



IV518 - March 2018

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A window opens to fight Macron

30 March 2018, by **Léon Crémieux**

It is attacking workers in several fundamental domains: on labour legislation, with the laws and decrees put in place last autumn through a system of governmental ordinances (which enable the government to avoid any debate and any process of submitting amendments) concerning many dispositions of the Labour Code that placed constraints on employers (abolition of the priority that was stipulated in the Code for agreements on an industry level rather than workplace by workplace, abolition of the responsibility of the parent company in case of closing down of a company or a plant, reduction of the amount of compensation in case of unjust sackings, possibility of breaking collective bargaining agreements while avoiding the procedures and the financial costs of redundancy plans). To this should be added a frontal attack against the legal rights of trade unions, by a reduction of up to 50 per cent in the number of elected representatives through the merging

of the existing bodies (works councils, committees of workers' representatives, health and safety committees) in the process removing the legal right of workers' representatives to have access to information about the company.

The offensive has continued at the beginning of 2018 by a fundamental attack on the social wage, i.e. the employers' and workers' contributions based on wages, which pay for social protection (sickness, retirement pensions, unemployment benefits) and professional training. The aim is progressively to remove from gross wages all payments for workers' rights and for these payments to be financed from taxes.

In practice, this is an attack on the fundamentals of the social wage established at the end of the last war, collectively guaranteeing the continuity of wages in case of sickness, unemployment or professional training. This challenge began, little by little, from the 1990s,

with the creation of the Generalized Social Contribution (CSG), a tax based on the totality of revenues that replaced, step by step, sickness benefits. In 2018, this CSG is being increased by 1.7 per cent, to 9.2 per cent of income. On the other hand there is the abolition of deductions from wages for sickness and unemployment, which in 2017 amounted to 3.15 per cent. Consequently, it has been possible contain demands for wage increases, since there was a net wage increase of 1.8 per cent, but also to impose cut of 1.7 per cent in pensions, which depend on the CSG. Similarly, in the autumn of 2017, a cut of state funding of Personalized Housing Aid (APL) was imposed, making a saving of 800 million euros. Thus students, receiving an APL of between 60 and 200 euros per month, saw it drop by 5 euros this year.

By reforming the rules governing access to universities and a reorganization of the courses leading

up to the baccalauréat, the government has accentuated the selection rules, accentuating social reproduction, while closing down more and more classes in primary schools, under the pretext of giving further resources to schools in priority zones.

After having thus attacked young people, pensioners and private sector workers regulated by the Labour Code, the government now wants to attack the status of civil servants and the funding of public services. The funding of health care services is under attack and 120,000 civil service jobs are programmed to disappear by the end of Macron's five-year term of office: the government intends to privatise many services that are today provided by the public sector. This is one more example of the aim on aligning France with the European countries that have already reduced the number of public sector workers and the scope of public services.

In parallel, a frontal offensive is also being conducted against the status of rail workers and the range of services provided by the state railway company, the SNCF, by suppressing a large number of small lines in the regions and opening up the main lines to competition. Rail workers benefit from a public status and a specific retirement pension scheme, which several governments have unsuccessfully attacked, in particular that of Alain Juppé in 1995. So there would be an emblematic aspect to a social defeat of the workers of this sector, a message sent to the whole movement demonstrating that if the rail workers themselves have been beaten, there is no point in hoping to have the strength to resisting the government's reforms.

In all, over several weeks, there has been an increase, in a sporadic fashion, of strikes by school and university students, but also a growing mobilization of pensioners and employees of hospitals for dependent adults (EHPADs), parallel to a movement of co-ordination of hospital workers, organized by a national coordinating committee, with the support of the SUD trade-union federation and many CGT unions. Air France workers, united in a very

broad inter-union alliance, will strike on the March 23rd and 30th to demand a 6 per cent increase in wages after six years of a pay freeze.

Seven federations of civil servants (all except the CFDT and UNSA), after having called a strike on October 10th against the freezing of their salary index and against the attacks on their jobs and their status, will be on strike again on March 22nd. The SNCF unions (CGT, SUD and FO) have called rail workers to demonstrate on March 22nd before launching a prolonged strike movement on April 3rd.

Many private enterprises, threatened by plans to lay off workers or close down plants, are also in the process of mobilizing, such as Carrefour and Ford Blanquefort, where Philippe Poutou works.

