is strong, so there are more people defending ecosystems. And ecologists have respect for the indigenous because they defend nature, and give less importance to things like money. I'm a Quechua indigenous person, and we have a principle of love and the worship of nature, which in Quechua we call Pachamama, or Mother Nature. But there are indigenous people all over the world in Oceania, in Africa, in Asia, and in the north of Sweden and Finland. And the characteristics of indigenous peoples are that they have a great love for nature, solidarity, and collective rather than individual mandates.

For example, there is a story of an anthropologist who was working with indigenous children in South Africa. He put some candies and fruit in a tree and he told the children, "Run,

and the first one to get there gets everything." The children ran there holding hands and split everything among themselves. "Why are you so silly? I said the first one to get there gets everything." And they answered him: "If there were one of us who was left without candy or fruit, we'd all suffer. I exist because you exist."

The faculty members at a university in Cusco who study agronomy have learned that when they go to the agricultural fairs of the *campesinos* [peasants], they shouldn't give prizes to the person who makes the biggest potato, or the largest quantity of potatoes, but instead to whomever produces the most varieties, because the indigenous think that's more important. And when you ask, "What do you produce on your land?" they say, "Everything," because they've got avocado next to the river, all the way up to the potato at the peaks.

There are certain mushrooms that only appear during the rainy season in Peru. And there was a *campesina* selling little mountains of them in the Cusco market. I told her, "I'll buy all of them without asking for a discount," which was a good deal for her, because usually you pay less for more quantity. But she told me, "No. If I sell you all of them, what am I going to sell everyone else?" Selling wasn't just business, but a social relationship.

I cite these examples to show that there is something to being "indigenous." Some people call us indigenous people "primitives," and they're right. Because we preserve the primitive organization that all of society once had, which is horizontal. They call us "savages," and I think they're right there, too, because the savage is the one who's not domesticated. The condor is a wild animal, but the rooster is domesticated. I'd rather be a condor than a rooster.

Guernica: Is it possible to harness that type of collective power on an international scale?

Hugo Blanco: I'm for the idea that the global population self-governs. It's the only salvation against global warming and against the destruction of nature. For that reason, indigenous peoples

have more esteem than ever.

There is a philosophical principle that Marx got from Hegel. First is the affirmation, which is the thesis; then there's the negation, which is the antithesis; then there's the synthesis, which brings back the thesis and incorporates some of the elements of the antithesis. The thesis is primitive society: horizontal, not hierarchical. After came [the antithesis], civilization: caste systems, and in Europe vertical classes, led by those who command and who rule to their own benefit. And the synthesis is the resurrection of the thesis, or once again horizontal society, enriching it with some of the elements of the antithesis, or all the advances of society that have not put the survival of the species at risk. I think we need to arrive at this synthesis. And we'll be there when all of society governs.

I don't believe in leaders or *caudillos* [strongmen] or managers. But I think that what we need to push forward is the movement for collectivity. That's what I believe in: power from below. And that organized society can be like that.

Guernica: Can you give me some examples?

Hugo Blanco: I've seen it in Limatambo, a district of *campesinos* near Cusco, in Mexico, and in Greece. In Limatambo, the *campesinos* asked, "Why are the mayors always the sons of the *hacienda* owners? Why can't we nominate ourselves?" So they had a secret ballot, and they won their elections. But it wasn't so that the individuals could govern. It was so that the community assemblies could govern. This is the mandate of the people, which is the same thing that the Zapatistas in Mexico have.

The Zapatistas have three levels of government: the community, the municipality, and the region. Many thousands of indigenous people govern themselves democratically with the principle of "lead by obeying." The people choose a group of women and men as governors, but they don't choose a president or a secretary general; all those chosen have the same rank. After a period of time they change out everyone,

there's no reelection, so everyone is at the head and there's no indispensable person. When there's a very important question, they convene a general assembly so that the collective decides. No authority at any level gets a cent. They're like farmers and each gets their ration. Drugs and alcohol are forbidden. I don't know if you would call this socialism, anarchism, or communitarianism. Nor does it interest me.

I liked what one comrade told me: "They elected me. If they'd elected me as a community manager, it wouldn't have mattered, because then I could still cook for my husband and my kids. But they elected for the municipality. So what was I going to do? I had to travel. I had to teach my kids how to cook, and that was good, because now my sons' wives can accept a post far away, and my sons know how to cook." So they're advancing.

We were there [with the Zapatistas] and they were explaining how they feed themselves, how they take care of themselves, how they've brought back indigenous knowledge. But they haven't rejected Western medicine, so they've gathered surgeons and doctors from other areas who taught them how to build and operate a clinic. And they also accept not just Zapatistas, but *partidistas* [people affiliated with political parties]. But the *partidistas* have to pay for their medicine—the Zapatistas are treated completely for free. And recently a Zapatista told me, "Well, in the clinics there are more *partidistas* than Zapatistas" because since we feed ourselves well, we don't get sick."

There are also indigenous people in a town called Cherán, in Mexico, who chose to self-govern. One day, when there were municipal elections across Mexico, and parties came to do campaign propaganda in Cherán, the citizens said, *No, we don't want parties, we don't accept any propaganda*. And then they decided to elect somebody of their own choice, so they elected another governing council, also without general secretary or president who governed everything. And Mexican President Peña Nieto had to recognize them and say, "Well, since they're an indigenous population, they have the right to

follow their customs and traditions." And so they have the municipal council, which has at its command the armed municipal guard protecting the frontier and the internal order.

In Greece, I've seen that in face of the government austerity, there's a rise in activity from the base. For example, the government abandoned the state television channel and in Thessaloniki the workers took it in their power and they interviewed me. Later, because they were closing clinics, health workers—nurses and doctors—met up and made clinics. There is also a publishing house in the hands of its workers. There are many restaurants in Athens that are in the hands of their workers. There is a cooperative that receives goods from the countryside and sells them, avoiding intermediaries. And I told them, "You're doing here in the city what the Zapatistas are doing in the countryside: creating power."

So that's it. The government of everyone. Not the government of one party, one person, or one leader.

Guernica: Are indigenous groups the only groups well-suited to fight capitalist interests?

Hugo Blanco: Of course not. You can see activism in the United States with the fight against the [Keystone] pipeline, where not just the indigenous but other defenders of the water came from all over the US. Of course, Trump has now ordered that they [build the pipeline]. But there is resistance. What's more, I believe that the strongest part of the resistance has been the Women's March. The greatest anti-Trump protest was the Women's March. In Peru, the biggest march in the history of the country was the *Ni Una Menos* march in Lima, a women's march. In Rosario, Argentina, there was a march of women. In Poland, too, they're fighting for their right to abortion. I think that women are an important part of the vanguard now.

We're constructing a new world here. Not only us, the fighters for social justice, but also those who work to produce ecological products, those who practice alternative medicine and alternative education, those who take

over factories and become their own managers. All of them, too, are fighting for a new world.

Guernica: An Indian court recently recognized the Ganges and Yamuna Rivers as having legal rights. The rights of nature also appear in the constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia, and they're considered important by many indigenous groups. What do you think of the idea?

Hugo Blanco: We have to defend [nature rights] because we form part of nature.

The New Zealand authorities have taken an important step in the defense of nature and humanity, which should be followed by other governments. The Whanganui River [on the North Island of New Zealand] is now a "legal person," and as such it has rights and obligations under a pioneering agreement signed by the New Zealand Parliament. This means that the river, which has been venerated by the Maori people for a long time, will have the same rights as a person. The Maori Whanganui tribe has been fighting for about 150 years for the river, the third-largest in the country, to be recognized as an ancestor—that is, a living entity. And now the parliament has finally approved a law that recognizes it as such.

Also, in 2014, Alberto Acosta [former minister of energy and mining in Ecuador] called for recognition of nature rights here in Lima. He said we're not going to wait for the neoliberal governments to do this, because they're never going to recognize them. And he organized a meeting for the defense of nature here in Lima.

Guernica: What are your hopes for indigenous groups in the coming years?

Hugo Blanco: There are indigenous struggles on all continents against the racist and colonial mentality and politics that defend the capitalist system. What's been happening for twenty-three years in Chiapas, Mexico, in the Zapatista zone, makes me optimistic. I hear what the

Nothing New in Trump's Comments

17 January 2018, by **Kay Mann**

His distinction between countries in Africa, Haiti, and Central America on the one hand, and Norway on the other harkens back to the reactionary racist immigration policies of the 1920s and could possibly herald the beginning of a draconian overhaul of US immigration policy even beyond what we have seen from Trump and his congressional allies so far. They also remind us of the legacy of colonialism and the workings of neo-Imperialist domination and racism today.

In 1921 and 1924, congress enacted the National Origins Act which established a system of quotas all but eliminating immigration from the poorer, non-Protestant countries of Southern and Eastern Europe, whose people were then the equivalent of Haitians and others slurred by Trump. That law established US immigration policy until 1965 when the Immigration and Nationality Act replaced the quota system with family relationship and work skills requirements.

The National Origins Act reflected fear of radical socialist and labor politics, but also racist bigotry and class prejudice remarkably similar to Trump's. It built on openly racist legislation passed in the 1880s and 1890s that sharply restricted Asian immigration. By the time the Act was passed, immigration from Northern Europe and Scandinavia had already slowed to a trickle. Since the 1880s on the other hand, large numbers of people had been coming to the US from Poland, Russia, Italy, and Greece. Most had been rural, peasant and agricultural workers and, in the case of Jews, urban workers. Initially welcomed as cheap unskilled labor for an expanding industrial economy,

these rural and working-class immigrants were later targeted by nativist and conservative elites, who raised alarms about supposed racial and cultural purity. The quotas were designed to virtually eliminate immigration from those countries.

From colonial times, the ruling class had been overwhelmingly Protestant. The new immigrants were Catholic, Jewish, and various forms of Eastern Orthodox. Much of the prejudice and discrimination suffered by Irish immigrants took the form of anti-Catholic bigotry. To this religious and cultural prejudice was added notions of race, understood as a biological phenomenon.

Excerpt from "Crania Americana" showing the supposed differences between the skulls of different races. Morton claimed similarities between the skulls of primates and African people. This was the age of pseudo-scientific racism used to justify the imperialist colonization of Africa and Jim Crow in the US, and the new immigrants were seen as non- or semi-white racial inferiors.

Racist Pseudo-Science Behind Immigration Quotas

Figures like the British mathematician and statistician Karl Pearson embodied the connection between racist pseudo-science and immigration policy. Pearson and others advocated theories of eugenics that the Nazis later drew on for their own eugenics programs. In 1925, Pearson co-authored a paper with Margaret Moul called "The Problem of Alien Immigration to Britain illustrated by an Examination of Russian and Polish Jewish Children." The paper referred directly to the recently established US quota system and advocated immigration policy based on carefully

selected applicants who would strengthen, rather than dilute what they considered to be the superior (white) racial composition of Britain and the US. The paper documented the high rates of various diseases among Jewish immigrants, many living in slum areas, and compared them with the much lower rates for "gentiles" (non-Jews). The comparisons pointed, they held, to the racial inferiority of Eastern European Jews. Elsewhere in the paper, they fretted about the possible negative effects on national racial "hygiene" of "mixing" between white and non-white races of Asia and Africa. Such concerns, they argued, were scientific and should guide immigration policy. Pearson's ideas have long been discredited in the scientific community, but still reappear in various forms of racist discourse and immigrant policy.

Ruling class politicians and their ideologues were also concerned about the connection between immigration, labor, and radical politics. Some immigrants from urban areas had acquired knowledge of and experience with anarchism and socialism in Europe, and some had been in unions. Many became radical labor activists and leaders in the US. All of the Haymarket martyrs, save the US-born Albert Parsons, were German—part of an earlier wave of European immigration. As far as conservatives were concerned, the Russian Revolution confirmed the connection between immigration and subversive politics. The US ruling class responded with the Palmer raids of 1920, targeting immigrant labor leaders and radicals, who were jailed and often deported. The apex of this ruling class frenzy was the frame-up and judicial murder of the Italian

immigrant anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927. Earlier, Joe Hill, a Norwegian immigrant and member of the IWW, a revolutionary, multiracial labor organization, was framed for murder and executed in Utah in 1915.

A Racist for all Seasons

Over time, racist discourse in elite circles has shifted from biological arguments and political fears about left-wing radicalism, to cultural arguments, and after 9/11, fears of Islamic terrorism. (The marginalized white supremacy of the KKK remains closer to its roots in eugenics.)

Harvard professor Samuel Huntington, who served as president of the American Political Science Association, advanced a new racist agenda designed to influence US immigration policy. In his 1996 book, *The Clash of Civilizations*, Huntington argued that in the wake of the collapse of the USSR and the end of the cold war, communism was no longer a threat to the US. The new threat was immigration from Latin American and Muslim countries that threatened to culturally dilute the Protestant culture upon which the US was built, and should therefore be sharply restricted. Huntington's racist thesis never disappeared from elite discourse on immigration, and Trump's most inflammatory remarks merely recycle old tropes.

During the 2016 Presidential campaign Trump, targeted Mexicans as "rapists" and "murderers", and then targeted Muslims as potential terrorists. His attacks on the NFL protests against racism have been widely seen as attacks aimed at black athletes and blacks in general. With his latest comments on the connection between AIDS and Haitian refugees, Trump now combines older and newer forms of racist discourse in ways reminiscent of both Pearson's and Huntington's ideas and recommendations.

Amnesia of Underdevelopment

In the current news cycle, the press has focused on the obvious racism of Trump's contempt for people from countries he labels "shitholes." Less discussed has been the degree to which imperialism has so exploited and underdeveloped those parts of the world that its peoples do in many ways live in cesspools. These cesspools are the direct result of neo-imperialist domination through the "structural adjustment" policies of the IMF and the World Bank. This innocent-sounding name refers to demands to cut social services and lay off public workers as a condition to borrow money from banks in order to pay interest on enormous loans made by those same banks decades ago, in many cases, to murderous US-supported military dictatorships. Neo-imperialist domination of Latin America by the IMF and World Bank means shorter life expectancy, sky-high rates of infant mortality, poor and far-from-universal education, and the reproduction of women's oppression. This imperialist domination creates the urban and rural slums where twenty-first century people live without electricity, running water, sanitation systems, or transportation, schools, health care, adequate food, and jobs outside the desperate informal economy.

Dr. Thelisma Heber cares for a patient at the Cholera Treatment Center in Mirebalais, Haiti. Photo: Rebecca E. Rollins/Partners In Health
Dilapidated sanitation systems have led to the return of water-borne diseases like cholera that had been wiped out long ago. Africa's lack of infrastructure, a legacy of colonialism, has until recently made this region undesirable even to neo-imperialist exploitation of low wage labor. The lack of health systems, a direct legacy of colonial domination, resulted in staggeringly high death rates during the AIDS epidemic, orphaning a generation of children. From the radioactive waste left at Vieques in Puerto Rico to the toxic material used on Central American highways the US has done much to create miserable living conditions throughout the global south. Yes, many people in the

countries insulted by Trump live in cesspools, and those cesspools were created by the very US imperialism that Trump wants to make "great again."

For a New Internationalism

The history of colonial and racial oppression is also that of resistance and revolt. From the Haitian revolution of the 1790s, to the African Independence movements of the 20th century, the Cuban revolution of 1959, and the revolutionary movements in the Caribbean and Central America in the 1970s and 1980s, to the Zapatista Rebellion in 1994, the peoples of the areas insulted by Trump have demonstrated an impressive capacity to struggle against imperialist oppression.

Hundreds of thousands of Haitians demand release of political prisoners and return of President Aristide deposed by U.S.-supported coup. Photo: Reuters

Trump's rhetorical assault on the peoples of Haiti, Africa, and Central America, and immigrant communities from those countries could serve as a call for a new internationalism between the peoples of dominated countries and those experiencing racial and class oppression in the US.

Given the concentration of immigrants and people of color in the low wage sectors of the economy, the labor movement should denounce Trump's comments and the policies they represent in the strongest terms and extend the hand of solidarity across borders to all workers and oppressed peoples.

More immediately we can support actions to defend immigrants that Trump has attacked, including this campaign by CISPES to maintain temporary protected status for 435,000 Haitian, El Salvadoran and Nicaraguan immigrants.

January 15, 2018

[Solidarity](#)

Pension reform, neoliberalism and street fighting

16 January 2018, by **Gabriela Mitidieri**

Argentina:

Gabriela Mitidieri / Democracia Socialista

The pension reform law in question is fundamentally a change in the way pensions are calculated which also affects non-contributory pensions, and also social benefits such as universal child allowance. "The project proposes to change the way pension amounts are regulated. They will be defined at 70% in relation to inflation for the two previous quarters and at 30% according to the recorded growth of wages".

"This change in the calculation of pensions will result in a loss of income for retirees, because their purchasing power will stagnate, and they can no longer improve their condition. The net loss of purchasing power will be 21%" [22]. To get an idea of what this represents: 1 Argentine dollar is worth 21 euros.

From a feminist point of view, it is important to highlight some elements that make it possible to measure how the right wing turn in the south of the American continent and the attacks on the social rights of individuals particularly affects women and exacerbates the feminization of poverty. As indicated in a recently published [note](#), until 2014, it was estimated 62% of retirees were women. In turn, 86% of those who reached the last pension moratorium were women. Indeed, because of the structurally precarious nature of the female labour market, many women are not able to contribute enough for their pensions, either because they were not employed in formal work, or because they were unpaid domestic workers. By contributing a maximum of 10 years, a retiree receives an average monthly salary of \$5,700 (≈\$271), while access to basic goods

and services, taking into account inflation, exceeds \$16,000 (≈\$761).

Argentine feminist economists, such as Patricia Latererra and Corina Rodríguez Enríquez, along with the sociologist Flora Partenio, have rightly pointed out that "the precariousness of life is being supported by an increase in unpaid care work by women". 99% of the beneficiaries of the universal allowance per child are women, and they also receive 64% of non-contributory retirement pensions (for example, for disability), which again demonstrates how care tasks are feminized in the domestic space.

So, these are the "raw data". The government of Cambiemos was emboldened. Its legitimacy was consolidated, it seems obvious, after the parliamentary elections in mid-term in October, following which the list of the outgoing Kirchnerist government (named after Cristina Kirchner, president of the country from 2007 to 2015) failed to position itself well, while the traditional left was mildly successful in electing two MPs to Congress. At the same time, the repressive climate and the criminalization of social protest have increased.

This situation reached a point of extreme violence with the disappearance, following a police operation, of Santiago Maldonado, an activist in the cause of the Mapuche people, who was later found dead. Last month, in November, Rafael Nahuel, a Mapuche boy who resisted the privatization of his ancestral communal territories in Patagonia, was also murdered. Social movements have become accustomed these last two years to go onto the streets once, twice and sometimes even three times a week.