Overall, around particular specific demands, all of which however concern jobs and wages, and in many cases public services, a social movement of considerable breadth is being built.

There is no guarantee of its success, the more so as the government has several advantages. If it launches a frontal attack without really negotiating, it can count on the support of the CFDT and the hesitant attitude of Force Ouvrière. In the same way, without in any way scaling down its objectives, it will set up a series of meetings with the unions where there will be a pretence of negotiation. The CGT leadership, once again, is pulled this way and that, between on the one hand the pressure of combative sectors who want to build up a real relationship of forces and an effective movement, and on the other hand the fear of finding itself isolated in a confrontation with the government.

Overall, SUD Solidaires is the only trade-union organization that is clearly putting forward a perspective of convergence of struggles and the construction of a broad movement against the policies of the government. The choice made by the SNCF federations of the CGT, UNSA and the CFDT of a disjointed series of strike days starting on April 3rd, is refused by SUD-Rail, which wants to build an ongoing strike movement. The

governing is counting on taking advantage of these divisions to get the union leaderships bogged down in a false social dialogue and avoid the convergence of struggles.

To this division among unions and among different sectors is obviously added the weight of the defeat in 2016 against the Labour Law and the defeat without combat against the ordinances of autumn 2017. That weighs on the shoulders of many combative trade-union sectors.

These negative elements can obviously be countered by the dynamics of the mobilization and by the mobilizations of important sectors of health workers, civil servants and of course the rail workers. That is what tens of thousands of combative activists are working towards.

Furthermore the principal contradiction of the situation on the side of the Macron-Philippe government is that it is counting on the absence of solidarity with the civil servants and the rail workers. A sustained media barrage denounces their "privileges" on a daily basis. It would be untrue to say that this campaign is having no effect, but at the same time, it is coming from a government that in the past few months has come across as the government of those who are really privileged, handing out more and more tax breaks for wealthy people and shareholders. Furthermore, the credibility of Macron's government comes less from its popularity than from the absence of serious political opposition. En Marche is a weak political force, but the traditional right, the Republicans, like the Socialists, are paralyzed, the National Front is voiceless and Jean-Luc Mélenchon is shutting himself up in an identity-centred posture that is paralyzing the energy of those that he had succeeded in mobilizing. In addition, his political orientations concerning migrants and Syria can only disorientate the activist layers that are close to him.

To sum up, a social window is opening, which can itself change the political climate. March 22nd will mobilize a large number of demonstrators. But it will have to exert all its weight, both to help to

bring together the sectors that have mobilized and to support the building of a broad movement, in the localities and nationally, in the coming weeks.

Olivier Besancenot has encountered a broad popular echo in the course of several televised interventions over the last few days in favour of solidarity with the rail workers and for a broad

unitary movement against the social attacks. With the engagement of its militants in the preparation of March 22nd and its sequels, the NPA took the initiative of a political appeal that was made public on March 19th, bringing together forces ranging from Libertarian Alternative to Benoît Hamon, via La France Insoumise, in

support of March 22nd and of the movement of the rail workers.

All of this does not yet mean that this is the springtime of struggles, but it bears witness to a political climate that can change through building a unitary movement against Macron.

March 20, 2018

A Call to Support the Landless People Char Conference

29 March 2018, by **Badrul Alam**

Date of the conference: 14 April 2018.

BKF and BKS are asking for support (including financial, with the help of ESSF) to insure the success of the conference.

Bangladesh Krishok Federation and Bangladesh Kishani Sabha first successfully occupied the Khasland (fallow land for which there is no particular owner—the government is the real owner but in accordance with land manual landless people are entitled to enjoy) in 1 January 1992 in Dashmina sub-district under Patuakhali district near the coastal belt of Bay of Bengal. Since then it has been continuing occupation of Khasland throughout the country. To date we have occupied around 76600 acres of Khasland at different points of the country. This land includes 22 Chars (small islands emerged from the river bed and surrounded by water) in the southern part, 12.5 kilometers long British regime railway abandoned land in the northern part, 9 shrimp cultivation centers in the south-western part, small areas in Rangpur district by Pahari Adivasi and some areas in Dinajpur by Santal indigenous people, and small areas in size in other different parts of the country.