Since March 8, in Buenos Aires, raids

have become the mode of operation of the police at the end of each demonstration. This led us to relearn anti-repressive methods, demanding the release of each violent arbitrary detention carried out by one of the three police forces authorized to do so. However, the apparent social hegemony that Cambiemos was building did not allow it to see that every December is a new baptism of fire.

The approach of the end of the year, the difficulty of reaching the minimum subsistence level, the still fresh memory of 2001, the year when popular mobilization managed to open a breach in the normal functioning of neoliberalism, are so many elements that seem to have resurfaced. The attack on pensions was seen as a step too far, according to the feeling of large sectors of society.

Thus, professional union sectors that took a stand against the passivity of the General Confederation of Workers, leftist and Kirchnerist organizations, women's and youth movements met on the plaza in front of the Congress the day the discussion of the law was planned. The week before, the government had not obtained the quorum to do so, while the popular mobilization that challenged the regressive nature of the reform was taking shape.

On Monday, December 18, everything seemed in place for the ruling coalition to pass the law. Since the quorum was not reached, the coalition negotiated with the provincial governors to pressure their MPs to pass the measure.

This time, following the violations committed by the repressive violence of the police, the preferred body of the Minister of Security, it was decided that only the police of the city would

act in the event of any disturbances. In the morning, unions, social organizations and left-wing parties gathered in front of the Congress. We have learned quickly from the Macrist ferocity and we coordinated protective measures, devices specific to feminist comrades in our organizations, who have learned how to react to the police because of the attacks they have suffered in recent years during the closing march of the National Women's Meetings.

Many of us rediscovered the memory of organizing against neoliberalism, during the days of December 2001, in the resistance of the occupations of companies like those of Brukman and Zanón, among others. That Monday,

we failed to break the arrogance of a government of entrepreneurs and marketers and financiers. The law has been approved, it is a fact that Macrism has now more than 50 billion pesos thanks to this brutal cut in the pensions of Argentineans.

But something happened: an afternoon of open confrontation with the police, a resistance to abandoning the public space and our right to protest, gestures of class solidarity between strangers who, faced with each new attack of gas tear gas and rubber bullets, intensified the songs of "Unity of the workers and whoever does not like to be screwed over!" Or "If it's not the people, where is it?". A

night of spontaneous mobilizations in every neighbourhood of the city of Buenos Aires, in cities across the country that have recovered this old national custom, of hitting pots in the streets to make popular discontent heard. We are still in the process of recovering all this.

But, we will try to ensure things do not go off the boil while we sketch provisional analyses that allow us to continue the struggle and the organization of those who do not want this state of affairs to continue. We call for solidarity and internationalist comradeship for this beginning of resistance to be better known, in the face of the neoliberal advance that affects us all.

Cyril Ramaphosa Is Not the Answer

15 January 2018, by Benjamin Fogel

Ramaphosa's supporters have heralded his victory as a triumph over the corruption, criminality, incompetence, and repression that have characterized Zuma's unmitigated disaster of a presidency. Once a darling of the Left, Ramaphosa's reputation will forever be stained by his involvement in the Marikana massacre. In the days preceding the massacre, he petitioned the government on behalf of Lonmin. His actions directly contributed to the murder of thirty-four workers, betraying the movement he cut his political teeth in.

Widely seen as "captured" by the [Guptas](#), an Indian business family, Zuma and his cronies have dismantled large sections of the state, including the national prosecutor and the tax revenue service, in order to keep themselves out of prison.

Zuma's championing of Radical Economic Transformation (RET) has done nothing to help the economy. Under Zuma's tenure, the economy was downgraded to junk status, crime in all its incarnations rose, the once-mighty trade union movement split,

manufacturing jobs disappeared, unemployment reached a record official high of 27 percent, and living conditions of the majority of working-class blacks have visibly declined.

The Zuma administration depicted any opposition from the media, the business community, or within the ANC as "White Monopoly Capital." And indeed, big capital in South Africa is as corrupt and venal as Zuma and his cronies. When it has suited their bottom lines, corporations have participated in "state capture" and helped the Guptas milk the country for all it's worth. Big capital in both its domestic and international incarnations, including KPMG, MultiChoice, and McKinsey and Company, have all been implicated in the Guptas' schemes. Last week, in the country's largest corporate fraud scandal, the [Steinhoff furniture company](#) was revealed as a criminal enterprise.

South Africa is [the most unequal](#) country in the world. While the racial demographics of inequality have changed since the end of apartheid — 49 percent as opposed 86 percent

of top income owners are white, with blacks making up 30 percent — almost the entirety of the poorest sections of the population are black. But Zuma's rhetoric distracts from the fact that his administration failed to challenge capital. It has [gutted and looted](#) state institutions, hurting South Africa's black working class the most.

For good reason, Zuma and his faction may have lost the party presidency, but the most corrupt and dangerous elements of the ANC are in control of the party. The ANC is now partially controlled by the so-called Premier League, a nickname that refers to a corrupt cabal of premiers (governors) of key South African provinces, more akin to Mafia capos than politicians operating in a constitutional democracy. Two of their members now have positions in the ANC's top six: David Mabuza (premier of Mpumalanga) and Ace Magashule (premier of the Free State).

Two of South Africa's most dangerous gangsters, Mabuza and Magashule have transformed their respective provinces into private fiefdoms. Mabuza has been linked to several

political murders and seems more than willing to take out his rivals. Magashule [paid for](#) the Gupta's niece's wedding in cash, and the ANC disqualified his province from elections twice thanks to his utter disrespect for basic democratic process â€” a remarkable achievement considering the party's already low standards.

Magashule will oversee the party's day-to-day maintenance as secretary-general of the ANC with the help of Jessie Duarte (re-elected as deputy secretary-general), an unprincipled Gupta flunky, and Mabuza is in position to become the next president of South Africa after Ramaphosa.

The result is [most likely](#) a disaster: with Mabuza and Magashule in office, it will be difficult for Ramaphosa to embark on any serious reforms or policy changes, and he might not even be able to recall Zuma. Unity, as Mabuza dubs it, means that the ANC won't split and the SACP and COSATU will remain in the alliance, aborting any hopes for a new left party to emerge out of it. Indeed, there are indications that a deal was cut between Ramaphosa and Mabuza before the conference that saw Mabuza become kingmaker by switching his support from NDZ to Ramaphosa. It could quite possibly mean that Mabuza might have broken with the Premier League and is seeking to carve out a new faction, making him even more dangerous and unpredictable.

Two competing patronage networks now run the ANC: one aligned with big capital promising stability, and the other representing a predatory faction based off transferring state assets to politically connected elites even if it plunges the country into economic crisis.

Zuma Stands Alone

The RET surrounded this campaign. The latest iteration of ANC policy, it promotes an end to neoliberalism, radical redistribution, and the transfer of the South African economy into black hands.

On the first day of the conference, Zuma announced the RET's centerpiece: a plan for free higher education, following several years of [student protests](#) under the #FeesMustFall campaign. Zuma's move was based on a proposal allegedly put together by a state security agent who also happens to be his daughter's boyfriend.

Zuma neglected to consult the party, his finance minister, or the treasury before making the announcement â€” a move that violated all standards of constitutional democracy and should make us very skeptical of the prospects for such measures being implemented.

During the conference, Zuma delivered a monumentally awful speech, speaking as if he had been a mere observer for the last decade instead of party and national president. He blamed the ANC's and South Africa's woes on imperialist plots, the courts, the media, civil society â€” everyone but himself. It is best summed up by Zuma's insistence that that he did his best as president and had no regrets, despite the depth of the current crisis.

Zuma's anti-imperialist rhetoric is so transparently opportunistic and mendacious that it persuades few. The South African working class recognizes the RET as cynical marketing, but also knows that Ramaphosa isn't their man either.

Zuma has thrown all his former allies, including trade union leader Zwelinzima Vavi and SACP leader Blade Nzimande, under the bus. All he has left are the Gupta bots, the gangsters, the flunkies, and the utter morons, like the thirty-seven-year-old ANC Youth League president Collen Maine. Publicly derided as "the Oros Man," -- referring to South Africa's mascot for our homegrown koolaid, an orange version of the Michelin man -- Maine hasn't been able to earn the respect of a single South African.

"Oros" made his name for such pathetic stunts as threatening to necklace former finance minister Pravin Gordhan for being an "impimpi" (informer), despite having [no anti-apartheid struggle](#) credentials

of which to speak. Indeed, the ANC's younger generation has no political talent; they received their positions thanks to blind loyalty and a willingness to throw their principles by the wayside.

From Ramaphosa's perspective, uniting with the ANC's gangster faction would be a disastrous result, but we shouldn't expect a split, a purge, accountability, or an alternative â€” just stalemate. I genuinely hope I am wrong and that Ramaphosa is able to out maneuver his enemies while stabilizing the economy and purging the state of its parasitic elements, but it's hard to have faith in the ANC.

Zuma is safe for the time being. It suits neither Ramaphosa nor the Gupta-axis to split the party or escalate the factionalism. Both sides recognize that they need control of the state to power their respective patronage machines.

Actual Radical Transformation

At least Ramaphosa's corruption will give South Africans trains that actually work â€” under Zuma, the government made a two billion dollar deal for carriages that didn't fit the tracks. At least Ramaphosa can appoint the next national prosecutor and replace the odious Shaun Abrahams. And at least South Africa's state won't be dismantled, so that a future left government â€” here I am being [quite optimistic](#) â€” will have something to inherit.

What remains of the South African left cannot assume that the heroism of the [anti-apartheid struggle](#) has left behind a mass base crying out for socialism, just waiting for the right leader or rhetoric. It also cannot assume that high levels of social struggle will automatically translate into a counter-hegemonic movement. It must build a majority and win people over. Taking shortcuts gave us Zuma â€” at the very least, we must learn from our mistakes; these mistakes destroyed one of the most powerful labor movements in the world.

While the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and their leader Julius Malema have more than a few flaws, they have shown that left rhetoric and militancy have an audience in South Africa after winning more than a million votes in the 2014 elections. While the EFF were initially dismissed as mere opportunists by the established left, they have kept emancipatory ideas in South Africa's political discourses and probably done more to give Zuma sleepless nights than the center-right Democratic Alliance and their liberal support base's endless whining. A left party won't be birthed by the backroom deals and insiders's club-

style endemic to NGOs and the trade union movement; it needs a vision that attracts people and builds cadre instead of sycophants.

Without a movement, we can only discuss defensive struggles to protect post-apartheid gains, such as the social-grant system, the constitution, and the state of a judiciary, which continues to side with the poor and working class more often than not.

The reconstruction of a [trade union movement](#) initiated by the [new](#) South African Federation of Trade Unions will take years as the economic conditions and decimation of

manufacturing jobs means the climate for labor organizing is exceptionally difficult.

South Africa needs more than a new leader: it needs a new vision, one that levels economic inequality and dismantles patronage systems, one that both draws from the heroic past and charts a new way forward. That is almost certainly not on the agenda for Ramaphosa, while gangsters like Mabuza threaten to drag the country into a nightmare.

21 December 2017

[Jacobin](#)

Solidarity with the popular protests in Iran!

14 January 2018, by Alliance of Middle Eastern and North African Socialists

We, the Alliance of Middle Eastern Socialists, support the popular protests in Iran and call on progressives in the region and throughout the world to stand in solidarity with them as well. We believe it is an absolute necessity to build regional and global solidarity with anti-authoritarian struggles for democracy, social justice and equality, and to oppose patriarchy, racism, sectarian or homophobic discrimination and prejudice. We hope that the current protests in Iran will force the Iranian regime to withdraw its military and financial support for the murderous regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, and to end its reactionary interventions in the region. We also hope that the efforts by some elements to inject anti-Arab chauvinism into the movement will be rejected in order to reach out to grassroots struggles across the region.

So far, at least 22 individuals have been killed (3 in detention) and the violent security forces have arrested more than 3700 persons including 1000 in the southern city of Ahvaz, and many women who have been

actively involved in the protests. Iran's authoritarian regime has also blocked access to Telegram and Instagram instant messaging, which are heavily used, and has limited access to the internet by creating interferences. At least 100 student activists, especially leftists and progressives, have been arrested and some have been released. Security forces have surrounded and in some cases invaded university campuses. Other students and labor activists are being hunted and kidnapped from their homes and dorms. Those captured may well face torture.

The Iranian regime, similar to other authoritarian regimes of the region, has accused the protesters of being part of an international conspiracy led by the USA, Saudi Arabia and Israel.

The protests are rooted in socio-economic problems, notably poverty, unemployment, and political repression, lack of democratic freedoms such as freedom of speech and assembly. Furthermore, discrimination against women and national and religious minorities is intensifying opposition in an ethnically

diverse population that has an 87% literacy rate and is connected to the world through the internet. 40% of the population lives under the relative poverty line and 90% of Iran's workers are contract workers without any rights and benefits. The minimum wage of \$230 per month, which is one fifth of what is needed to support a family of four, is not even enforced. Many Subsidies for basic food items and essential services were abolished between 2010 and 2014, during the presidencies of Mahmoud Ahamadinejad and Hassan Rouhani. At the same time the prices of basic foodstuffs are exploding. The share of healthcare in the budget has been slashed. Energy prices are going up. All this, combined with rising general inflation (12% according to the regime and 40% in fact) is a new blow to the purchasing power of workers and the poorest segments of society.

At the same time, billions of dollars in the budget are going to institutions/foundations related to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). These non-accountable and tax-exempt foundations are among the largest holding companies in the

Middle East. These foundations or "parastatal institutions" are in fact run by the state and led by the dignitaries of the regime and the leadership of the IRGC, Iran's de facto military. They hold more than 80% of the Iranian economy. Furthermore, In 2103, the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, controlled about 95 billion dollars through the Setad ("Setad ejraie hazrate emam" or "Seat for the execution of the orders of the Imam"). It has shares in virtually every sector of the country's economy, from finance to oil, real estate and telecommunications.

Large portions of the profits which the state/IRGC extract from the Iranian/Middle Eastern labor force are spent on direct and indirect military intervention and ideological propaganda in the region as well as funding security/police/basij forces inside the country.

The latests protests have actually been preceded by over a year of almost daily actions and strikes by workers against non-payment of wages and terrible working conditions, protests and strikes by impoverished retirees, teachers, nurses as well as those who have lost their meager savings in bankrupt banks and financial institutions. Many political prisoners, including Reza Shahabi, a labor leader, have been on hunger strike off and on for several years.

Two statement by independent labor organizations have declared their support for the most recent popular protests. These statements have been issued by the Tehran Bus Workers Union and the Haft Tapeh Sugarcane Workers Union, as well as Five other independent labor organizations (Free union of Iranian workers, Association of Electrical and Metal Workers of Kermanshah, Association of Painters of Alborz Province, Labor Defenders' Center, Committee for the Pursuit of the Establishment of Labor Organizations). We support their views which are summed up in the following passage:

"We, together with the toiling masses of Iran, shout something that should

be clear: Our demands for an end to poverty and misery should be realized; all oppression and prisons should end; all political prisoners should be freed and predators of social wealth and those responsible for oppression should be prosecuted and tried, no matter what position they hold; the wealth stolen from people by financial institutions should be given back; the minimum wage of workers and employees of both public and private sectors be increased fivefold and the massive income of government authorities be slashed; the right of workers to form independent trade unions and civil organization and their unconditional freedom of speech and press and freedom of political parties is to be guaranteed and the demands of millions of Iranian masses be realized."

Most protesters have raised slogans against all factions of the authoritarian regime, whether the so-called "reformists" or the hardliners, while calling for democracy, social justice and equality symbolized by the slogan "Bread, Work and Freedom." Although the wave of street protests has receded after two weeks under the pressure of state repression, the struggle has now turned toward labor strikes and other industrial actions. Many women's rights activists, teachers, families of political prisoners, various well-known intellectuals and artists are also publicly defending the protests. Families of political prisoners have been protesting outside the Evin prison in Tehran and other prisons to demand their release.

Similar to the uprisings and popular protests in the region of Middle East and North Africa since 2010-2011, these protests are a response to both economic impoverishment and political and social repression. They have the added feature of opposing the military interventions of the Iranian regime in other countries of the region, especially Syria, symbolized by the slogan "Leave Syria Alone, Pay Attention to Us".

The Islamic Republic of Iran cannot be

reformed. Since 1979 when the Iranian revolution quickly transformed into a counter-revolution, Iranian youth, women and workers have been subjected to a capitalist, reactionary and theocratic regime that represses, tortures and physically and systematically eliminates its opponents.

This is why we, the Alliance of Middle Eastern Socialists, support the popular protests in Iran and call on progressives in the region and throughout the world to stand in solidarity with them as well. We believe it is an absolute necessity to build regional and global solidarity with anti-authoritarian struggles for democracy, social justice and equality, and to oppose patriarchy, racism, sectarian or homophobic discrimination and prejudice. We hope that the current protests in Iran will force the Iranian regime to withdraw its military and financial support for the murderous regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, and to end its reactionary interventions in the region. We also hope that the efforts by some elements to inject anti-Arab chauvinism into the movement will be rejected in order to reach out to grassroots struggles across the region.

We oppose all foreign imperialist interventions and demand an end to the sanctions against Iran, which affect firstly and mostly the popular classes of the country.

We demand the release of all protesters, trade-unionists and other political prisoners.

Solidarity with the popular protests in Iran for democracy, social justice, and secularism!

Solidarity with our comrades!

No to Capitalism. No to Patriarchy! No to Racism! No to Sectarianism! Yes to the unity of the popular classes!

Our destinies and our emancipation are linked!

January 11, 2018

Why Do So Many Western Leftists Defend Robert Mugabe?

13 January 2018, by Benjamin Fogel

Why do so many Western leftists feel the need to defend a [counter-revolutionary](#), kleptocratic despot like Robert Mugabe? Is it because a country like Zimbabwe and its struggles only matter for them to score points against their interlocutors in the United States or Europe?

Mugabe is almost universally reviled among his own people. His corrupt, [authoritarian regime](#) was about as far from any desirable socialist project as one could possibly imagine and he hijacked a popular movement performing actual land reform in order to save his stumbling autocracy.

He remains a harsh social conservative who [advocates](#) legal action against LGBTIQ persons. Gays are “worse than dogs and pigs,” he once [said](#).

Mugabe was a neoliberal stooge up until the 2000s. And far from being a Pan-Africanist hero, he sent his army to intervene in the most rapacious war in Africa’s history in the Congo, where it committed major war crimes and seized diamond mines from the DRC in order funnel billions of the illicit proceeds from “blood diamonds” into the coffers of Zimbabwe’s ruling elite, [including](#) new president, Emmerson Mnangagwa.

I would love to see some of Mugabe’s apologists explain away his son’s [comments](#), mad at an exclusive club in Johannesburg a few weeks before the coup: “60k (USD of course) on my wrist, because my daddy runs the country.”

The historical record shows that Mugabe [did away](#) with his rivals (through “car accidents” and “suicides”), many of whom played a greater role in the struggle against the Rhodesian apartheid tyranny than

he did, and [unleashed](#) a genocidal campaign against his own people shortly after coming to power in order to secure his own power base; at least twenty thousand people were indiscriminately murdered by a special army unit in 1983 and 1984. The Zimbabwean [trade union movement](#) and its socialist left have both been major victims of Zanu-PF’s authoritarian rule.

In the end, China replaced the West as the major power with interests in Zimbabwe. Far from the coup being an imperialist project, it is likely that China [put pressure](#) on Zanu-PF to remove the aging and increasingly unreliable despot. As the Financial Times [“](#)which cautioned against exaggerating the role of China in the coup [”](#) [concluded](#): “Beijing didn’t stand in the way . . . Mugabe clearly lost China’s favor.” (The FT also suggested there’s a lesson in the events for other African autocrats long supported by China: “Might your opponents persuade China to look the other way as you are pushed out the door?”)

It should be remembered that it was Mugabe [who championed](#) the IMF’s structural-adjustment policies in Zimbabwe and oversaw decades of disastrous economic policies that deindustrialized the country before land reform took off. According to some estimates, Zimbabwe has an unemployment rate of 91 percent. Only 5 percent of Zimbabweans are in formal employment. The country’s economy has halved since 2000. Zimbabwe’s people suffer while the spoiled failsons of the elite floss on the ‘gram.

Zimbabwe is also compared with Venezuela. But while Venezuela suffers from serious economic problems, it reached heights far

beyond those in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe’s was a “socialism” based on an almost entirely informal economy, a kleptocratic state, and the wholesale transfer of raw materials to China at knockoff prices. No Zimbabwean is delusional enough to take Zanu-PF’s propaganda seriously, but it seems more than a few Westerners are prepared to believe the lazy spin emanating from jaded hacks like the odious former health minister Jonathan Moyo, to depict Mugabe as a socialist revolutionary.

Zimbabwe’s tragedy is not one of a socialist dream falling under its own contradictions. It was always a tale of an authoritarian and self-interested elite crushing democracy and impoverishing its people. Mugabe, unlike Gaddafi (who at least built a semi-decent welfare state for Libyans), wasn’t removed through Western military intervention; the current political conjuncture in Zimbabwe arises from Zanu’s own failings rather than some diabolical Western plot.

One can even defend Zimbabwean land reform without supporting Mugabe, who hijacked the project, ensuring his family and their cronies made off with the prime land. Critiquing an aging despot does not make you an apologist for the despicable Rhodesian regime, which remains a stain on human history. One can even claim that Mugabe and Zanu-PF betrayed the national liberation struggle. You can also rightly criticize British lies and failures when it comes to their promise to fund Zimbabwean land reform. But the people who poured out on the streets of Harare after Mugabe was toppled were not the dupes of Western imperialism; they represented the joyous outpouring of a population that has known untold suffering over the last few decades, a people who had given

up hope of any real political change before the old man died.

It is even possible to be skeptical of supporting a coup led by the most repressive and corrupt elements of the Zimbabwean ruling class, while also appreciating the real joy and sense of hope that has returned to the Zimbabwean people after so many years where they were robbed of the ability to dream of a better future, or even a future at all. This remains Mugabe's greatest crime: the terror and powerlessness that comes from decades of personalized rule which inflict psychic damage on a people for generations.

Zimbabwe, despite the immense damage done by Mugabe to its universities and intellectual culture, still has many fine intellectuals (most

of whom are in exile). Read their takes, appreciate their work, and follow their lead, not the soundbites and tweets from those simply looking to score points over other Western socialists. For instance, when an [article](#) on Mugabe's legacy by a black Zimbabwean scholar appeared recently in the African online publication *Africa is a Country* and [was adapted](#) by Jacobin, it was dubbed part of a racist conspiracy against black socialist leaders on Facebook and Twitter. What could be a greater colonial erasure of African intellectual culture?

Those who use Zimbabwe simply as a weapon to batter their rivals on the Left in the United States mirror the despicable conservatives who use Zimbabwe as a rhetorical machine gun

to spray against any who dares speak about radical land reform or the heroic legacy of national liberation struggles. As Fanon [wrote](#) so many years ago: "No leader, however valuable he may be, can substitute himself for the popular will; and the national government, before concerning itself about international prestige, ought first to give back their dignity to all citizens, fill their minds and feast their eyes with human things, and create a prospect that is human because conscious and sovereign men dwell therein."

What is so "imperialist" about not celebrating reactionary authoritarian regimes and the geriatric despots that loot impoverished countries to pay for their failsons' Instagram lifestyles?

[Africa is a Country](#)

Québec Solidaire Clarifies Its Support for Independence

12 January 2018, by [Richard Fidler](#)

Following extensive debate, the fusion proposal was adopted by a vote of more than 80% of the 550 QS delegates. At a subsequent ON congress in Quebec City on December 10, the fusion with QS was accepted by 90% of the members who voted [23] Several dozen more, opposed to the fusion, walked out and did not vote. [24]

However, the QS congress lacked sufficient time to debate and adopt the bulk of the proposed platform, including some of the most important parts. It will be left to the party's 16-member executive, the national coordinating committee (CCN), to adopt the remaining proposals in the spring of 2018, in consultation with the party's policy commission which had created the original draft platform.

Homage to Catalonia

The congress debates were informed from the outset by the lessons of Catalonia's militant mass struggle for independence from the Spanish state. The opening night heard powerful speeches by two leaders of the Catalan left pro-independence party, the *Candidatura d'Unitat Popular* (CUP), EulÀ liÀ Reguant and Anna Gabriel, the CUP spokeswoman in the now-dissolved Catalan parliament. [25] Their presentations (in French) can be heard and viewed here. Their message of internationalist solidarity with national liberation struggles everywhere [26] was cited by a number of participants in the congress's subsequent debates. [27]

In a pre-congress interview, QS spokesman Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois

said the recent events in Catalonia had "opened up our thinking about the need for a clear and positive approach" to Quebec independence. They reveal, he said,

"the profoundly revolutionary nature of the independence process, which entails a rupture with the dominant political system.... Catalonia is a good reminder that independence cannot be achieved only from above, in the salons of Outremont, with experienced constitutional scholars. The political forces that are going to lead the Quebec people toward independence are going to have to have the potential to generate a powerful social mobilization." [28]

This thinking was reflected in the congress debate on fusion with ON, and in particular in the new centrality of the fight for Quebec independence that fusion entails.

Further Clarity on Quebec Independence

At its earlier congress in May 2017, See [29] Québec solidaire had voted to probe the possibilities for a fusion between QS and Option nationale. In the proposed negotiations between the respective party leaders, it said, QS would “discuss in its authoritative bodies the development of political campaigns on the independence of Quebec and the means by which to accede to it.”

However, no report on these negotiations was issued to the QS membership until early October, when a joint news conference of QS and ON leaders suddenly announced they had signed an “agreement in principle” on a fusion that was to be put to the respective party congresses in December.

The agreement – presented as a “package deal” for adoption without amendment by the party memberships – indicated that Option nationale had taken advantage of the QS leaders’ eagerness for a fusion to drive a hard bargain. I have summarized its key provisions in an appendix to this article, below. Among these provisions:

â€¢ ON is to continue to exist within QS as a “collective” with special rights not allowed to the other half-dozen or so collectives in the party. Under the QS statutes, members promoting specific orientations for the party (for example, secularism, ecosocialism, degrowth, animal rights, etc.) are allowed to organize within the party as a recognized collective, provided they comprise at least 10 members and abide by the party’s “fundamental values.” They are not given representation in leading bodies of the party, however. Under the agreement, ON will constitute a distinct collective with its own funding and representation in leading bodies, and at least three ON members will be nominated in 2018 as candidates in electoral constituencies deemed “winnable” for QS.

ON leader Sol Zanetti will be presented as the leading party spokesman on “issues surrounding the independence of Quebec.”

â€¢ The ON collective will organize a “university” on independence in the spring of 2018, with the right to organize this event each year, provided it is self-financed.

â€¢ The unified party will republish an ON publication, the *Livre qui fait dire oui* [the “Book that leads to a yes”], although the “sovereign” Quebec it advocates is totally neoliberal in its economic program and conflicts in major respects with the QS program. [30]

â€¢ A party congress after the 2018 election will review the QS program with a view to “aligning it with the ON program” – the program of a party that has always said the independence it proposes is “neither left nor right” in its political content.

As might be expected, the sudden announcement of this ON-QS agreement aroused considerable controversy in the ranks of both parties. Many QS militants, in particular, deplored the fact that they had been given no opportunity to experience dialogue or collaboration with ON as a prelude to a unification of the parties. Instead, some noted, ON had run a candidate against QS in a recent by-election in Quebec City, and (unlike the PQ, which desisted) had even run against Nadeau-Dubois when he was the QS candidate to succeed party leader Françoise David in Gouin riding last spring.

Some members protested their inability to amend the agreement with its 18 different provisions, as well as the party leadership’s insistence that it could be approved by a simple majority of votes at the congress even though it entailed some changes in the party statutes (which require a two-thirds majority for amendment).

A Constituent Assembly for an

Independent State

But the substantive criticism, the subject of the most controversy in QS, was the agreement’s inclusion of amendments to the party’s program providing that a Québec solidaire government would act from the outset as the government of an independent Quebec, and its proposed Constituent Assembly would develop a draft constitution of an independent Quebec that would then be submitted to a popular referendum for approval.

Thus the ON-QS agreement alters what has been Québec solidaire’s favoured mechanism for accession to independence. As I have noted in previous articles, since its founding in 2006 the party has insisted that the constitution to be drafted by its proposed Constituent Assembly need not necessarily be the constitution of an independent Quebec, that it could simply be, for example, a proposal for greater provincial autonomy within the Canadian constitutional regime – even though Québec solidaire itself would fight for an independent Quebec within the Assembly.

This ambiguity with respect to the Assembly’s mandate reflected in part a fear that federalist supporters – currently a majority in Quebec – would be disinclined to participate in a project aimed at founding an independent state. It also reflected, I suspect, lingering federalist sympathies among former members of Option citoyenne, the feminist and community-centered organization that was one of the new party’s founding components in 2006. (The other one, the radical-left Union des Forces Progressistes, had always advocated a constituent assembly with a “closed mandate” to found an independent and socialist Quebec.)

However, this ambivalence over the Assembly’s mandate was not universally accepted by QS members. Nadeau Dubois had indicated he disagreed with the open mandate. And only last May, QS representatives in OUI Québec, a coalition of pro-sovereignty parties (PQ, ON, QS and the Bloc québécois) working to develop a common “road map” in the fight for independence, had signed a

joint statement with the other parties endorsing the proposal for a Constituent Assembly but specifying that the Assembly must develop the constitution of an independent Quebec. [31] They were then overruled by the QS leadership, who withheld that statement from the QS congress meeting soon afterwards. As the party's national coordination committee explained in a report to the December congress, the four-party statement "completely contravened the QS program on this sensitive question."

Thus the ON-QS Agreement in Principle, with its amendments to what the QS program says about the mandate of the Constituent Assembly, represented for some QS members a sea change in a basic part of that program. A typical reaction was that of Jean-Claude Balu, chair of the QS orientations committee. In a vigorous dissent, Balu noted that from the outset of the process of defining its program, QS had made a rigorous distinction between its support of Quebec independence and its conception of a constituent assembly that is a "fully sovereign assembly of citizens open to everyone."

"In our founding principles, we say the national question must belong to the population of Quebec as a whole, including the indigenous peoples and persons of every origin, and not to the political parties.

"Moreover, if we really wish to have relations of equals, nation to nation, with the indigenous peoples throughout the constituent process, they must be invited to participate without imposing any conditions whatsoever upon them." Option nationale, he noted, with its virtually sole emphasis on independence, had manifestly failed to win electoral support. (In fact, ON's electoral results have barely exceeded 1% of the popular vote.)

"To rally a popular majority, Québec solidaire has relied since its founding on its social agenda [projet de société] and, to counter the downturn in support for independence, on a strategy linking its social transformation project to the accession to independence through a

popular and sovereign Constituent Assembly."

The QS members negotiating fusion with ON, Balu concluded, should have done a better job in defending the party's positions.

Most of the debate over the fusion agreement took place publicly, and almost all of the key documents were published in the on-line journal *Presse-toi À gauche*. [32]

Does Independence Trump Democracy?

Balu accurately expresses the reasoning behind Québec solidaire's road map to independence, as it has been articulated up to now. However, the argument is notable for its wishful thinking. The fight for an independent Quebec necessarily confronts powerful propertied interests dominant within the existing federal state and civil society. They will bring to bear immense media and material resources to influence and if necessary sabotage the proceedings of a constituent assembly. No matter how democratically appointed, or how democratic its functioning, if it lacks the clear objective of establishing the framework for an independent state the assembly will be immensely vulnerable to such pressures. Yet any result short of the draft constitution of an independent Quebec would simply be of no effect whatsoever. As Québec solidaire has consistently said, the federal regime cannot be reformed to become an adequate framework for the party's progressive social agenda. Yet the QS ambiguity on the Constituent Assembly mandate has undermined the credibility of the party's commitment to independence.

In a six-page leaflet distributed to congress delegates, a self-described group of "QS members in favour of the agreement for fusion with ON" addressed the fear of some QS members that the party's support of independence might trump its commitment to democracy:

"What makes the Constituent Assembly radically democratic is precisely that it directly involves the people in the foundation of a new state, given the perspective of independence. But... it must be clear from the beginning that the question of independence will be posed in the [subsequent] referendum [to approve the new constitution]. If there is a lack of clarity during the constituent process, the debates will be confused: are we writing the constitution of a province, of a country, both at once, one or the other separately? That is why we must know clearly where we are heading.

"Giving the constituent process direction or a destination does not mean it will be controlled from above, or that the people will not have an opportunity to declare themselves freely on their political future. Quite the contrary, it means leaving it to the people to democratically draft the outline of their proposed country [their project de pays] without having to comply a priori with the narrow constraints of the Canadian regime..."

Furthermore, the argument for independence cannot be left to an assembly appointed after the election of a Québec solidaire government. The party must campaign even today around a progressive social program that is clearly the program of a sovereign Quebec with control over all the powers of an independent state. And it must be recognized that the party will come to power only on the strength of a massive social movement from below that challenges the capitalist logic and laws responsible for the social inequality and environmental catastrophe we are now facing – a movement for "another Quebec" that is analogous, but multiplied many times over, to the mass upsurge sparked by the Quebec students who in 2012 mobilized and won broad popular support for free public post-secondary education.

The arguments in support of the Agreement in Principle negotiated by QS and ON leaders had been amply expressed before the congress, so the debate at the congress gave greater exposure to the critics and opponents. However, in the end the delegates voted overwhelmingly to accept the

agreement.

Québec solidaire leaned over backwards to accommodate Option nationale's concerns and it remains to be seen how this will affect the party's functioning in the near future. Clearly, the integration of those ON members who will now join QS will stimulate some useful internal debate. With the fusion, the former ON has been won to a party that proudly proclaims its progressive goals and program – and does not pretend that Quebec independence is neither right nor left.

Inconclusive Debate on the Election Platform

The congress was unable to achieve its other major objective, the adoption of a platform for the next Quebec election. The platform, for Québec solidaire, is intended to select and highlight particular issues and demands drawn from the lengthy program [33] that the party has hammered out over nearly a decade with a view to their immediate relevance. An initial draft is compiled by the party's policy committee; it is then submitted to the members for amendment, following which a synthesis comprising the draft and proposed amendments by QS associations and leadership bodies is debated by congress delegates.

This has proved to be a somewhat unwieldy process. This year it resulted in a 130-page document in which the 15 topics addressed are listed alphabetically – from agriculture (Agroalimentaire et ruralité) to local democracy (Vie démocratique et régionale). And although an attempt was made to prioritize certain topics for the less than two days of debate, the proposed order, in the opinion of some delegates, did not assign sufficient importance to some urgent matters of the day.

As it was, the congress managed to get through the first six of the proposed topics, for the most part without major changes in the draft, leaving the remainder (as I noted earlier) for debate and adoption by the

party's national coordinating committee later in 2018. Topics omitted from debate at the congress include economy and taxation, education, environment and energy, justice, health and social services, and strategy for sovereignty – that is, some of the most important questions the party should address in the election campaign, key components of a coherent social agenda.

Furthermore, some of the platform proposals left for later adoption by the party executive omit important parts of the party's adopted program. A blatant example is in the platform draft on the environment and climate change, which omits the QS program's target of a 67% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030 needed to comply with the COP 21 Paris accords, as well as the party's opposition to carbon taxes and carbon markets, and its call for free public transit; Québec solidaire has been unique among political parties in Canada in adopting these demanding targets and demands. Incredibly, a 24-page pamphlet circulated at the QS congress by the Réseau écosocialiste [34] likewise omits these demands, as did a pre-congress article by a Réseau leader attempting to prioritize platform proposals from an ecosocialist perspective. [35]

Québec solidaire has made important progress in 2017. But the congress debates point to important challenges the party faces during the year to come, and beyond. ¶

Appendix 1

Agreement in Principle between Option nationale and Québec solidaire – a translated summary [36]

Preamble

This fusion should allow all progressive independentists in Quebec to work within a unified party that will spearhead the promotion of Quebec independence. This union takes place therefore on the basis of the program, the founding values (independentism, democracy, ecologism, feminism,

pluralism, progressivism, global justice) and the statutes of Québec solidaire, but will preserve the spirit and visibility of the constituent aspects of Option nationale, which is summoned to become a collective in the unified party.

In the current political context, a reconciliation of the independentist and progressive forces is more necessary than ever in order to reunite the conditions for our exit from the Canadian regime and to enable the social agenda that Quebec needs. In view of the history of Quebec society and today's reality, this unification can be achieved only around a true program for a country, freed of the limits imposed by the Canadian political system. This historic agreement creates a new pole of unification for all those who are resolutely committed to this course.

The unified party will be called Québec solidaire.

Programmatic Issues

The QS program on accession to independence is to be amended as proposed in Appendix 1 hereto.

For the party program to fully reflect ON's contribution, five proposals from the ON program will be included in the electoral platform to be addressed by QS in December 2017.

The congress following the 2018 election will, in addition to adopting the party's program on "national defense," as provided by last May's QS congress, will review the entire program with particular (but not exclusive) attention to aligning it with the ON program.

Political actions

The unified party will continue its participation in OUI-Québec when it resumes its proceedings.

In the 2018 general [Quebec] election, the party spokespersons will support three candidates for nomination from ON, including at least one woman. One of these candidates will be the present leader of ON, who will be supported in contesting one of the 9 ridings considered most favourable by party's election committee among

those not already held by QS.