This year 30 January-10 February 2018 we made a visit to different occupied areas from the north to

south. The landless people living in occupied lands proposed a Char conference for reunion of landless people aiming to remember the story and history of the land struggle. According to them in 1992 when the landless people took over the land they came with their children. Now they are grown up, got married and they have their children as well but they do not know how their parents or grant parents fought a tough fight against the illegal land bandits and how they survived in the remote island isolated from the main land. Not only they have a new generation but they have achieved their food sovereignty. They are dignified owner of a piece of land amounting 1.5 acres for which they got permanent settlement since 2000. They are growing different sorts of crops, different types of seasonal vegetables, fruits, etc. Furthermore, they are raising cattle, buffaloes, goats, poultry, etc. They have their sanitary latrine and solar panel for electricity. Now they have their respectful lives. However, in the past before the occupation they were neglected in society. Nobody would care a fig for them. They would live in other people's extra abandoned house. Their whole family had to work for the master. Instead, they were provided with food or no cash money. Actually they were called 'Okrait'. That was difficult and some sorts of bondage life.

The residents in the Char are still with the natural farming. The soil of the land is very fertile. They do not need any chemical fertilizer or pesticide to produce any crops. Their agricultural produces are every healthy and nutritious. By nature their farming method is agro-ecology that is environment and ecology friendly.

In the struggle of Char occupation the role of women was praiseworthy. In some cases they were in fore front of the movement with leading role. Even after the Char occupation they built huts with straw, bamboo or whatever they found. They fought the enemies with strong determination of do or die. Although they started with straw houses now they have their wooden or brick-built houses. They gradually improved their condition.

With all of the good information about present living standard they are lives and livelihoods are also at risk due to the impact of global climate change. They are also the first victim as island people if any extreme weather events take place in the southern areas. The conference also will try to find how to solve this climate crisis based on their own experience and know-how. They experienced lots of storms, cyclones like SIDR, Aila, etc. So, they know how to adapt to and mitigate with impact of climate change. They also need to know that they are not the responsible for the global climate change. They

are the northern rich industrial countries which account for climate change. And they have their historical and ecological dues to pay the landless victim as reparation.

If there would have been a gathering of landless people who were engaged in heroic landless movement, the new generation would have the scope to learn the experience.

Considering their arguments and a long discussion with them the final objectives of the conference have been decided in the following:

1. Declaration of a 'National Land Action Day'
2. Compilation and preservation of the history of Khasland movement
3. Chalking out the planning and strategy of taking possession in the new Khasland
4. Brochure on the wounded and dead in the Khasland movement including Abdus Satter Khan who was the pioneer of Khasland movement
5. A policy paper on protection of landless people and livelihood at the context of global climate change.

They have also decided to rise funding on their own for the conference. Each landless family will provide 2 Kg of rice as contribution to the conference. As southern part is full of canal and rivers most of the participant will come by engine boat. Thus, they will use one Kg of rice for their transport cost. The rest of the rice will go to be cooked for their meal during conference. Total participants are expected to be 5000. Out of them 3000 will surely give the rice to the organizing committee. An organizing Committee has been formed already in February 2018. This committee is taking all preparation for the conference. So, rice contribution of 3000 landless people will cover the meal for 5000 participants. As the Char conference is going to be held in one island in the south token participation at leadership level will be ensured from other different districts where occupation took place in different forms. These participants will come from far areas. Since they are not economically solvent enough

they are not in position to bear the long travel cost fully. They need subsidy for their travel cost. They have to come by Rickshaw, van, bus, train, ship, launch, trawlers, etc.

Invited guests in the conference:

Chief Guest: AKM Jahangir Hossain, Former State Textile Minister of Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh and current Member of the Parliament

Special Guest: Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, Former Commerce Adviser of the Care Taker Government of Peoples Republic of Bangladesh in 2007-2009

Special Guest: Khusi Kabir, Renowned social activist and coordinator of Nejera Kori

Special speakers: Veteran peasant women leader and current female Vice-Chairman of Dhasmina sub-district and President of Bangladesh Kishani Sabha

Speakers: Leaders of different organizations and local public representatives

Chair: Badrul Alam, President, Bangladesh Krishok Federation

Date of the conference: 14 April 2018

Reporting time: Report will be made and sent within three months of the commencement.

Host:

Bangladesh Krishok Federation, Bangladesh Kishani Sabha, Bangladesh Adivasi Samity, Bangladesh Landless People Association.