This arrangement will be implemented by a mediation committee formed of ON and QS members and concerned local associations.

In the 2018 general election, the unified party will present (a) a financial framework for the process of accession to independence, including the establishment of the Constituent Assembly; (b) a financial analysis showing the financial viability of an independent Quebec. And these documents will be developed by consulting economists designated by ON.

Finally, the Canadian colonial regime will be ranked equal in importance with neoliberalism in the unified party's public communications.

Organizational adjustments

ON will become a collective within QS. Its present funds will be integrated with the party's but may be used to fund initiatives of the ON collective provided the executive first approves, until the 2018 election.

The ON collective will have two positions on the national coordinating committee (a woman and a man) guaranteed for two years. QS will hire one person designated by the ON collective, who will enjoy the same conditions of employment as other employees of the party.

A committee will be established to advise and accompany ON and QS associations in their fusion process. Local, regional and campus QS associations must be fully functional as associations of the unified party no later than the end of April 2018 to ensure full participation of ON members in deliberations of the unified QS national council to be held next spring.

Every effort will be made to ensure that national commissions, theme commissions and working committees include members of ON who wish to participate.

Promotion of independence

The ON collective will organize a "university" on independence in the

spring of 2018. ON funds may be used to finance this event. The ON collective may organize this event each year, inasmuch as it is self-financed.

The unified party will work closely with the ON collective to ensure that party members have available material promoting independence on a permanent basis, including the republication, reprinting and development of the *Livre qui fait dire oui* [the "Book that leads to a yes"], within the budgetary constraints of the party.

The unified party will feature the current ON leader in its public communications and activities concerning the issues surrounding the independence of Quebec, and in particular in public presentations on the matter.

Appendix 2

The Québec solidaire program concerning accession to independence will be amended as follows. All amendments are in *italic* or [crossed out].

The Québec nation and Canadian federalism(...)

Amendment 1 Canadian federalism cannot fundamentally be reformed. Quebec cannot possibly obtain all the powers it desires, not to mention those that would be needed for the profound changes proposed by Québec solidaire. *A Québec solidaire government will therefore implement the measures provided in its program irrespective of whether or not they are compatible with the Canadian constitutional framework.* (...)

A Constituent Assembly

Amendment 2 A Québec solidaire government will propose, *at the earliest opportunity*, the adoption of a law on the Constituent Assembly defining its mandate, its composition and its process.

Amendment 3 *This law will declare the independence of the Constituent Assembly from the Quebec National Assembly and provide mechanisms to allow and promote the free expression*

of all tendencies within the Constituent Assembly and in the public debate surrounding the process.

The Constituent Assembly, an affirmation of popular sovereignty, will simultaneously reaffirm the sovereignty peculiar to the indigenous nations. The Quebec National Assembly will invite these nations to join in this democratic exercise by whatever means they decide, including, if this is their wish, granting them a major place in the very framework of the Constituent Assembly.

Amendment 4

*Existing text*source Congress 2016-11.04: The mandate of the Constituent Assembly will be to develop a Quebec constitution specifying the values, rights and principles on which our common life is to be based, and defining its status, its institutions, powers, responsibilities and resources that are delegated to them.

Amended text: The mandate of the Constituent Assembly will be to develop a *draft constitution of an independent Quebec*, specifying the values, rights and principles on which our common life is to be based, and defining its status, its institutions, powers, responsibilities and resources that are delegated to them.

The Constituent Assembly will be elected by universal suffrage and will be composed of an equal number of women and men. The voting procedure will ensure proportional representation of the tendencies and the various socio-economic walks of life present within Quebec society. In the election of this Constituent Assembly, candidates of all means and origins shall be allowed equitable access to the means of communication. Members of the National Assembly may not be elected to the Constituent Assembly, as participation in it requires that they be available on a full-time basis.

After the election of the Constituent Assembly, it will have the responsibility and the means to conduct an extensive process of

participative democracy aimed at consulting the people of Quebec concerning their political and constitutional future as well as the values and political institutions pertaining to it. Pursuant to the results of this process - which shall be publicized and which the Constituent Assembly will be obliged to take into account - the Assembly will develop a draft constitution.

Amendment 5

Existing text source Congress 2016-11.04: The draft constitution will be submitted to the people through a referendum, which will mark the end of the process.

Amended text: The draft constitution will be submitted to the people through a referendum, which will mark the end of the process.

In order to ensure its plural and democratic character, and to fight against electoral fraud and outside interference, the government will ensure basic funding and strict surveillance of the campaigns to promote the respective options for and against the draft constitution.

Amendment 6

Existing text. source Congress 2009-05.21 (g) Throughout the Constituent Assembly process, Québec solidaire will defend its option on the Quebec national question and will

promote its ecologist, egalitarian, feminist, democratic, pluralist and pacifist values without however presuming the outcome of the debates.

Amended text: Throughout the Constituent Assembly process, Québec solidaire, as party, as parliamentary wing, and as government, will defend its option on the Quebec national question and will promote its ecologist, egalitarian, feminist, democratic, pluralist and pacifist values. [without however presuming the outcome of the debates.]

December 12, 2017

[Life on Left](#)

What we learned when women said #MeToo

11 January 2018, by **Elizabeth Schulte, Jen Roesch, Leia Petty**

This is characteristic of the last few months, when the #MeToo campaign has broken the long silence about sexual harassment and assault, especially in workplaces, and shone a spotlight on it. In this special feature, *Socialist Worker* contributors Leia Petty, Jen Roesch and Elizabeth Schulte discuss the roots of the #MeToo moment and where it could lead.

Elizabeth: It was just in October that that the *New York Times* chronicled women's experiences of sexual assault and harassment with Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. It started with actors and then quickly cascaded throughout U.S. society, so that last month, it reached Capitol Hill, with several politicians forced to step down.

Let's talk about the impact #MeToo has made so far—both the concrete changes it produced, but also the broader ideological impact it has had on how people think about sexual assault.

Leia: One concrete thing is how many powerful men have fallen from grace. In a matter of months, dozens of high-profile, previously-thought-untouchable men—who got away with this for decades because they knew they were untouchable—are gone.

The fact that the silence was broken meant that people had the confidence to come out in unprecedented ways, and it had real consequences.

It started as a hashtag, but grew much broader than that. *Time* magazine said the "silence breakers" were the Person of the Year, and from personal experiences at work, it's clearly now part of the conversation to talk about sexual assault.

The whole #MeToo moment was about women telling their stories for the first time after feeling for so long they couldn't tell that story, and now it's become common conversation.

Jen: #MeToo has transformed what lots of people, including many women,

treated as the background noise of women's lives—what it means to be a woman in this society, particularly a woman at work.

For decades, putting up with groping, sexist jokes and invasive, sexualized personal questions was the price of admission for women at work. Now that's being challenged in a very fundamental way.

There was an idea coming out of the women's movement that women were going to be equal in society—the mass entry of women into the workforce, into higher education, the breaking of the glass ceiling for a very small layer of women—and now we're seeing how far that didn't go in some ways.

How much women were able to operate and exist in that world was posed as a personal question for women, and now it's being re-posed as a collective and a political question for women.

It's being challenged in a fundamental

way that is deeper than just recognizing the pervasiveness of sexual assault and rape, but is really looking at the entire sexist society within which women are forced to operate.

It's also opening up big questions about how unequal women are—starting with the thin number of women who have been able to make it into middle-class professional jobs, but even they are subject to this kind of abuse and harassment.

That is the tip of the iceberg for millions of working-class and poor women, farmworkers, service workers, domestic workers—you go down the line and that's the condition of work for the vast majority of women in this country.

Elizabeth: The impact is twofold. All the horrors are exposed, and at the same time, women's ability to talk about them is also a part of what #MeToo has accomplished. Being able to speak out about it gives it a different character.

I read a quote from a former congressional staffer who said, "I thought this was just the way that it was. I didn't think I could say anything." How many people are thinking that now?

At first, there was some dismissiveness about #MeToo because it was Hollywood women. But in many ways, the impact of sexual assault on working-class women is more in the newspapers than before because of the opening these Hollywood women pried open.

When I saw the [exposé that the New York Times did on the Ford workers](#)—Black women who had faced sexual harassment at work for decades—I appreciated the fact that the *Times* had to report on that now.

The media has also had to talk about the institutions and mechanisms that let abusers off the hook repeatedly—in Congress for instance, where women with complaints have been [forced into silence for decades](#).

You brought up the women's movement, and I've been thinking a lot about that in terms of how

successfully the backlash of the late 1980s and '90s furthered the idea that "the women's movement went too far" or we're in a post-feminist society. Leia, [you've written about that recently](#).

Leia: About the women who have been facing sexual harassment at Ford, I have to say that when I read that article, I was kind of astounded by how little had changed. Susan Faludi wrote in her book *Backlash* about women who came to work in factories with signs that said, "Kill a woman, save a job."

This was happening during the 1980s during an economic recession, and it represented a full-scale backlash against the women's movement of the 1970s.

I was shocked to read about those conditions in Faludi's book, and then I read about the women in Chicago Ford plants, and it really felt like things weren't that different. You have constant sexual harassment, and when women were hired and given a tour of the plant, they were called "fresh meat." They were required to do sexual favors to further their careers.

These women felt trapped in their jobs. For some, it was the best job they'd ever had, and this is what allows this to continue—women feel like they don't have any other choice but to endure, because to quit is a non-option. The conditions of the backlash are very much alive.

I was surprised at how quickly #MeToo was able to topple powerful people. But then, when the question of politicians came up—specifically Al Franken, but also others who were being accused and about to suffer for it—that's when a series of articles came out saying maybe it had gone too far, that there was panic underway which might have repercussions for society and people's ability to be sexually free. That was just horrifying.

I don't think the timing is a coincidence. I think there was a panic, but the panic was by people who run this country, who felt like this was going to go too far and was going to have political consequences for the establishment and their ability to rule

in the way they want to rule.

It felt like they were willing to do away with a Harvey Weinstein or a CEO or an actor here and there, but when it came to the question of how our government functions, that's when they began to panic and produced a narrative that this was going too far.

All of a sudden, they cared about due process. But they didn't care about it when Black men were unjustly accused of sexual assault, [like the Central Park Five](#). It's clear that they don't care about justice for women or the unjustly accused—they care about the maintenance of their political order.

Jen: If you look back at the women's liberation movement in the 1960s and '70s, it totally transformed people's ideas about women in society. It was part of the mass entry of women into the workforce. Obviously a significant number of working-class women and women of color had always worked, but this was a significant transformation.

You had the sexual revolution, abortion rights were won—there were a number of reforms that paved the way for people thinking that women were going to be equal in society.

But think about how shallow the gains were in terms of economic equality. We didn't win provisions for funded childcare or the Equal Rights Amendment.

So on the one hand, you have the idea that women can do and be anything, but the material basis for women to actually be able to do or be anything wasn't there. You can see that in the fact that male-dominated industries have one of the highest rates of sexual harassment, which is clearly connected to keeping women out of those jobs.

I think there was also a parallel development of a sense of sexual liberation and freedom coming out of the women's liberation movement, where divorce became commonplace and was a real benefit for women.

There was more freedom on that front, but the fact that abortion rights have been rolled back in the last 30

years—that women don't have real autonomy in a material and economic sense or bodily autonomy over reproductive rights—sets up a situation where on the one hand, women are supposed to be sexually liberated and free, but at the same time, they don't have that kind of control. That's central to understanding how sexism and sexual violence operates.

The contradictory gains of the women's movement set this up. The message is: You're free, but it's on you—it's your own personal struggle.

One of the things that is heartening about this moment is the sense of collective solidarity among women who say they are coming forward to protect other women.

I think there's been pushback from some liberals and some on the left who are worried about a moral panic: Are we not going to be able to flirt and have fun anymore? First of all, it's a terrible lack of political imagination that people can't envision fulfilling relationships that aren't based on inequality and the degradation of women.

People have referenced old debates—what they call sex-positive feminism vs. the idea that all sex is inherently sexist, going back to the radical feminist critique.

But this moment raises a different notion: that you can't talk about sexual freedom, women's liberation and mutually satisfying relationships unless women have full material economic social equality. That's a condition for all of these things.

The #MeToo moment has produced an opportunity for a discussion about those structural conditions that inhibit actual equality and liberation and freedom.

Because like you said, Elizabeth, they knew about what people like Weinstein were doing for years. The reason that they toppled so quickly wasn't because there was a moral panic—it's probably because there are personnel files a couple inches thick that they knew would be discovered if these guys weren't jettisoned right

away.

For the people who did the firing, it was less about "going too far" and more about clearing the decks—as opposed to opening up everything that was beneath the surface. The people in power knew about this, but the vast majority of us didn't know the scale.

Elizabeth: Coming back to the narrative about the moral panic: [Masha Gessen raised it in the New Yorker](#), and it was talked about elsewhere in relation to Al Franken.

That was also an attempt to flip the script and say: Wait, are some "good men" going to go down because of the massive number of women speaking out about the harassment they face every day?

Part of the power of #MeToo has been just how gargantuan the outpouring was—that so many women were standing up and talking about everything from the horrendous cases like Weinstein to the daily slog of going to work and being harassed.

It's not done yet, obviously, but it's begun to transform the way women think that they should be treated.

There are all these mechanisms that are supposedly in place, but it's very difficult to file complaints. You put yourself in jeopardy if you try to respond to sexual harassment. The statistics show that women would rather not report.

You have to ask, too: What kind of equal, supposedly post-feminist society are we living in where this sort of behavior can exist? And how is this connected with women's unequal position in society by every measure, from wages and access to health care, to childcare, housing and education.

The question of Ford was a good one—the *New York Times* couldn't figure out how to explain it, but some working-class men went along and took part in the harassment that was encouraged from top to the bottom at Ford.

Socialists have an opportunity to talk about how sexual harassment and violence is linked to women's unequal roles in society while #MeToo is

shaking people's conceptions.

I want to steer us toward how #MeToo fits into the Trump era. And also what came before that—the anger about sexism that was brewing, but hasn't had a way to express itself.

Leia: One thing that was astounding to me is that Trump won a month after the tape was released where he was bragging about committing sexual assault. I've been thinking about what's happened to people since Trump's election: There's a sense that people need to stand up, and if they don't, then nothing will change.

On the one hand, Trump's election has emboldened the far right, racists, sexists and so on. And at the same time, it's exposed the nature of this country.

That was true with the [NFL take-a-knee protests](#), with #MeToo, with actions against immigration raids. A lot of what's being protested under Trump was in place under Obama and decades before that. They're foundational to our country.

But things that you used to have to use a magnifying glass to see are now laid bare for everyone to see. It's like the emperor has no clothes, except it's the whole country in this case.

The anger and resistance is directed at Trump, and rightfully so. But there are people in the Democratic Party who want to contain this and *just* make it about Trump. I think that would be a mistake. It's our job to look beyond Trump and talk about how to build a wider resistance.

I remember Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor talking before Black Lives Matter erupted that there was going to be a Black rebellion in this country soon because of the mass despair, injustice and daily police violence—and zero expression for it in the mainstream political establishment.

You can see a parallel with feminism. There's a daily sexual violence, degradation and exploitation. People are struggling to get by, and there wasn't a conversation happening about those conditions.

It's like a powder keg that can explode

at any point. That was true of the Women's Marches—they weren't organized by the main women's organizations, but by individual women who [brought millions of people into the streets for a counter-inauguration](#).

That sentiment was brewing beneath the surface if you remember the SlutWalks that began a few years ago. You see it again with #MeToo, and we can expect more. The task is to organize this sentiment so that it's not just a moment, but there are organizations that go alongside the resistance.

We can't just have a sentiment of resistance in the air without organizational mechanisms to fight for demands to push forward.

Jen: I think a women's movement on a different kind of basis has been struggling to emerge for some time, and it hasn't been successful yet at an organizational level, but you see the seeds of it.

I've had the opportunity to speak with campus activists who have been deeply involved with the struggle against sexual assault on campuses, which was a prelude to this movement. It was very similar in the sense of women speaking out about how they've been treated by campus administrations.

The [first spark was Angie Epifano from Amherst College](#), who talked about how, when she was raped on campus, instead of getting justice, the administration had her committed to a mental institution, and she was forced to leave school.

When she told her story for the first time, it set off a significant protest on that campus, and then there was a rolling effect on campuses across the country.

Most people have heard of Emma Sulkowicz at Columbia University, [who carried the mattress she was raped on around campus](#), with hundreds of students helping and supporting her. One part of that action was a day called "Carry that Weight," which happened on 300 campuses across the country and internationally.

These women have done a great job organizing, rejecting some of the narratives around criminalization and trying to articulate a different understanding about why sexual assault happens.

There are many examples like this because of the failure of any of the groups like the National Organization for Women or NARAL to take up these issues.

Planned Parenthood is facing extinction, and it can't organize a national march in its own defense. When anti-choice bigots decide that they want to surround their clinics, rather than combatting the right, Planned Parenthood directs its fire at the activists who want to defend clinics.

They're more afraid of the people rebuilding militant tactics than the people gunning for them because they're so used to figuring out how to cut backroom deals in Congress, or work in the courts or with the police. They want to rely on all the mechanisms that have utterly failed us.

Leia and I are involved in a group called [NYC for Abortion Rights](#), and one of the first things we heard at meetings was how sick women were of writing letters to Congress and sick of apologizing for abortion.

I think that "I'm sick of it" feeling is very much there, and it hasn't exploded into a movement yet, but #MeToo is one of the ideological expressions. Now the challenge is taking the next step to building that movement.

It won't be overnight, and it won't be massive at first, but even small networks of people coming together to defend a clinic, or hold campus administrations accountable on rape and treat survivors with the dignity they deserve, can begin to lay the groundwork for something different.

It will be challenging over the next few years, because what's being planned out of the Women's Marches last year is a convention on the anniversary in Las Vegas to launch the biggest voter registration drive ever.

There will be a lot of focus on elections, and it will be challenging to keep the focus on what initiatives we take. So it will be important to lay claim to what #MeToo has accomplished and continue pushing forward.

Just last month, 1,500 anti-abortion bigots surrounded a clinic in North Carolina. Elizabeth, you and I were involved in [running Operation Rescue off the streets 20 years ago](#), but initiatives like that don't exist now. It would be great if those mainstream organizations would move, but I don't think we can wait for it or count on it. We have to begin with the basic building blocks.

Elizabeth: When you were talking about the "sick of it" feeling, I was thinking of that "Shout My Abortion" campaign a couple years ago, which was such a contrast to what all the political forces like NOW and NARAL tell women they're supposed to say about abortion rights.

Abortion is put on the backburner, when politicians talk about defending Planned Parenthood, but women spoke out about their abortions to say: No, this is fundamental and necessary for all women. It felt like people chomping at the bit to do something, but not having the organization to do it.

It will be important to keep on track building independent organizations to take up women's rights, including abortion, and not let them get put on the back burner. The NYC organizing has been really impressive. Sometimes, people can forget the impact that more modest organizing can have on a broader layer of people.

Right now, many activists are figuring out what's next. What are some of the things we can organize around, including Title IX on our campuses, taking on harassment in women's workplaces? What kind of demands and initiatives are you thinking about?

Leia: About the mainstream women's organizations and the Democratic Party, I think this is a real challenge. I think we're going to have to drag them out to fight.

That was true with the Women's Marches. They were started by a group of friends and then ballooned, and eventually, NOW mobilized and sent buses. They came out, but they were dragged out. That's the unfortunate state of affairs, but it's the moment we're in and we have to find more ways to self-organize and put pressure on those organizations.

The Seattle Clinic Defense group that was started by socialists and other activists is now in a conversation with NARAL locally about how to defend clinics and confront the right directly. We have to continue on that front with the expectation that we can't rely on those organizations to do it for us, but if we can organize our side, we can force them to move.

I've heard of activists on campus talking about organizing around Title IX [37], which is under threat from the Trump administration. It will be up to activists to demand that their campus administrations have Title IX protections for students, whether or not it exists at the federal level.

At Brooklyn College, a coalition of groups led a modest speak-out and march called "Stand with Survivors." Members of the Black fraternity joined. Now these groups have come together to talk about how this newly established coalition can continue to call for justice on campus for survivors of sexual assault.

Some [70,000 farmworkers signed onto a statement in solidarity](#) with a march in Hollywood standing with survivors, but also bringing attention to the sexual harassment experienced by women in agriculture.

The [Coalition of Immokalee Workers](#) in Florida is part of a campaign taking on some huge fast-food corporations, and one of its demands is around sexual harassment in the fields. It's planning actions targeting Wendy's, which is one of the companies that still refuses to meet the workers' demands. This could bring attention to the intersection between exploitation and sexual violence at work.

The union question is a really serious one, because here are organizations that we have to drag out to fight for

us. Reading about the Ford women, it's just devastating to find out that the United Auto Workers was complicit with some of the sexual harassment in this plant.

We need to rebuild a new kind of union that connects the economic struggle to questions of rights and dignity at work, and that sees the struggle against sexual assault as connected to economic rights at work. That seems to be what the Coalition of Immokalee Workers is doing in Florida, and that could be a model.

The United Federation of Teachers, which I'm a member of, is launching a campaign around parental leave, which the Movement of Rank and File Educators caucus has been pushing for a while. An individual woman put together a petition that got 50,000 signatures demanding that the UFT put up a fight around parental leave, so they're finally they're doing it.

Once again, you have this example of having to drag these institutions out to fight, but when they do, they have power.

Jen: I agree about Title IX—there's a big fight over it right now and a lot of confusion about it. So in addition to what Leia is saying, we should have discussions and debates about Title IX on campus.

We also need to expose the right-wing foundations of the attack on Title IX. For example, the Koch Brothers are funding the attack, as is this right-wing group, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni.

The importance of Title IX is about expanding options for survivors and saying that rape and sexual assault aren't just criminal offenses, but civil rights offenses, because they hamper a woman's right to continue her education at an equal level.

This is about holding administrations and institutions accountable so that women can complete their educations, have funded rape crisis centers and advocates who don't have biased interests, and not have to go to the police to get those protections on campuses.

This is a very radical direction for the

movement to take—away from criminalization and seeing rape and sexual assault through a very narrow lens.

One thing about the Immokalee workers: They say that sexual assault claims have decreased 80 percent in the fields where they have contracts.

What's interesting about their campaign is that they have metrics to hold growers accountable and internal education in the union so that all the workers—men and women—understand the toll that sexual harassment takes. The entire coalition is part of it, so it's an issue for every worker in the industry, just like wages or other issues.

In terms of unions and workplaces, I think starting small is really important, and the role of socialists and labor militants in those circumstances is really important.

If you're in a union workplace, you could call a lunchtime meeting about sexual harassment in the workplace and get people to talk about what their issues are—in other words, providing a venue for that viral experience in real life.

You can imagine situations where people agree that when they have a sexual harassment complaint, whether they have a union or not, a bunch of co-workers will go together to file, so that it's not just one woman having to file a complaint by herself.

You can imagine petitions demanding that HR offices release statistics of the number of sexual harassment complaints they receive every year. One of the requirements of Title IX is that campuses must disclose how many rapes were reported each year—imagine if you had that for workplaces. That would begin to deliver a measure of accountability.

These are small steps of organizing co-workers and beginning to have conversations, and it may be six months or a year before actions takes place, but I think that's the process of rebuilding a working-class movement in this country.

Lastly, Congress just cut funding for childcare. The question of poverty and

support of the poor is important, because half of poor families are supported by women—that's a very central feature of women's oppression

looks like.

These are things that may not be viewed immediately as part of the #MeToo movement but are very much

part of creating the conditions where women aren't vulnerable to abuse.

January 9, 2018

Black Nationalism, Black Solidarity

10 January 2018, by **Malik Miah**

Blacks would be happy to drop the hyphenated "African-American" and redefine the term "American" as meaning all of its peoples. Most whites, however, don't support that change if it means seriously coming to grips with the legacy of slavery, genocide and persistent racism.

Even more than 150 years after the Civil War, Confederate monuments still occupy prime property in southern states. "American" and "white," to many, are implicitly equivalent with no hyphen required.

Black "identity politics" is a phrase not commonly used by African Americans. It's a reaction to racism and historical discrimination and oppression, whereas white identity politics is a choice. The terms "white nationalism" and "white supremacy" are interchangeable.

As with previous slogans such as Black Pride or Black Power, the demand Black Lives Matter is one of defiance to police violence. Whenever whites assert their "rights" as Donald Trump did in 2016, African Americans must push back and resist. The power of Black solidarity and nationalism is to strengthen Black unity, and sets an example for others to stand up against the ideology of white victimhood.

The fundamental contrast between Black nationalism and defiance versus white nationalism is important. The former has a positive dynamic; the latter is reactionary.

When Race "Trumps" Class

What Blacks are most concerned about with Trump is his large personal base, who see him as infallible and follow him no matter his flip-flops on issues or his racist rants. That base, including his white working class supporters, see Black defiance as a threat to their leader and themselves.

Although they suffer as all workers do from income inequality and the shift of more wealth to billionaires, they see themselves as victims of immigration and government programs that help Black and Brown people. Trump stokes the worse racial instincts of this base. Race trumps class.

The cult-like worship of Trump is why his working-class supporters continue to back the Republican Party with its Wall Street policies. They believe Trump and his constant lies, even when the facts say otherwise. It is a deep emotional connection.

That mob-like thinking is dangerous for Blacks, Latinos and Muslims. It is how extralegal racist and fascist type organizations are created and used by demagogues.

Trump is conscious of his actions. He manipulates his cult-like white base to get what he wants. The GOP leaders work with Trump because of his base and so long as he signs bills and executive orders that carry out the GOP agenda.

He's appointed far right operatives or billionaires to every Cabinet position.

The Attorney General is leading the openly anti-Black campaign. For African Americans it means the continuation of decades of discrimination and violence.

The Justice Department led by Jefferson Sessions has been transformed into a whites-first organization. The Civil Rights division is being turned into a pro-cop and "colorblind" agency. There are no Blacks in senior positions, whereas for eight years under Obama the Attorney General was African American.

FBI's New Anti-Black Campaign

The FBI released a report on August 7, 2017 that came to light in a Congressional hearing in late November with Attorney General Sessions. The report is titled "[Black Identity Extremists Likely Motivated to Target Law Enforcement Officers.](#)"

In his article "The Trump Administration and Hoover-Era Paranoia" in the December 4th The New Yorker, Jelani Cobb, a staff writer and professor of journalism at Columbia University, writes:

"The report, which was issued in August and leaked to ForeignPolicy.com last month, argues that the increased scrutiny of police shootings of African-Americans in recent years may result in acts of violence directed at law enforcement. It cites a 2014 incident, in which a man attacked four N.Y.P.D. officers with a hatchet, and a 2016 attack on police in Baton Rouge that left three

officers dead. But the primary example is the shooting during an anti-police-brutality rally in Dallas last year, when Micah Xavier Johnson, a twenty-five-year-old Army veteran who harbored resentment toward whites, in general, and toward white law-enforcement officials killed five policemen and wounded seven more, before he himself was killed.

"In discussing such incidents, the report coins the category "black-identity extremist," which is poorly defined but features the three-word rhythm of other usefully ambiguous terms, such as "radical Islamic terrorist." The authors argue that people sympathetic to the Sovereign Citizens movement and to the Moorish Science Temple of America, both of which reject the authority of the federal government, warrant vigilance, even though violence conducted by any such sympathizers "has been rare over the past twenty years." To ground their conclusions in history, the authors point to radical organizations of the nineteen-seventies, such as the Black Liberation Army, which has been defunct for longer than Johnson had been alive, and for which they offer scant connection to the B.I.E. cause.

"When Representative Karen Bass, of California, asked Sessions about the report, he said that he had not yet read it but he nonetheless stood by its findings. When she pressed him to cite an organization committed to the kind of violence the report warns of, he said, "There are groups that do have an extraordinary commitment to their racial identity and some have transformed themselves even into violent activists," but declined to name any.

"The black-identity extremist appears to be something of a bureaucratic phantom, yet that kind can be the most difficult to exorcise. The "Final Report on Negro Subversion" prefaced a long engagement between the F.B.I. and organizations seeking to realize black rights, which included the surveillance of Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as the Bureau's COINTELPRO efforts to destroy the Black Panther Party. When James Comey was the Bureau's director, he kept on his desk a copy of the approval of Hoover's

request to wiretap King, as a reminder of the perils of organizational excess."

Since the end of the Civil War and the defeat of Reconstruction, the government has systematically targeted Black leaders and militants as "subversives," "communists" and "extremists" while white terrorists who lynched and murder Blacks were often not investigated.

As Cobb notes, the anti-Black actions and policies of government agencies have a long record that continues to this day.

The National Question Theory

The theory behind the "national question," as Marxists call it, explains national oppression and its progressive dynamics. It is rooted in the basic understanding not only of how capitalism causes class struggle, but also how racism (and previously colonialism) are integral to the ruling class and the economic workings of the system.

Black nationalism, as a nationalism of the oppressed, is powerful. The racial/national oppression of both free Blacks and slaves led Blacks to stand as a people wherever their lives were threatened. The tactics and methods of self-defense and protection were calibrated to the situation. Racial solidarity has been and is inspiring to the Black communities and others.

African Americans have few illusions about racism and national oppression even if they may not use these words to describe Black solidarity. Blacks who have tried to pretend that racism doesn't impact them because of individual merit quickly learn otherwise. No African American can hide from racist assumptions of whites. Whites don't know anything about who you are. They just see you're Black, with all that means to them.

The central reason why the U.S. working class has had a hard time to organizing itself politically and fighting for power is tied to the ruling class ability to use racism, keeping

white workers from joining with African Americans on a sustained basis.

In the mid-1800s when Marx wrote Capital and previously the Communist Manifesto, he and Friedrich Engels saw capitalism as entering its final stages. Marx noted that the fall of capitalism, the victory of socialism and eventually communism would not be easy. The capitalist system on the political level had weapons to use to divide the working class and its allies.

Socialists at the time assumed that colonialism and national oppression would be settled by the class struggle to overthrow the capitalist rulers. But in the imperialist epoch, socialists could no longer view class struggle separately from the rights of colonial peoples and those racially oppressed.

Leon Trotsky's writings in the 1930s on the Black struggle in the United States remain incisive. He explained why the right of self-determination and freedom applied to Black people. In his discussion with leaders of the Socialist Workers Party he said:

"The Negroes are a race and not a nation: "Nations grow out of the racial material under definite conditions ...

"We do, of course, not obligate the Negroes to become a nation; if they are, then that is a question of their consciousness, that is, what they desire and what they strive for. We say: If the Negroes want that then we must fight against imperialism to the last drop of blood, so that they gain the right, wherever and how they please, to separate a piece of land for themselves.

"The fact that they are today not a majority in any state does not matter. It is not a question of the authority of the states but of the Negroes. That in the overwhelming Negro territory also whites have existed and will remain henceforth is not the question and we do not need today to break our heads over a possibility that sometime the whites will be suppressed by the Negroes. In any case the suppression of the Negroes pushes them toward a political and national unity." (See [here](#))

That impulse for unity was the primary reason behind Black support for Obama, more than his views or actions. (Clarence Thomas, a conservative Supreme Court justice, also had majority support from African Americans.)

Voting Black is the lowest form of political consciousness. In 2016 without Obama on the ballot the Black vote went down, and not just because of voter suppression.

The higher form of consciousness arising from popular struggle is a conscious push for radical changes through creating independent (from the two-party system) political organizations. That impetus does not exist yet.

Although Marx wrote over 170 years ago that capitalism was a destructive system for working people, and Lenin and Trotsky discussed the rights of oppressed peoples, none of these issues have been resolved. Their analysis remains relevant today. Capitalism cannot end racism and bring equality.

Malcolm X and Freedom Now

One hundred years after the rise of Jim Crow segregation, following the

defeat of Reconstruction, Malcolm X said the United States did not represent Black people. While still a leader of the Nation of Islam, he said:

“Sir, how can and Negro say America is his nation? He was brought here in chains; he was put in slavery and worked like a mule for three hundred years; he was separated from his land, his culture, his God, his language!

“The Negro was taught to speak the white man’s tongue, worship the white God, and accept the white man as his superior.

“This is a white man’s country. And the Negro is nothing but an ex-slave who is now trying to get himself integrated into the slave master’s house.

“And the slave master doesn’t want you! You fought and bled and died in every war the white man waged, and he still won’t give you justice. You nursed his baby and cleaned behind his wife, and he still won’t give you freedom; you turned the other cheek while he lynched you and raped your women, but he still won’t give you equality.” (1963)

African American writers such as Ta-Nehisi Coates [38] reflect the realism of average working-class Black Americans. Realism is not pessimism. Like most Blacks, Coates offers no solution to institutional racism.

The nationalism (ethnic solidarity) of oppressed peoples can have a progressive and revolutionary dynamic. Coates himself has radicalized by studying history and the rise of the Movement for Black Lives and actions of Black athletes against police violence. The #MeToo against sexual harassment and assault was first started by African American women ten years ago and is massive today.

The fight for full freedom remains a central one in politics. It can move forward, then be pushed back. Victory requires a state where racial discrimination is not tolerated. (The one country that outlawed institutional racism and used positive action was Cuba under Fidel Castro.)

It is important to study great African American activists and leaders such as Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, W.E.B. Dubois, Ella Baker, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X but also the Marxist tradition including Marx and Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg and C.L.R. James. The fundamental conflicts of race have evolved. There has been some progress, then reversals. The objective remains what it has always been – Freedom Now through struggle.

[Against the Current](#)

The Future of Social Control? China’s Proposed Social Credit System

9 January 2018, by **Robin Lee**

In June 2014, China’s State Council issued the “Planning Outline for the Construction of a Social Credit System (2014-2020)”. The outline put forward objectives for the construction of a social credit system to rate every member of society, with plans for the system to be established by 2020. The proposed scope of the plan is so far

reaching that it would potentially impact all aspects of everyday life. The goal is to work towards a complete network covering the whole of society, creating a system that encourages trust while punishing trust breaking. In addition to drawing on more conventional rating and credit records, one of the more worrying

parts of the plan are its aims to:

“perfect social public opinion supervision mechanisms, strengthen disclosure and exposure of trust-breaking acts, give rein to the role of the masses in appraisal, discussion, criticism and reports, shape moral condemnation and censure trust-breaking acts of members of society”.

The document goes on to outline a need for “rewarded reporting systems for acts of breach of trust” and to implement rewards for “reporting individuals”. In other words, this seems to suggest a system that encourages members of society to exert pressure on and to monitor each other on behalf of the state’s standards of “trustworthiness”.

How has this progressed towards becoming a reality since the release of this document?

Pilot Projects

In 2015, following the issuing of the State Council’s plans, the People’s Bank of China selected eight tech companies to develop pilot programs. The pilots monitor participants spending, personal behavior and social media activity. Although these pilots, for now, are voluntary, millions of people have already signed up to participate attracted by the incentives offered for good credit scores. Probably the most well-known of these pilots is Sesame Credit, which is run by Ant Financial Services Group, an affiliate company of e-commerce and technology giant Alibaba, and reportedly had 260 million users as of July 2017. Sesame Credit rates individuals with a numerical score ranging from 350-950 points based on an individual’s credit history, fulfilment capacity (e.g. to fulfil contractual obligations), personal characteristics/verification of personal information, behaviour and preferences (e.g. shopping habits) and interpersonal relationships (including choice of friends and contents of social media interactions). Although at present Sesame Credit does not punish those deemed “untrustworthy”, it does offer rewards for high scores, for instance loans, preferential car rental terms, VIP airport check-in, visa fast-tracks, as well as more prominent profiles on the popular dating website Baihe.

Although it was never entirely clear how far these initial pilots might have initially been intended for use or incorporation into the government’s plan, in July 2017, despite initially approving the licenses, it was reported that the People’s Bank of China had

abandoned plans to grant licenses to these companies, citing major conflict of interest concerns and corporate governance structures lacking third party credit independence [39]. Nevertheless, this has not necessarily deterred these private pilot programs. Tencent Credit, operated by China Rapid Finance, a partner of Tencent, is another high profile pilot project, which has recently sought to expand its social credit system, even after the People’s Bank of China’s decision not to grant the licenses.

Moreover, regardless of the futures of these pilots operated by private companies, the Chinese government’s plans for a centralized state social credit system by 2020 still remain and the government has been taking increasing steps towards the creation of a platform where increasing forms of data are submitted for central management. Earlier this year, ten of China’s bike sharing companies, for instance, have signed agreements with the National Development and Reform Commission to share user data so that it can be used for the social credit system [40].

On 25th September 2016, the State Council General Office again updated its policy in a document entitled “Warning and Punishment Mechanisms for Persons Subject to Enforcement for Trust-Breaking”. The document sets out the principle that if trust is broken, then penalties can be imposed across the board. It states that the social credit system will allow, “the trustworthy to roam everywhere under heaven while making it hard for the discredited to take a single step”. The document sets out a long list of areas where restrictions will be imposed on those deemed to have broken trust. Some of these areas included internet speeds, access to restaurants and night clubs, the ability to travel (including travel abroad) restrictions on rental and loan applications, social security benefits and job prospects as well as restrictions on establishing social organisations. The restrictions not only impact the individual concerned but in some cases also extend to their family members, for instance by restricting the schools that those with low ratings can send their children to.

It should also be noted that, while similarities have been made between these pilot programs and data collection, surveillance and credit scorings created by companies elsewhere which are often also lacking in transparency –it is notable that in 2016 social media giant Facebook announced that it was ending its credit rating and reporting pilot in part due to consumer concerns– China’s proposed social credit system differs in the way that it is directly intended as a tool of the one-party state.