Budget

1. Construction of a big Pandal and stage for the participants: Tk. 90,000/-

2. Generator cost: Tk. 10,000/-

3. Cross the river by trawler from the mainland: Tk. 20,000/-

4. Transport cost for the participants availing from different districts: Tk.

2500X110 = Tk. 275,000/-

5. Digital banners(3 pieces): Tk. 2000X3 = Tk. 6,000/-

6. Posters (5000 pieces): Tk. 1000X 20= Tk. 20,000/-

7. Miscellaneous: Tk. 50,000/-

Total: Tk. 471000/-

In Euro: 4710

In word: Four Thousand Seven Hundred Ten Euro Only

Apart from the landless people contribution with rice we need the above budget to make the conference a big success. Therefore, we appeal to ESSF to give support us as much as possible so that we can do everything with the conference smoothly.

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

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IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12
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You can send money through Paypal: see the PayPal button on the upper right side of ESSF [English home page](#):

Through HelloAsso

You can also send money through the association HelloAsso: see its button on the upper right side of [ESSF English home page](#): Or go directly [here](#).

We will keep you informed through our website of the state of the permanent solidarity fund and how it is utilized.

Elections in Russia: The Very Best Day - 2012 and 2018

28 March 2018, by **Ilya Budraitskis**

Indeed, presenting Putinism as an “eternal present”, founded upon a heroic millennial national history, remains one of the key ideological tropes of the ruling elites.

However, in reality “the very best day” of 2012 is completely dissimilar to “the very best day” of 2018. Back then, the regime received the support of the majority through more than just patriotic rhetoric. With the backdrop of high oil prices and continuing economic growth, Putin was able to promise an increase in public sector salaries and guarantee a growth in incomes for the population as a whole. But in 2018, Russia is a country ever more deeply plunged into poverty and deprived of viable prospects for any new economic recovery.

“On the eve of his new six-year term, Vladimir Putin is unable to propose anything other than continued economic stagnation and a deeper plunge into poverty.”

The annexation of Crimea in 2014, ensuing sanctions, and the fall in energy prices curbed the development of a Russian model of capitalism based upon the predatory exploitation of industrial potential inherited from the Soviet era. Over the past few years, the government of Dmitry Medvedev has consistently enacted a Russian version of “austerity measures” whose severity would be envied by the elites of the European Union. Health and education were subject to “optimization programs” accompanied by the closure of schools and hospitals, while inflation was restrained mainly through the effective “freezing” of wages. Russians have been and continue to pay for a

crisis created by the elites. The “besieged fortress” rhetoric adopted by the government since the start of the Ukraine crisis has allowed practically any social protest to be declared as part of a hidden “hybrid war” deployed by the West against Russia [1].

On the eve of his new six-year term, Vladimir Putin is unable to propose anything other than continued economic stagnation and a deeper plunge into poverty. The real government program, which experts openly discuss, anticipates an unflinching adherence to “budgetary rules”, an increase in pensionable age, and a further reduction in social spending.

This frightening lack of any future prospects was fully reflected in the programmatic speech made by Putin on March 1st, 2018. Pronouncing several perfunctory promises “to improve the quality of life”, he then moved to the main subject matter — military threat. Over the small presidential figure, huge screens were lit up, flashing graphics reminiscent of an earlier generation. Putin described with gusto new types of nuclear armaments which would be able to break through the American missile system with ease. Putin made his oft-repeated argument of recent years: if the West is not ready for talks, we will make them listen through our strength. The growth of Russia’s military power has been the result of Putin’s rule. However, the country continues to find itself surrounded by enemies, so continuing the current course is necessary for its survival.

In the forthcoming election on March

18th, what is actually on offer is not the election of a peacetime president, but of a Supreme Commander; the type of leader who, in wartime, like Churchill or Stalin, cannot promise anything else but “blood, sweat and tears.” The figure of Putin, as it were, rises above economic and social policy, thereby transferring that obligation to the competence of government technocrats. Putin is the leader of the nation, primarily responsible for issues of war and peace.

Consequently, military rhetoric becomes the main ideological orientation of domestic policy, justifying both the neoliberal social course, as well as the ensuing crackdown on civil rights and the further entrenchment of the authoritarian regime. The manifold security structures, whose funding has continuously increased in recent years, have been given a mandate to act under a state of permanent emergency in the struggle for the unity of the nation in the face of an external threat. It is no accident that, on the eve of the elections, the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) initiated a new large-scale case against Russian anarchists. In their effort to build up an absurd picture of an armed conspiracy against the regime, the FSB investigators have resorted to physical torture to obtain the evidence needed [2].

The resort to external and internal threats as the main justification for the government’s legitimacy in fact demonstrates the weakness and degradation of the existing regime. Behind the predictability of Putin’s victory in the decorative elections of

March 18th lurks the unpredictability of further developments in the

country.

arts everywhere

March 16, 2018

What Is the Significance of China's #MeToo Movement?

27 March 2018

Since then, Chinese women have organized at least 70 open letters to universities and have posted some of their stories of sexual harassment on social media, with the #MeToo hashtag attracting over 4.5 million hits on Weibo. [3] The government has tried to suppress some of this, blocking the #MeToo hashtag and deleting posts, and China's social media movement has had difficulty moving "offline," as it has outside of China. [4] Nonetheless, some Chinese officials have acknowledged that sexual harassment is a problem and are discussing how universities and government agencies should respond. [5] Hong Kong women have similarly been taking to social media to air their grievances.

The following conversation, organized by Aaron Halegua, a lawyer and research fellow at NYU School of Law, addresses the significance of the #MeToo movement from a variety of perspectives, including its impact on sexual harassment litigation and worker protections; implications for youth, feminist, and LGBTQ movements; the role of public interest lawyers in social movements; and the push for gender equality in Hong Kong. —*The Editors*

Correction: Luo Xixi's allegations were made on Weibo in January 2018. An earlier version of this post misstated the year and failed to state that Luo's allegations led to professor Chen's dismissal from Beihang University.

Friday, March 16, 2018 - 12:48pm

Aaron Halegua [6]

China amended its Women's

Protection Law in 2005 to outlaw sexual harassment and permit victims to sue in court. [7] In 2012, a national regulation protecting female workers obligated employers to prohibit and prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. But these provisions are vague, providing little guidance to courts or lawyers on questions such as: How much harassment gives rise to legal liability? If the harassment is by a coworker, when is the employer liable? If there is harassment, what remedies are available?

Facing this opacity, few victims have sued employers for sexual harassment. Where they have, the results are not encouraging. In what is often considered China's first sexual harassment case, a woman complained that her boss repeatedly touched her body while promising her a better job, invited her to his hotel room, and withheld her bonus when she complained. [8] court dismissed the claim, citing a lack of direct evidence and difficulty confirming her allegations.

In my review of nearly 20 sexual harassment cases, there were many in which courts, like the one above, have found the victim's evidence insufficient. One reason for this is the significant emphasis that the Chinese legal system places on physical evidence as opposed to oral testimony. In other cases, courts find that the victim failed to demonstrate the "harassment" was unwelcome or nonconsensual. In 2005, Xinhua reported that only 10 sexual harassment cases were filed since 2001 and only one plaintiff prevailed. [9]

Even in cases where the plaintiff wins, compensation is paltry. In the earliest known successful case, in which the victim's supervisor kissed and molested her without consent and then repeatedly sent inappropriate text messages, the court awarded an apology and 2,000 renminbi (under \$300) for emotional distress. [10] A Hainan court ordered compensation of 1 renminbi to three men who were fondled and kissed by an advisor to their employer. [11] In an unusual instance where the court awarded over 100,000 renminbi (\$15,000), the unwelcome sexual advances were found to be the cause of the victim's schizophrenia.

The cases highlight the many obstacles that dissuade victims from suing. One manager lobbied a female employee to withdraw her complaint to the police about a coworker repeatedly ejaculating into her teacup. Not surprisingly, retaliation against complaining victims is also common, including forced resignations, dismissals, or retaliatory harassment. [12] When a lawsuit is filed, employers have brought countersuits alleging defamation or requested a court-ordered psychological evaluation of the victim.

Although victims may not fare well in court, not all employers are simply permitting sexual harassment to occur without consequence. In a 2013 case, Walmart fired an employee after several female workers alleged that he rubbed his cheek against theirs, touched their shoulders, and sent harassing WeChat messages. The terminated employee sued Walmart, denying his behavior and claiming that

he was fired without sufficient cause. The court agreed, explaining that only one alleged victim testified and it was unclear who controlled the WeChat account, and therefore ordered Walmart to compensate the fired employee. In such cases, courts are reluctant to credit the victims' oral testimony or to conclude that sexual harassment occurred. Nonetheless, these employers are dismissing alleged harassers, even if they may need to compensate them later.