Earlier initiatives

Like most official initiatives, the social credit system is justified through appealing to how it represents an important component of China’s socialist market economy system and the creation of a socialist harmonious society. Parallels have also been made with the dang’an, an existing system of files for each citizen tracking personal information, data on performance, behaviours and political positions that travel with a person throughout their life, and, particularly during the Maoist era, impact on a person’s work and career prospects and access to benefits. In some ways, the proposed social credit system might therefore be deemed as taking this method of control to new heights.

Indeed, the idea of a government social credit system based on the ranking of every citizen has already occurred at the local level. In Shanghai, for instance, the municipal government launched an app called “Honest Shanghai” in November 2016, aiming to make citizens more honest. Citizens can at this stage voluntarily sign up for the app using their national ID number, and facial recognition software is then used to search through personal data collected by the government to create a “public credit” score. Good scores are rewarded, while there is the potential for bad scores to later be used to punish participants. Meanwhile, an earlier experiment in Jiangsu Province was perhaps even more alarming. In 2010, a pilot social credit system was introduced in Suining County that ranked each system on an A-D scale based upon

their everyday social behaviours, including their political positions such as whether they had “illegally petitioned higher authorities for help” [41] (i.e. going against decisions and (in)actions at the local level of administration). Interestingly, the experiment had to be abandoned due to public backlash and has even faced some degree of criticism in the sometimes more outspoken, although Communist Party controlled Global Times, which has maintained that China’s proposed social credit system is not Orwellian but has also stated the need for a national credit system to be restricted in range. Nevertheless, the Suining experiment still highlights the dangers of the potential of such a system of control to attempt to silence dissent, something which would become increasingly alarming under the higher levels of centralization and authority that have been proposed in government documents.

Additional Surveillance

Combine this with China’s ambitions regarding artificial intelligence and surveillance and the future concerning the potential for this authoritarian state to tighten its control and to silence dissenting voices becomes ever more bleak. Earlier this month the South China Morning Post reported on Yitu Technologies’ Dragon Eye facial recognition technology that the company’s co-founder, Zhu Long, told the newspaper “can very easily recognise you among at least 2 billion people in a matter of seconds”. The platform has already stored more than 1.8 billion photographs in a database that is being used by 20 provincial public security platforms and more than 150 municipal public security systems across China and has already been used to catch hundreds of suspected criminals [42]

Clearly the use of technology as a tool for social monitoring or control carries with it many risks as well as questions and uncertainties about exactly how it will be used. The failure of previous

experiments and the changing attitudes towards previous pilots might suggest potential internal tension or weakness in this regard. In addition to concerns over the implications of such a strong system of surveillance as a potential tool for mass control on a scale not previously conceived of outside of a science-fiction novel, however, any weaknesses of such a comprehensive and integrated system of mass data collection also carries with them additional risks of misuse by hackers or other third-parties. Equally, we might also ask about the potential for manipulation of the social credit system, malicious reporting or emergence of black market services to boost scores or to buy access to limited or reward services. Of course, any such weaknesses or cracks in the system might simultaneously represent remaining gaps in which creative resistance may occur, although for now it is only possible to speculate about the potential scope, and this does not undermine how alarming the Chinese government’s proposed social credit system really is.

Critical humanitarian situation in Mindanao - Urgent appeal for financial aid

8 January 2018, by **Pierre Rousset**

The battle of Marawi lasted 5 months. The reconquest of the city by the army has not, however, led to an improvement in the humanitarian situation in Mindanao. The situation is actually more critical than ever, for various reasons: a devastating typhoon, widespread fighting between government forces and the New People’s Army (NPA) of the CPP, a new jihadist area, prolongation of martial law throughout the whole island, mountain populations directly threatened by the activities of forestry and mining companies, impossibility for the majority of the inhabitants of Marawi to find decent living conditions ...

This is why we are relaunching our solidarity initiative this beginning of 2018. The funds collected will be sent to:

Mihands coalition [43] with whom we have been working for years, specifically asking them to use the collected funds for the victims of humanitarian disasters, whatever their origin (typhoon, military conflicts ...).

The Tripod association [44], which is part of the Mihands network, specifically asking them to use the funds to help the mountain population.

Thanks to the donations we received

at the end of 2017 for our permanent Asian Solidarity Fund, we have already been able to send this month of January 4,000 euros to Tripod . [45] We thank all those who made this emergency aid possible.

Description of the situation

Typhoon Temblin (international name) Vinta (Philippine name) struck Mindanao last December 22, crossing the northern part of the island from east to west and causing considerable damage: floods, landslides, etc. On

December 24, we received a call for solidarity from Mihands, which we immediately published [46]

There is here an effect of climate change. Mindanao used to be hit by violent tidal waves, but not by the great tropical storms (typhoons), which crossed the Philippine archipelago farther north; they have now extended to the south where the people are poorly prepared for their violence. Besides, much of the devastation is due to economic activities, including deforestation (to a large extent illegal). This explains further why Temblin / Vinta has far more victims than what the volume of rains would normally imply.

Figures from late December mentioned 670,000 people affected by the typhoon, 140,000 displaced, 2,600 homes damaged, 60% destroyed, more than 200 dead, many injured. However, the situation in many localities remained unknown. We will be receiving later assessments soon.

Mining and forestry lobbies are seizing new lands, contributing to aggravate the consequences of climate hazards. Their activities also threaten directly the uprooting of various lumad communities - namely mountain tribes (or mountain ethno-linguistic groups) of Mindanao by penetrating into their ancestral domains.

The conflict between the army and the CPP is now total (even if the CP has participated in the Duterte government). Fighting is widespread

in much of Mindanao and is often concentrated in mountainous areas. The pressure of the state of war is felt by communities everywhere, especially by the *lumad* communities. In areas where there is no active armed conflict, the population tries to preserve peace by avoiding being dragged into the spiral of militarization.

Martial law has again been extended throughout the island of Mindanao for the whole of 2018. This means practically that the army can do what it wants, even though the 1987 Constitution, drafted after the overthrow of the Marcos dictatorship, officially limits the powers of this exceptional situation. The army continues to look suspiciously upon Muslim refugee families from the Battle of Marawi, the self-organization of popular communities, civic movements, Left forces from all tendencies... In these conditions, the military framework renders the action of humanitarian grassroots networks more difficult.

The various causes of misfortune have superimposed, making the humanitarian situation particularly critical in a big part of Mindanao.

As soon as we receive additional information, we will let you know.

Thanking you for your solidarity,

To send donations

Cheques

cheques to ESSF in euros only,

payable in France, to be sent to:
ESSF
2, rue Richard-Lenoir
93100 Montreuil
France

Bank Account:

Crédit lyonnais
Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux
(00525)
10 boulevard Chanzy
93100 Montreuil
France
ESSF, account number 445757C

International bank account details :

IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044
5757 C12
BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP
Account holder : ESSF

Through PayPal

You can send money through Paypal: see the PayPal button on the upper right side of ESSF English home page: <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spi...>

Through HelloAsso

You can also send money through the association HelloAsso: see its button on the upper right side of ESSF English home page: <http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spi...>
Or go directly to:
<https://www.helloasso.com/associati...>

We will keep you informed through our website of the state of the permanent solidarity fund and how it is utilized.

Anticapitalistas hold second congress

7 January 2018, by Brais Fernandez, Juan Tortosa

What is Anticapitalistas, how did it emerge?

Anticapitalistas is the continuation of Izquierda Anticapitalista. We have changed our name to adapt to the rules imposed by the Podemos leadership: they prevent activists from a party structure from participating in

the leadership bodies of Podemos. Another reason: the term "left" became devalued sharply in Spain after 15M (the abbreviation for the movement of *Indignados* which started with the occupation of the Plaza del Sol, May 15, 2011).

Beyond these reasons, there is a

change of political conception. Izquierda Anticapitalista saw itself as a broad anti-capitalist group (though it failed to achieve this goal) to the left of the reformist left. Anticapitalistas assumes a new task: to build broad anti-neoliberal fronts on the electoral level, while building an independent revolutionary organization and strong

and autonomous extra-parliamentary movements. A new hypothesis for a new stage, after the experience of 15M.

The 2nd congress of Anticapitalistas had as its theme "To build the movement, build anti-capitalism". What were the most important challenges?

We had two big debates. First, an intense and very interesting debate on the national question, after the Catalan experience and the radicalization of the territorial crisis in Spain. It is a debate in progress and an open one. From our defence of the right to self-determination, we have other questions: what do constituent processes mean and how do they materialize? Do we defend a state model or not? Which one? How do we approach the national question, avoiding falling into what Gramsci called "cosmopolitan deracination", but maintaining an internationalist perspective?

Second, we discussed how to implant ourselves in a working class in times of reflux. We need to be more involved with youth, unions, feminist and environmental movements. We do not want to be an organization strongly represented in institutions, but with few activists at the grassroots level.

Two out of three delegates were youth and many women were present. How did you go about replacing the old guard?

This succession was quite natural,

because the old guard - coming from the Liga comunista revolucionaria (LCR) - was always very generous to take this step; it did not cling to internal power, unlike in the Communist parties. There has always been a permanent opening: we collect the legacy of the elders, while generating new references together. For example - and this is quite natural - the younger generation reads Gramsci more than Trotsky. We had a lot of luck with the people who come from the LCR: they have an incredible capacity to assimilate new experiences, something unique on the European left.

How do you experience the tension between institutional work and street presence to fight in the thousands of social fronts where you are involved?

It's difficult. The representative institutions of the capitalist state absorb a lot. This liberal mechanism serves to condense political contradictions in a space foreign to social materiality. It takes a lot of time and imposes an artificial temporality. Therefore, we must maintain a militancy linked to the movement, bringing other problems to the organization and proposing a centre of gravity oriented towards the base.

You have tense relations with the majority leadership of Podemos. What are the main challenges for Podemos and your current inside Podemos? How do you combine your activism within Podemos and your organizational independence?

Anticapitalistas is not a current of Podemos. It is an organized movement that impels radical broad currents. Not all our activists are in Podemos, although we are certainly identified as the leader of the critical sector. It is important to know this, because otherwise you do not understand the experience of Anticapitalistas.

There is constant tension with the Podemos leadership, which is very authoritarian and has difficulty in observing pluralism. We would like a better collaboration, but it is difficult with the political culture of Podemos.

Finally, what are your areas of work for the next few years?

We need to be better implanted locally and in the strategic sectors of the social struggle: trade unions, feminist and environmental movements. There are times of reflux, a reaction of the ruling classes to restore order. It is therefore necessary to train cadres, to continue to work on the political elaboration and the renovation of militant Marxist theory, to help advance the electoral front and to build positions beyond parliaments capable of constituting sufficient counter-powers strong enough to face capital. The project of the bourgeoisie for the working classes in the south of Europe is more impoverishment and more state authoritarianism. We must therefore work to promote a massive and radical proposal, hegemonic, based on social conflict, responding fiercely to the class war, but at the same time able to involve people who are not necessarily revolutionaries.

The greatest radicalisation since 1979 as Iran explodes

6 January 2018, by Foad Asabani

Workers and the poor have flooded the streets.

The chants and slogans within a day turned against the regime, against

both moderates and hardliners, but with a focus on supreme leader Ali Khamenei. "Death to the dictator!", "Death to Khamenei!" and "Death to (president Hassan) Rouhani!", among other anti-government chants echo across the country.

In some cities, there have been protests of up to 50,000. In others, pockets of thousands gather in various suburbs, trying to beat back the security forces and connect with each other.

Ahvaz, the capital of Khuzestan province in the country's south-west, has a predominantly Arab population subjected to severe repression and the object of racial oppression for decades. Eighty thousand protested there; the police station was razed. There had been a week of protests here earlier last year. The people had warned the government that, if their grievances were not addressed, there would be an uprising.

In many cities, workers have stormed local government buildings and taken over various institutions of the security forces, burning down police stations, overturning police cars and setting ablaze police motorcycles.

Cars owned by the rich, some banks and other signs of affluence have been attacked. Across the nation, workers are ripping down posters of the supreme leader and burning them with other symbols of the regime.

In Izeh, Khuzestan province, many of the 120,000 inhabitants have hunting rifles. The people have taken over the entire city.

Tehran, the national capital and largest city, hasn't erupted in the way other cities have. In part, this is because the working class is more affluent, but it's also because the repression is a lot more severe. Nevertheless, there have been many pockets of hundreds of people in the suburbs protesting and battling the security forces, trying to connect with each other and merge into centres such as Revolution Square.

Karaj, Iran's fourth largest city and an hour west of Tehran, has a predominantly working class

population, many of whom commute to Tehran daily. They are protesting in their thousands, smashing the windows of state buildings and setting fires in the streets. They have been met with extreme repression but show no signs of backing down and are battling it out with the security forces.

Students at various campuses in Tehran have been protesting, especially at Tehran University, and have been met with severe repression. The student demonstrations are left wing, and radical slogans such as "Smash the state!" are being chanted. Student activists who identify as Marxist are taking the lead, side-lining the moderates and hardliners, which were the dominant forces on the campuses during the 2009 Green Movement, which arose after Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's re-election as president; many thought the result fraudulent.

Many students have been badly demoralised by the defeat of the 2009 movement. In its aftermath, many turned to drugs, mysticism and lifestyle or identity politics; others tried to gain positions within local government so that they wouldn't remain so politically marginal and to have more influence on workers, dragging them to the right.

Left wing students have been critical of president Rouhani and rightly oppose his moderate faction, viewing it as little different to the hardliners. Both have the same agenda of implementing anti-worker policies.

Neoliberal attacks

The neoliberal program that began under hardliner president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-97) was expanded by the moderate Khatami government (1997-2005) and further entrenched under hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who amended the constitution in 2006 to speed up the privatisation process. The neoliberal agenda has been implemented alongside austerity measures under Rouhani, whose government has privatised numerous state-owned enterprises.

So the major domestic rift between

the hardliners and moderates concerns who will control the Iranian capital being privatised, and who will get the spoils of office.

But working class expectations had been raised when Rouhani came to power in 2013 promising to reinvigorate the economy and implement a civil rights charter. Although GDP has grown significantly in the past couple of years (6.4 percent in 2016), inequality has continued to grow dramatically, with more wealth transferred from workers into the hands of the ruling class.

Rouhani released a proposed budget a month ago, which called for slashing cash subsidies to the poor and raising fuel prices. The plan also included fees for things such as car registration and a departure tax. The president has been implementing austerity budgets since he came to office, in an effort to make Iran more attractive for investors. The austerity measures were implemented on top of years of recession, due to United Nations economic sanctions, squeezing even more wealth from the working class and the poor.

There are other contributing factors to the protests: a recent 40 percent jump in the price of staples, mass layoffs, unpaid wages for months across many workplaces in all industries, a labour movement resisting and struggling for several years against austerity and for independent unions, and the obscene wealth flaunted in front of the faces of the poor and the working class.

As with the Arab Spring of 2011, the situation was primed for an explosion; only a spark was needed. Now, the working class and the poor have unleashed the greatest radicalisation since the 1979 revolution.

Politics at the top

The factional struggles within the regime between the hardliners and the moderates, which created the cracks and fissures within the ruling class and paved the way for the Green Movement, are not the reasons for this uprising. Rouhani's administration has tried to establish support within the ruling class, distributing handouts - to

the liberal capitalists and to the security forces, to the hardliners and religious groups – to encourage members of the elite not to interfere with the government in different policy areas, from foreign politics to the economy.

For example, a large amount of spending in the most recent budget has been allocated to religious semi-public foundations, the Revolutionary Guards or the Office of the Leader, all of which are aligned to the hardliners. This is another factor that fuelled anger, especially among teachers.

Rouhani has also established a base within the liberal middle classes that led the 2009 movement and came out to protest in mass numbers against the hardliners back then; large sections of them turned against the moderates and the regime as the movement became more radical.

Not that the factional struggles within the regime have disappeared. The UN economic sanctions enforced on Iran during the Ahmadinejad era (2005-13) severely hurt capitalists of all hues. Khamenei and the hardliners came to view Ahmadinejad as a liability, so they sidelined him from the political establishment completely and barred him from running in any further elections.

For all these reasons, Rouhani's government created a more stable situation. But the attacks eroded the government's support among the working class and the poor, leading to significant developments in the class struggle.

Class struggle from below

Over the past year, civil servants, government workers, retired government workers, teachers, nurses, mine workers, petrochemical workers, manufacturing workers and public transport employees have all protested and gone on strike.

In March, teachers went on strike and protested across the country, demanding a pay increase, and an improvement to the government's

education system. Teachers have waged a long-running campaign on this front over the past decade. On World Teachers Day, 5 October, thousands of teachers gathered in cities across Iran to demand fair salaries and the right to form independent associations. Teacher activists have been threatened, summonsed, arrested and tortured by security forces.

Persian Gulf International Transport Company workers walked off the job on 23 October to protest against the privatisation of the company and to demand unpaid salaries. The regime denies the basic right of workers to form independent trade unions; however, workers have been organising themselves in their workplaces and advancing their demands.

On 19 and 20 September, workers from two factories, Azarab and Hepco in the industrial city of Arak, took strike action and fought police. Azarab and Hepco are privatised factories manufacturing heavy equipment, including for road construction and the petrochemical industries. Workers at these factories have gone without pay for four to six months.

On 2 December, workers at the giant Haft Tapeh sugar cane plantation and mill complex in Shush, near the border with Iraq, launched a new round of strikes and demonstrations following from a strike in July, after more than four months without wages or entitlements. The Haft Tapeh workers have launched numerous strikes and protests over the past decade.

Slogans

The Western political establishments and corporate media have made a great deal of slogans – such as “Not Gaza, not Lebanon, my soul is the redemption of Iran” or “Leave Syria and think about us” – being chanted by a minority in some of the protests, which are anyhow not the main slogans or chants in the uprising. As Michael Karadjis, a left wing political commentator and analyst correctly wrote:

“Many point to these slogans as

evidence that the protestors are narrow nationalists only concerned about themselves and opposed to ‘helping’ other peoples in the region. While the misunderstood reference to Gaza does raise justified alarm bells ... the demand to leave Syria is a manifestly internationalist slogan, similar to demands of the US antiwar movement for the US to leave Vietnam.

“After all, that movement did not begin as pure ‘internationalism’ – many wanted to end the state spending all that money destroying Vietnam and spend it at home to improve livelihoods. How many times have leftists in the West raised the slogan ‘Money for jobs not war’? What’s the difference?”

Liberals and workers

Outside of the campuses, there's no organised force leading the uprising or intervening into it, unlike the 2009 movement that was led by the moderates who wanted to contain it to minor, liberal middle class demands. The workers knew that none of their grievances were being raised in that movement and hesitated to enter it as a mass force.

This time, the liberal middle classes are split, the upper middle class taking sides with the regime, worried that their own interests are being threatened. The moderates have been trying to derail the uprising and bring it under their own wing, but workers well understand that both the hardliners and the moderates are two faces of the same coin, wanting to further squeeze them, knowing that they are not organised. Both the moderates and hardliners have been using various tactics to have the protesters take up their chants and slogans, but they usually are beaten up, pushed out or booed and remain impotent in the face of the mass protests.

All indicators are that the uprising is continuing to expand and deepen. The teachers have called for a nationwide strike, which has the potential to be replicated in other industries given

the militancy and class nature of the movement. Security forces are set to crack down even harder, but so far the

people show no signs of retreating.

03 January 2018

[Red Flag](#)

Hay Days of Nepali Communists

5 January 2018, by **Farooq Tariq**

The Communist Party Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist UML) won 80 seats under FPTP while their Left Front partner CPN (Maoist Center) won 36 seats. The ruling Nepali Congress (NC) could gain only 23 seats. The Communists won 116 seats out of 165 in total.

Two parties based in Madhes, in southern Nepal, the Rastriya Janata Party-Nepal (RJPN) and the Sanghiya Samajbadi Forum (SSF), combined to secure 21 seats; other fringe parties won the remaining five seats.

In the proportional system for the 110 seats, UML got 33.25 percent vote while Congress came second with 32.78 percent. The Maoist Center got 13.66 percent votes.

In total, out of the 275 seats in the House of Representatives, the left alliance holds 174 (121 for the CPN-UML and 53 for the Maoists), the NC 63, the RJPN 17, and the SSF 16.

The Congress was at the losing end in the FPTP system as the Communists united and put up joint candidates under a 60/40 formula in favor of UML. It was mainly one to one race in the elections under the new 2015 constitution that made the difference in favor of Communists unlike the past parliamentary practices, when three main parties contesting against each other's during the last 2013 and 2008 general elections.

The newly constituted seven provinces also saw a massive victory for UML. Six out of seven provinces were won over by UML and the process of forming new provincial governments is under way.

The two main parties of Nepal, UML and Maoist Center, had decided prior

to the elections, not only to form the alliance but also to merge within six months to form one united Communist party. This was approved very well by the people as this brings the two parties into a binding contract to unite and not just an election alliance.

There were celebrations in the street of the Katmandu after this historic victory of the Communists. This was the first time that Communists have an almost two third majority in Nepal, the most poverty stricken country of South Asia. The UML and Maoist Center have been in power several times since 1994 but always for a short time and as part of coalitions.

The appeal of UML for a stable and strong government worked very well among the Nepali masses who were tired of weak coalition government of opposite ideologies. The Nepali Congress was also taught a lesson for their impression of a pro Indian party.

The Indian Blockade

India's blockade of September 2015 was remembered very well by Nepali masses who had to make kilometers of lines to fetch petrol for vehicles after most supplies from India was stopped.

This was after the Madheshi community protested over the issue of constitutional rights. Madheshis are mainly located in Terai area of Nepal and were unhappy with the rights they had within the first constitution of Nepal. The blockade choked imports of not only petroleum, but also medicines and earthquake relief material. The United front of Madheshi parties could win only one

province and around 10 percent of the total votes during the present elections.

During the election campaign, Nepali Congress leaders said that a victory by the left alliance would bring a totalitarian regime to power; that a one party system and age old communism has failed miserably in the world. These arguments failed to impress the general public. Over the last three decades, the CPN-UML has transformed itself into a democratic force; voters were not convinced that its victory would lead to one-party communist rule. UML at best could be termed as left social democrats. They had adopted multi-party system in their constitution.

Women's Participation

A total of 41 women candidates contested in the first round of elections to the House of Representatives and State Assemblies, in 32 districts out of 75 districts. Of them, 18 women are contesting in the House of Representatives and the rest in the State Assemblies. Only five women won the elections in the FPTP system on the open seats contest. The Nepal constitution guarantee at least 33 percent of women's representation in the parliament that means 91 women in a parliament of 275. Only five were elected, rest of the 86 women would be elected through the proportional system to qualify the general election in accordance with the constitution.

The UML leadership

The UML is led by KP Sharma Oli (65) who joined the Communist movement at the age of 13. Inspired by Indian Communist leader Charu Majumdar, known as “father of Naxalbari peasant movement of Bengal” he spent fourteen consecutive years in jail from 197 to 1984. He was elected Member of Parliament for the first time in 1991 then 1994 and 99. He lost to Maoists in 2008 general elections but won comfortably in 2013 and 2017. He has served in important ministries during the past 21 years and was also Prime minister of Nepal from October 2015. He resigned in August 2016 after the Maoists ditched the Left Alliance government to join the Congress. Pushpa Kamal Dhar, known as Prachanda, leader of the Maoists, was elected prime minister. However, before the present elections, Prachanda opted to form the Left Alliance and won 36 seats in the FPTP system and around 13 percent of the votes in PR system.

A short note on History of Communists

Nepali Communists are not traditional communists. Realizing the negative effects of the collapse of the Soviet Union, CPN UML was formed on January, 1991 through the unification of the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist Leninist). The party has led four governments before the present landslide victory. The UML surprised many internationally, when they took over power for the first time briefly for nine months through elections in 1994 at the time when there was massive propaganda against socialism. Many brushed aside this victory as “communists governing under a king”.

In this present period of right wing surge, it is very pleasant to see that Nepal is a sizable country where Communist parties of various stripes cumulatively enjoy the support of the

majority of the country's voters – even if it is the only remaining one.

However, this is not an accidental landslide victory of the CPN UML and Maoist Center. It took years of hard work with a Nepali touch unlike the other CPs of the region that they were able to keep, sustain, consolidate and muster this mass support of the working class. The Communist Party Nepal formed in 1949 in India has gone through various phases of development, from being a party in exile to a party with significance presence in every part of Nepal. It has seen dozens of splits within its ranks and has allied to various international trends within communist movement. However the urge of unity among various factions and groups which identify as Communist was always at the centre of their strategy.

From Maoism to Left social democratic ideology, from armed struggle to parliamentarianism, from war to peace, the Communists of Nepal in various forms were always known as communists. This identity as Communists has been very strong among their ranks and with good reasons. The term never brought them a negative response It was always a vote winning term.

The predecessors of UML and Maoist Center have always learned to live and survive in most difficult circumstances and keep their support intact. While all political parties were banned between 19 60s – 1980s, they managed to work along with the dictates of the King. They worked through Panchayats established as an alternative to parliament [47] and tried to popularize their ideas. The main debate among them was how to be popular among the masses with their own name.

The decade's long rift between the Kingdom and the Congress, the main party of the bourgeoisie, was very well maneuvered by various grouping of Communists in their favor. They sided one against the other. However, most of them were never afraid to go to jail. And many spent years behind bars.

The Maoists

The Maoists, during 10 years of armed struggle from 1996 to 2006, used a combination of armed attacks on police and official buildings and personal while negotiating with the government and the King. The rejection of negotiation was not written in the dictionary of their strategy. So was UML leadership who was always ready to find a way out of the crisis.

It was the Maoist determination to abolish the office of the King that won the day after 2008 parliamentarian elections when Maoist emerged surprisingly as the second largest party trailing behind Congress. This was a great victory for Nepal to get rid of the king through a combined strategy of mass movement and elections.

After abolishing of the office of King, the main challenge was writing a new constitution that could guarantee all the basic rights of all the communities, no matter how small. The challenge was not met without years of negotiations and sacrifices of various governments.

Maoist's splits continued during the 2008/2013 power period through coalition governments along opposite parties and fellow communists. They were bitterly divided on issue of the path of the “revolution”. One faction of Maoism advocated a boycott of 2013 election, a strategy that failed miserably. However the damage was done as Maoists emerged as third party rather than the second position they had before, losing a significant layer of mass support to the UML.

Maoists under the charismatic leadership of Prachanda made various overnight U turns in terms of forming coalitions and alliances. However, the cleverest timely move by the Maoist Center was to form an election alliance with UML prior to the 2017 elections and decide to start a merger process of the two parties. Had they not made this move, they would have lost badly in the present elections. A political scenario of a three way race in the present election would have benefited the Congress and thus

another unstable government, probably based on another kind of alliance.

The Constitution

The year 2015 saw the acceptance of the constitution with 90 percent parliamentary support. The yearlong boycott of Madheshi parties and the economic blockade of Nepal by India was well fought by the vast majority of Nepal. They succeed in bringing back the Madheshi parties to main stream politics by they making some

amendments to the constitution in agreement with those advocating the boycott.

A positive development and real challenge

The Communist's alliance land slide victory is a positive development in the South Asian region. It is like a wave fresh cool air in an over- heated region of Indian subcontinent. The

real challenge begins now. The massive victory has raised massive expectations. Reforms are on the agenda. However, reforms under capitalism can never be of permanent nature. The capitalist path in the longer run is a road to distraction and losing mass support of the Communists ideology. They have to move ahead on the road of parliament to abolishing of capitalism and remaining elements of feudal society. They know the best how to do it if they want to do it.

23/12/2017

A Women's Strike Organizer on Feminism for the 99 Percent

4 January 2018, by **Linda Yang**

Cecilia Palmeiro is a professor of Latin American literature and queer theory at New York University Buenos Aires. She is also a longterm member of Ni una menos, the transnational Latin American feminist movement that started in Argentina.

This past March, Palmeiro helped organize the [International Women's Strike](#). The strike, dubbed "feminism for the 99 percent," was intended to represent the women ignored by "lean-in feminism"—such as women working in informal labor markets.

The international strike happened on March 8, not long after the Polish Women's Strike and the South Korean Women's strike. Since then, "[we've] started to weave a new internationalism based on sorority and solidarity," Palmeiro said, "which open a new political perspective and the possibility of unexpected alliances.

"As the world made by men for men is collapsing because of its own contradictions, a new world is being dreamed of and created," she added.

Broadly asked Palmeiro about her year of organizing, how global networks of

feminist resistance are strengthening and evolving, and what she plans for next year's international strike.

Looking back as we enter the end of the year, what did 2017 mean to you?

This year, 2017, is a remarkable key date in the history of feminism and the politics of desire. For the first time, women and feminized bodies of 55 countries organized together to strike against patriarchal and colonial forms of exploitation. This was the biggest and most radical process we have ever experienced collectively.

The year opened with another historic event: the Women's March in the US, which happened in more than 600 cities. But these events are processes, they don't start and end on a determined date.

After the strike, we have organized a network of feminist politics. We have situated assemblies in places of conflict such as occupied factories, indigenous territories in dispute; in places where there are political prisoners, in high schools resisting the education reform. Not only have we

been able to identify the plot of machista violence, but also to link struggles over land, labor, human rights, from a feminist perspective.

This is the year of the feminist tide, as we call the new collective subject that women of the world are creating in these oceanic protests that traverse borders, languages, and identities. The tide is intersectional, horizontal, transversal, global: We have constituted ourselves as a revolutionary subject, yet our revolution cannot be captured in the traditional frames of representative democracy, although it appears and floods everywhere. The tide permeates artistic languages, intervenes in political parties, imposes agenda within trade unions, changes the relations of production in factories and in the informal economy, fuels disputes over power in all spheres of life. It blooms in the street protests and exploits in the households and in beds. This is an existential revolution, and we are organizing ourselves to change it all.

You helped organize the Women's Strike in your community. After the strike ended, how did you feel?

By creating empathy between all the feminized bodies as we all suffer machista violence, from micromachismo to femicide, we have strengthened international and intersectional sorority as a source of power and social transformation. Instead of perceiving other women as competitors (as patriarchy wants), we identify with their struggles. We share the causes, because violence affects us all in different ways, but the root is the same. This is an effect of the organization of the international strike, that is not just an event but a creative process in which we map the global disobediences and resistances, we articulate concepts and struggles, we visibilize forms of exploitation and extractivism, and we construct a radical feminist perspective that is able to address this critical moment of humanity that threatens the very continuity of life on this planet. We have developed a feminist ethics of life and not of sacrifice, and found new conceptual tools to confront the gendered, sexuated, and racialized international division of labor.

Everybody can make a difference. Nothing is too small for the feminist revolution. We are creating a new power and we need to feed the tide in every possible way.

Organizing for next year's Women's Strike is already underway for Ni una menos. What do you hope this next strike will bring?

Next year, 2018, will find us with our networks already developed and tested. We were successful in organizing the first International Women's Strike as a rehearsal of the world to come, of the world we want to live in. Striking allowed us to denaturalize labor exploitation and extractivism of our bodies and territories. This year, the strike will be organized around the question: "How do women strike?"

Because for us, labor is not only the work we do in the formal market. Most women in the world don't have the privilege of a waged job. Housewives, unemployed women, students, retired women, workers of the informal economy are the majority of the female population. So our strike

is a creative tool. We have first to make visible how we work. We need to perceive the tasks that are imposed over us and we "naturally" do as labor. Caregiving, reproductive and domestic labor need to be identified as such, with or without love. And then the question of how to strike gives us tools to take over the control of our lives, to disobey and create new forms of living. Because, with our devalued labor in the market and our not-recognized labor at home, women of the world support capitalism. Once we realize our position in the productive process, we have the power of changing the world.

You've said that the Ni una menos movement has developed a lot since this March. In what ways has Ni una menos developed and how do you hope that expands?

Since the strike, we have been networking and connecting different fronts of struggle, specifically in Latin America in the context of a conservative restoration. We have focused on issues of labor, exploitation, and extractivism. Our bodies and our territories are in danger because of this new wave of intense neoliberalism. The conflicts over the common property are at stake: The lands that are being appropriated by transnational companies displacing peasants and indigenous [people] (such is the case of Benetton in Patagonia); the state that is being dismantled, leaving women with no access to education, healthcare, or protection; and our bodies are taken as plunder of conquest, as we are exploited and disciplined. By connecting perspectives such as indigenous feminism with black feminism, migrant feminism, queer feminism, and popular feminism, we made alliances and enlightened the intersection of violences as well as featured possible strategies of resistance. That is why our movement has been described as a fourth wave of feminism or feminism of the 99 percent.

We were able to connect and deepen the mutual understanding of issues such as the life-endangering agrobusiness, the defense of Mother Earth as a source of life, the defense of our

rights and autonomy (considering reproductive rights as a main issue of public health) in the frame of anti-colonial and anti-neoliberal struggles. Since the strike, all sorts of feminist assemblies have proliferated. Women are organizing themselves at all levels—"from the academia to the slums, from political parties to high schools"—in an exercise of direct democracy and collective reconstruction of the social tissue. We have creatively questioned the pharmaceutical and financial control over our existences through direct action. We criticized the neoliberal appropriation of our demands. Our hope is that feminism can be the way out of this catastrophe.

Has the past year given you frustration? Hope?

This year has been as exciting as frustrating. At the level of the social landscape, it has been devastating. Poverty and violence have spread over the world. Conflicts have arisen at all scales, from the threat of a global war to the increase on femicide rates. Neoliberal policies and the infinite greed of the one percent ruling elites, with the complicity of the governments, are responsible for this crisis of humanity. Our hope is that more than half of the world population can agree to end this madness. Women are the owners of the factories of humanity: We just need to raise awareness to take over our own power.

Do you have any advice for anyone who finds themselves tired or beaten down from fighting? How do we keep pushing forward?

Everyday, we all feel frustration and despair as we see our rights and liberties limited more and more. But we always need to bear in mind that we construct the world we live in, so we can make it different, starting at the micro-political level, or the politics of everyday life. Everybody can make a difference. Nothing is too small for the feminist revolution. We are creating a new power and we need to feed the tide in every possible way. To know that one is being part of something bigger than oneself is already comforting and stimulating. We should not underestimate the role

of affects and creativity in the revolutionary process.

Moving forward into 2018, what initiatives do you hold most important? What do you hope to accomplish?

Besides the collective Ni una menos, some of us, together with other compañeras, have just founded the Permanent Assembly of Women Art Workers and have issued a [Declaration of Commitment of Feminist Artistic Practices](#). Our first

goal is to provide creative perspectives on how to strike and to denaturalize and deconstruct patriarchy within the art world. It is of vital importance that female sensitivities and world views are promoted and not censored and that we work against inequity in every sphere.

With Ni una menos, our main plan for 2018 is the organization of the second International Women's Strike, which is already a huge campaign. After that,

we aim to consolidate more alliances and imagine new languages for the social protest and the construction of new forms of community. We hope to experiment with new forms of organization and continue to expand our horizons.

As the world made by men for men is collapsing because of its own contradictions, a new world is being dreamed of and created. We are up and coming.

[Broadly](#)

Reflections on the Growing Anti-Regime Protests in Iran

3 January 2018, by **Frieda Afary**

In comparison to the mass protests that arose in 2009 after the fraudulent presidential election, these protests are different in several important respects: 1. They directly oppose poverty and systemic corruption. 2. They include the wide participation of the working class (men and women), many unemployed. . 3. Demands include an end to the Islamic Republic, Death to Supreme Leader Khamenei, Death to president Rouhani, Death to the "Revolutionary Guards" and an end to Iran's military intervention in Syria and Lebanon. 4. In some cases, individual women have bravely taken off their headscarves or veils in public places and have encouraged others to follow them.

No one can deny that these protests are arising after at least a year of almost daily labor actions and strikes against non-payment of wages and terrible working conditions, as well as protests by impoverished retirees, teachers, nurses and those who have lost their meager savings in bankrupt banks. Slogans have also called for freedom for all political prisoners and an end to dictatorship.

At the same time, there is no doubt that there is a strong nationalist tone to some of the slogans such as "Neither Gaza, Nor Lebanon, I sacrifice my life for Iran" or a monarchist influence expressed in slogans which support the legacy of Reza Shah Pahlavi.

Some Iranians believe that the protests might have been started by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to consolidate its power, given the infighting within the regime and the threat of a direct war between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Others believe that monarchists and the Mujahedin Khalq, with support from the Trump administration, have had a major role in encouraging the protests.

For those Iranians opposed to all these actors and genuinely hoping for a liberatory movement, it is extremely important to learn from the lessons of the Syrian revolution. If the mass movement against poverty and dictatorship limits itself simply to the overthrow of the regime without an affirmative and progressive vision, it

faces the danger of being taken over by right-wing populists or monarchists and becoming a pawn in the imperialist rivalries.

This is a time when those Iranian socialists and Marxists who do not support authoritarian brands of socialism can make a difference by organizing within this movement on the basis of opposing Iran's capitalist state, helping the development of workers' councils, defending and promoting women's struggles against patriarchy/ misogyny, and speaking out against the discrimination suffered by Iran's ethnic and religious minorities such as Kurds and Bahais.