In the United States, many believe that litigation has failed to provide victims with a meaningful remedy, but the #MeToo movement may inspire some changes to the laws governing sexual harassment. [13] Similarly, in China, there is hope that #MeToo will provide the political push for the government to adopt measures that make litigation a more meaningful mechanism for remedying sexual harassment.

Friday, March 16, 2018 - 12:56pm

Kevin Lin [14]

"Loudly telling dirty jokes, ridiculing female colleagues about their looks and figures, using the excuse of 'giving direction' to make unnecessary body contact in factory workshops, this kind of 'sexual harassment culture' is prevalent." As the #MeToo movement took hold in China, a Foxconn worker described her experience for the feminist website Jianjiaobuluo (????). [15] "If a sexually harassed woman worker protests, she is likely to be accused of being 'too sensitive' and 'unable to take a joke.'"

Sexual harassment is a labor rights issue because it so often occurs in the workplace. While journalists were among the first to popularize the #MeToo movement, the Foxconn worker's story is a reminder that women in blue-collar jobs also regularly experience sexual harassment. A 2013 survey by an organization for female workers, Xiangyanghua (???), showed that an astonishing 70 percent of the 134 female factory worker respondents experienced sexual harassment. And, women in these jobs, due to their more marginalized social status, may

have fewer avenues to fight back than professional women.

So what can be done to combat sexual harassment in the workplace? The Foxconn worker's article makes several concrete proposals, such as breaking the taboo of discussing sexual harassment, providing anti-harassment trainings, and establishing grievance procedures to investigate complaints. These necessary measures on their own do not guarantee protection, at least not without employees actively demanding accountability. Mobilization in the public sphere as well as the workplace remains essential to drive social change.

Such efforts should be supported by stronger legal mechanisms. Although China has had "Special Rules on the Labor Protection of Female Employees" in place since 2012 to prevent sexual harassment, workers rarely see its enforcement. The lack of an explicit provision in the labor laws, or in labor contracts (if workers even have one at all), means women lack even minimal legal protection. There is a call at the global level for the International Labour Organization (ILO) to adopt a convention concerning gender-based violence in the workplace, which countries would then be asked to adopt. [16] China should use this proposal as a guidepost for advancing its own national laws and policies.

This moment also presents an interesting opportunity for the feminist and labor movements to connect and share strategies. Civil society organizations in both movements wrestle with the interplay of gender and work. Further, both have struggled to keep their operations going in light of pressure from authorities. The female worker labor group that conducted the aforementioned survey, Xiangyanghua, was forced to close down in 2015, allegedly because it assisted workers in strikes. The labor movement might benefit from learning more about the use of strategic public and media activities and policy advocacy; the feminist movement may draw lessons on labor mobilizing and giving voice to not only professional but also factory and retail workers.

Such partnerships, while recognizing differences, could be a powerful force in pushing for some of the legal, policy, and workplace reforms necessary to combat sexual harassment.

Friday, March 16, 2018 - 1:09pm

Sophia Huang Xueqin [17]

The #MeToo movement finally echoed loud in China when Luo Xixi, a Ph.D. graduate from Beihang University, made a public allegation on January 1 that her professor Chen Xiaowu had sexually harassed her and seven others over the past 12 years. More sexual harassment accusations against professors and other authority figures are also showing up. Over 8,000 students and alumni have signed petitions demanding anti-sexual harassment mechanisms on campuses.

The notion that "women hold up half the sky" was promoted more than 50 years ago, over 50 percent of students in universities are female, and China's female labor force participation rate is around 60 percent. [18] However, the reality tells a different story. The pay gap between men and women is still huge, discrimination in jobs is everywhere, and the glass ceiling still exists, especially in corporate executive and leadership positions. [19] Looking at the all-male line-up of the Politburo Standing Committee, the fact is clear: men will usher China into the so-called new era.

The #MeToo movement reveals the reality that the right to "hold up half the sky" is granted by men. Deep down, sexual harassment is about gender discrimination and unequal access to power and resources. Luo Xixi's allegation is an awakening of female consciousness, and the message is delivered: if you want your voice to be heard, and your position as a victim to change, take action and speak out, but not too loudly.