Deepening the content of the current protest movement is the best way to challenge and oppose imperialist war drives by the U.S., Israel, Saudi Arabia, Russia, China, Iran, Turkey, and to express solidarity with other progressives in the region and around the globe who demand social justice.

December 31, 2017

[Alliance of Middle East Socialists](#)

Send Fujimori back to prison

2 January 2018, by **Hugo Blanco**

From that moment, in Cusco, where I was, in Lima and in other cities, people went out to the streets, abandoning their Christmas dinner. In Lima, the capital, the demonstration intended to go to the Government Palace - the seat of government -, but in the face of police opposition went to the residence of the president. The videos show the protesters pushing against police shields.

On Christmas Day, Cusco returned to the streets and a meeting was called at the premises of the Workers' Federation of Cusco for the following day. At the meeting, a governing body was appointed to continue the fight for Fujimori to be returned to prison. A regional strike is being prepared and a national strike will be fought. There were protest demonstrations in several cities.

Former Minister of Justice Marisol Pérez Tello had said that the Peruvian president should not be granted a common pardon since he was convicted of crimes considered crimes against humanity. But, the president changed the Comisión de Gracias Presidenciales, the body that considers pardons, by appointing a new minister, Enrique Mendoza, in order to have Fujimori's freedom.

They set up a medical board of three people, which included Fujimori's own doctor, who described Fujimori's health as "serious". The formal basis for the pardon was the former president's supposed bad health. The Peruvian people think that this is a betrayal, because precisely PPK was chosen so that the daughter of the dictator was not president, because she would free her father. Peruvian law prevents a prisoner from being released when there is an ongoing legal process: in Fujimori's case there is the matter of the killing in Pativilca. Therefore the freeing of Fujimori is illegal.

There is suspicion too that PPK did this because Fujimori's son Kenji had backed him weeks earlier in a fight against his own impeachment and that this was the quid pro quo. [\[48\]](#)

What did Fujimorismo mean?

In 1990, the candidates in the Peruvian Presidential elections were Mario Vargas Llosa and Fujimori.

The economic program of Vargas was neoliberal, so, against that, Peru voted for Fujimori. But once in power, Fujimori carried out the economic policy proposed by Vargas Llosa and privatized public companies.

On the night of April 5, 1992, Fujimori made an announcement to the nation, dissolving the Congress of the Republic, the judiciary, and the Public Ministry.

While the speech was being broadcast on television, Army, Navy and Air Force troops arrived at the Congress of the Republic, the Judiciary, the Public Ministry and other institutions to take complete control of them. The headquarters of the General Confederation of Workers of Peru (CGTP) and other unions was also shut down.

The events that occurred immediately after the message to the nation were only broadcast by the international media. Members of the Armed Forces entered TV channels and radio stations, and forced them to continue with normal transmission, without informing about what was happening in state institutions and in the streets. The government decreed a curfew and began a series of arrests of businessmen and politicians.

Fujimori took control of the judiciary.

Using the money of all Peruvians, he promoted those parts of the media with whom he had a sweetheart deal.

He educated his children in expensive US universities with the money of the Peruvian people.

His family members stole money sent from Japan to poor people in Peru. His wife, Susana Iguchi, reported this. For that reason he had her arrested and tortured. His daughter Keiko agreed to be named "first lady" instead of her imprisoned and tortured mother.

Indigenous women were forcibly sterilized to exterminate our race.

He changed the constitution so that his reelection was possible.

He bought politicians, as we saw in a video of his main advisor.

He organized groups of mercenary assassins such as the Colina group that massacred students and a professor from La Cantuta University. The Colina group also carried out [a massacre in Barrios Altos](#), a poor neighbourhood of Lima.

The Pativilca case, mentioned earlier, went like this: Colina members kidnapped John Calderón RÃos (18), Toribio Ortiz Aponte (25), Felandro Castillo Manrique (38), Pedro Agüero Rivera (35), Ernesto Arias Velásquez (17)) and César Rodríguez Esquivel (29).

After seizing them, they tortured them with burning torches on various parts of their bodies, including the anus; and they also kicked them. After this, they were killed with two rounds of bullets in the head and their bodies were thrown in a sugar cane field.

Decline

In 2000, a video appeared that showed Fujimori's advisor Vladimiro Montesinos (now imprisoned) buying an opposition politician.

and economical) were concentrated in one family and its clique, the [Asad-Makhuluf-Shalish](#), similar to Libya or the Gulf Monarchies. This type of regime favored the development of a crony capitalism dominated by a state bourgeoisie. In other words, the

members and people close to the ruling families often exploit their dominant position guaranteed by the political power to amass considerable fortunes.

In this perspective, although a new generation of Sunni businessmen emerged as others left the country following the uprising in 2011, the complex network of relations between the power elite, and fractions of the Sunni bourgeoisie, has remained part of the regime's tools to dominate society and build loyalties among this sector.

Alliance between Regime, Crony Capitalists and Fractions of the Sunni Bourgeoisie

Following the rise to power of Bashar Al-Asad in 2000, neoliberal policies and a deepened processes of privatization, which had started in the previous decades, created new monopolies in the hands of relatives and people associated with the regime, either through familial ties or through positions in the public sector or offices in the military and security services. Rami Makhluf, the cousin of Bashar Al-Asad, embodied the regime-led mafia-style process of privatization. His economic empire was vast [49] and he was the main shareholder of Cham Holding Company (Sottimano 2016).

The Asad-Makhluf cartel could include external actors into their *‘asabiyya* [50] (group solidarity or social bond) such as Mohammad Saber Hamsho, who is still a prominent Syrian Sunni businessman in the country. A few years prior to the uprising in 2011, he became a powerful political and economic figure as a result of his association with Maher Al-Asad, the brother of Bashar, following his marriage with Maher's sister in law. He was *‘elected’* as deputy in Parliament in 2003 and 2007 (Donati 2013: 40). Before the uprising, many other examples of old fashioned Sunni state bourgeoisie

turned into private entrepreneurs existed, such as former Minister of Defense Mustapha Tlass and sons (owners of MAS Group, a chain of different commercial and semi-industrial companies) and the sons of former Vice President Abdel Halim Khaddam (owners of Afia, one of the country's largest food firms, which produces food preserves, olive oil and bakery products) (Matar 2015: 110). These new businessmen became prominent in the economic life of Syria, increasingly taking over the positions occupied by traditional bourgeoisie.

From 2005, the number of business associations increased, mostly in the form of joint ventures between local business people and foreign countries, which were generally controlled by businessmen with close links to the regime (Haddad 2013:84). Entrepreneur Imad Ghreiwati [51] who emerged during Bashar Al-Asad's era, led the Chambers of Industry, which was established in 2006, and the Damascus Provincial Chambers of Industry, while Damascene entrepreneur Bassam Ghrawi was appointed by presidential Decree in 2009 as secretary general of the Damascus Chamber of Commerce. He also occupied the position of secretary general of the Federation of Syrian Chambers of Commerce (Donati 2013: 41; Abd al-Aziz 2016).

The establishment of holding companies (Al-Cham [52] controlled by Rami Makhlouf, and Al-Sourya [53] constituted another step in the renewal of the regime's networks in the business world. The holding companies were the instruments for the state bourgeoisie to conduct private business with the new commercial bourgeoisie (Enab Baladi 2016).

The previous agreement between regime and business community deepened as the members of these two holdings secured capital, networks and political support for the establishment. In return they enjoyed economic benefits from the market expansion, took the most profitable projects and benefited from the regime's political protection. 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 who were not sufficiently well connected.

It is interesting to note that the majority of the businessmen were from a Sunni background, with the exception of the inner circle of crony capitalists. According to an analysis published in the Syrian magazine *Al-Iqtisad Wa Al-Naql* in 2011, from the list of the 100 most important businessmen in Syria, 23 percent of them were children of high officials, or their partners or acting as their *‘interfaces’*; 48 percent were new businessmen, but for the majority they had close and corrupt relationships with the security services; 22 percent were part of the traditional bourgeoisie from before the nationalization policies of the sixties, some of whom also had corrupt relationships with the leaders of the state; and seven per cent had their main business activities outside of Syria. In terms of religious sects, the percentage was the following: 69 percent were Sunni, 16 percent Alawi, 14 percent were Christians, 1 percent Shia, while there was no Druze, Ismaili or Kurdish presence. It is important to note that among the 10 wealthiest businessmen in Syria, a majority were Alawis and most probably closely linked to the Asad family, such as Rami Makhluf. In regional distribution, the wealthiest sections of businessmen were first from Damascus, then Aleppo, Latakia, and finally from the cities of Homs and Hama, while there was not a single businessman from the eastern regions of Ar-Raqqa, Deir Az-Zawr and Al-Hasakah (Seifan 2013: 112-113).

The patrimonial nature of the state under Bashar Al-Asad was considerably strengthened during his era with an increased weight of crony capitalists, at the detriment of the historical social base of the regime, especially in rural and mid-town areas. This resulted in a diminished role of corporatist organizations such as the General Federation of Trade Unions, and Baathist peasant unions, and of the Baath Party apparatus in society in general. They were viewed as obstacles to neoliberal economic reform (Abdulhamid 2005; Hinnebusch 2012).

Consequently, cliental, tribal and sectarian connections became all the more important and reinforced primordial identities. These policies, in addition to the growing scarcity of resources and other factors, caused increasing poverty and social inequalities, alongside sectarian and ethnic animosities in some regions [54]

In 2011 it was thus not surprising that large sections of those left behind by the liberalization process, particularly from Sunni-majority villages and medium-sized cities, were at the forefront of the uprising.

After the Uprising: a New Generation of Sunni Businessmen

After more than six years following the uprising, the alliance between the regime and fractions of the Sunni bourgeoisie was maintained although with changes.

Firstly, no mass defections by crony capitalists and businessmen close to the regime occurred; on the contrary, they played an increasingly political role. They first funded the regime's orchestrated mass rallies and public relations campaigns, while their private media tried from the first days of the uprising to undermine the message of the protesters and promote the regime's propaganda (Iqtisad 2015).

Later on, they were increasingly involved in the funding of militias to defend the regime. Early sanctions by various international and regional states did not encourage Syria's integrated elite to abandon the Asads, with the exception of a few individuals such as Manaf Tlass. No individuals under sanctions joined the opposition (Abboud 2013; Ahmed 2016). Crony-capitalist businesspeople and elites affiliated with the regime largely maintained and expanded their operations in the country. Their sustained support granted them opportunities to improve their socio-economic status by affording them

preferential access to industries and sectors that were abandoned when competitors fled Syria (Kattan 2014; Osseiran 2017).

The Asad regime forces punished the businessmen who openly supported the uprising by confiscating their properties or fling spurious legal charges in newly established "counter-terrorism" courts. Firas Tlass, who fled the country after voicing his support for the Syrian opposition, saw his various assets seized by the Syrian regime (The Syria Report 2014; Lecadre 2017). Those who did not support the regime adequately were also targeted: The assets of 11 members of the Ghreiwati family were seized, including Imad Ghreiwati and four of his siblings. Imad Ghreiwati had been residing in Dubai for several years following his resignation from his position as the head of the Syrian Industrial Federation and the Damascus Chamber of Commerce in 2012 (Baladi News 2017). Similarly, the assets of Muwaffaq Al-Gaddah, one of the main UAE-based Syrian investors with shares in several real estate projects in the upscale Yaafur district outside Damascus, were seized in 2014 by the regime under the accusation of "funding terrorists organizations" and of "participating in bringing weapons into Daraa" (Adulraszak 2013; Al-Iqtisadi 2014). These businessmen have never made any official statements opposing the regime or in support of the uprising. Both personalities paid the price for not being vocal about their support.

The traditional sections of the bourgeoisie, and the ones without connections to the regime, adopted a more passive attitude of 'wait and see.' Large sections of this social class might have wanted the uprising to succeed in the beginning, while maintaining a rather authoritarian and neoliberal regime. With few exceptions [55], they were nonetheless reluctant to participate in the protest movement (Abbas 2011).

With the deepening of the war, many business elites also decided to leave Syria and transfer most of their capital outside of the country. Total withdrawals from Syrian banks were estimated to be around \$10 billion by the end of 2012. The majority of this

money was reinvested in neighboring countries. Having obtained the Syrian regime's approval, some investors transferred their activities and machinery to Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates (Al-Mahmoud 2015). Syria's neighbors benefited from the considerable cash injections flowing from the establishment of Syrian companies and joint ventures with local partners.

The majority of this segment of the business elite, those who left the country, were not integrated in the new war economy networks, while their old influential connections were now challenged or disappearing (Abboud 2013: 6). There was already evidence that some members of these elites were becoming marginalized in Syria, by being silently dismissed from the executive boards of various companies or other positions of nominal leadership and power. The new 'rising stars' were usually outsiders who had accumulated some level of wealth before the uprising.

There are few examples. The most important one is Samer Foz, who became throughout the war one of the country's most powerful businessmen. Hailing from Latakia, he is the son of a former Sunni member of the Baath party who was very close to Hafez al-Asad in the 1970s (Iqtisad 2017). Prior to the uprising, he owned Aman Group [56], a contractor for real estate developments and food commodities. According to their website, the Group has "strategic relations with an extensive network of suppliers in over 30 countries (Aman Group 2017, Swedeh 2017)."

He also purchased at low price the assets of some of the 'outcast' businessmen who had left Syria, such as Imad Ghreiwati. Throughout the war, and thanks to his close contacts with Bashar Al-Asad, he benefited massively from government contracts and acted as a broker for grain deals with state buying company Hoboob (Saul 2013, Enab Baladi 2017, The Syria Report 2017). Furthermore, he founded the Association of the FOZ Charity, which is active in Latakia and its rural areas, and was planning to expand its services to Damascus and its countryside. Foz has also been accused of funding the Quwwat Dirâ

Al-Amn Al-Askari (the Military Security Shield Forces), a paramilitary force affiliated with Al-Amn Al-Askari (the Military Intelligence), and use it for personal affairs (Swedeh 2017; Ash-Sharq Al-Awsat 2017).

In August 2017, his company Aman Group announced its contribution to the reconstruction of Basateen Al-Razi area, in the Mezzeh district of Damascus, in partnership with Damascus Governorate and Damascus Cham Private Joint Stock Company. Aman Damascus, the company established by Aman group for this project, has declared a \$18.9 million capital (Enab Baladi 2017). In November, Aman Group was granted by Damascus Cham Holding the right to develop real estate properties worth around \$312 million in the Basatin Al-Razi project (The Syria Report 2017b).

Before the deal with the Aman Group, Damascus Cham had established a similar joint-venture with Zubaidi and Qalei LLC, which is owned by Khaled Al-Zubaidi and Nader Qalei. The latter is a Sunni Damascus-based businessman with connections to the regime and whose company Castle Investment was awarded in 2017 a long-term contract to manage the 5-star Ebla Hotel in the outskirts of Damascus (The Syria Report 2017a).

The fact that Samer Foz and Nader Qalei were part of the Sunni community did not prevent them from having very close links to the regime, showing once again the latter's multiple strategies and tools to constitute a diverse popular basis through clientelism, tribalism and sectarianism.

Another noteworthy case is that of Husam Qaterji, an Aleppo-based trader who was little known before the uprising, and operated as a middleman for the trade of oil and cereals between the regime, the Kurdish PYD and the self-declared Islamic State (IS) (Yazigi 2016b: 4). For example, Qaterji and his traders bought up wheat from Raqqa and Dayr Az-Zawr and gave IS 20 percent, when the jihadist organization was still in control of these provinces. He was then rewarded by the regime through the "election" as a member of

parliament in 2016, representing the Aleppo Governorate (El-Dahan and Georgy 2017). Similarly, Muhyaddin Al-Manfush (known as Abu Ayman) became one of the most prominent merchant smugglers in Damascus province. He provided besieged Eastern Ghuta with food and fuel, relying on personal relations with regime officials to funnel his supplies through the Harasta checkpoint and charging prices up to 20 times higher than in the capital. Manfush used some profits to try to win over the Ghuta residents, for instance by paying salaries for teachers and administrators, while the regime benefited by taking a cut of his profits. Just like every warlord, he protected his facility with a private militia. Around 1,500 people worked in his factory, which also supplied Damascus with cheese and dairy products. Subsequently, Manfush was able to develop his facilities to produce canned and baked goods sold in Ghuta and Damascus (Sadaki 2016; As-Salhani 2017).

These new profiteers were able to bank on the opportunities created by the departure of the dependent business elite networks. Fares Shehabi, the head of the Aleppo Chamber of Industry and a well-known supporter of the regime, became the President of the Federation of Syrian Chambers of Industry in June 2012 (Abboud 2013: 6). At the end of 2014, for instance, the chambers of commerce in Aleppo and Damascus witnessed a significant change in their membership. In Aleppo, 10 of the 12 elected board members were new investors, many of whom were unheard of prior to the uprising. In Damascus, 7 out of 12 had a similar background (Yazigi 2016a: 4). Already in the beginning of 2014, the Ministry of Industry had nominated new individuals to sit on the board of various chambers of industry (in Hama, Aleppo, Homs, and Damascus), in a move largely seen as a reprisal against pro-opposition investors. A similar development occurred in the parliamentary "elections" in 2016, when 70 percent of the deputies were replaced by new entrants, thus reflecting the significant change of the powerbase of the Syrian regime (SANA 2016).

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can see that the regime's collaboration with fractions of the Sunni bourgeoisie and new generations of businessmen has been maintained. The key element has been loyalty, and failure to do so led to punishment measures.

The regime is not opposed to Sunni populations or a particular Sunni identity per se, as some has claimed, but to hostile constituencies, which have been in their far majority from Sunni popular backgrounds in impoverished rural areas and mid-towns, in addition to the suburbs of Damascus and Aleppo.

This does not mean that sectarianism has not been a major tool employed by the regime in order to control and divide the Syrian population. There have been sectarian massacres and forced displacement by regime forces and its allies against impoverished Sunni populations involved in the uprising or at least suspected of sympathies towards it [57] while eliminating most forms of democratic and non-sectarian resistance in the country. Similarly, the regime has demonized the uprising since day one by describing it as a foreign conspiracy led by salafist jihadist movements. This campaign had the objective of isolating religious minorities and seculars from the popular movement and binding them to the regime, which presented itself as the sole guarantor of their very existence. The regime's sectarian narrative soon became complementary to the rise of Islamic fundamentalists and their subsequent domination of the military opposition scene.

This is however very different than saying that the regime is against all Sunnis. Such simplification overlooks the Sunni support for the regime, especially in Damascus and Aleppo, and the Sunni presence within regime institutions and loyalist militias. Just as other religious and ethnic communities, Syrian Arab Sunnis were "formed" through various elements (class, gender, regional origin, religion, etc.) and do not have a single political position. Class has to be thus understood as a social relation, and

When approaching Syria, we should similarly be careful not to essentialize religious and ethnic identities as monolithic ones; failure to do so has generally led to misinterpreting

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