Many sexual harassment cases on campuses have been exposed, but none of them has achieved what Luo's case has. Chen Xiaowu, the perpetrator, was stripped of his positions and titles. Even more significantly, the Ministry of Education

has agreed to introduce anti-sexual harassment mechanisms on campuses.

Apart from the global #MeToo movement, Luo has been smart in her approach to Chinese authorities and the media. She has consistently communicated with the authorities in a mild but determined manner, collaborating with the disciplinary committee to collect evidence. Simultaneously, she has reached out to journalists and used social media for help and advice. She has received overwhelming support from media and feminist advocates. It's easy to criticize and scold, but it's not as easy to voice constructive suggestions. Providing useful information to the authorities (such as suggesting a sexual harassment prevention mechanism), engaging in a reasonable discussion about sexual harassment and equal rights on social media, and submitting proposals to address sexual harassment by three members of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference all have pushed the government to respond and take real action. Providing constructive advice is more useful than making sharp criticism, especially in China where authorities and people value face and image.

Credit for #MeToo in China also goes to a growing feminist awakening over recent years. However, the closure in March of Feminist Voices and ATSH, social media that gave voice to sexual harassment accusations and equal rights issues, means a new approach needs to be found. [20]

Friday, March 16, 2018 - 2:34pm

Lü Pin [21]

From early January to the Spring Festival, over 8,000 students and alumni signed petitions demanding their schools implement policies to prevent sexual harassment. How has the #MeToo movement in China mobilized so many within the same harsh environment where many other social movements have been suppressed? The primary reason is the incredible courage, wisdom, and ability of a young generation enraged by the prevalence of gender inequality and repression, which has nurtured an unyielding determination for change.

The indignation of the generation born after the late '80s stems from the day-to-day conflicts experienced within a system that subordinates women to men, despite their equal levels of education and other qualifications. This indignation is the lifeblood of the social movement. But Chinese society is rife with inchoate indignities. Repression has undoubtedly had a chilling effect on speaking out, giving rise to fear among many before and after they decide to resist. However, these young people are less fearful than older generationsâ€”not out of naivete, but because their mentality and material resources are not yet beholden to any particular establishment.

It has been clear to the core initiators of this movement that their campaign must be center-less, flexible, creative, and swift. Rather than expecting a single person to contact thousands of supporters on her own, the movement saw leaders rise up of their own accord to organize groups of classmates and alumni at 70 different universities. This networked guerrilla movement was much more effective than a centrally planned and executed campaign would have been at addressing censorship concerns and at allowing members to exercise individual initiative. Those within the movement also were skillful in their use of Internet technology to avoid surveillance. For instance, they used QR codes to lead potential supporters to the petitions as quickly as possible because censors would delete petitions within hours or even minutes.

The young people involved in the movement were also savvy about tailoring the presentation of their identity and interests. The motivations of students combating sexual harassment could not be easily smeared. Further, identifying themselves as “conscientious and innocent youth” also allowed for the mobilization of a large population, even transcending national boundariesâ€”more than 300 overseas Chinese students and scholars signed a petition in support of further advocacy at the end of the January. The momentum on this issue in the U.S. has also lent a degree of legitimacy to the efforts in China,

although the demands and methods have been somewhat different in the Chinese context.

Now that the Ministry of Education and some universities have promised to establish mechanisms to prevent sexual harassment, the #MeToo movement has made real progress toward its goalsâ€”a truly extraordinary achievement within the current climate for grassroots action in China. Ultimately, credit for this success should be ascribed to the growing popularity of feminism over recent years in response to the aspirations of young women in China. The Chinese government has failed to deter girls from believing in feminist ideals despite constant crackdowns on feminist activism and campaigns to stigmatize feminism. At the heart of this popularity is a resilient community of self-organized feminists poised to channel widespread anger at the unequal status of women into social and political change at any given opportunity, just as we are witnessing now with the #MeToo movement.

Friday, March 16, 2018 - 2:41pm

Di Wang [22]

There has been a dearth of #MeTooInChina posts explicitly describing LGBTQ experiences. Does this mean that LGBTQ people are excluded from #MeTooInChina organizing, and moreover, China's anti-sexual harassment movement generally? The answer is complicated.

On the one hand, LGBTQ people in China are experiencing sexual harassment just as are heterosexual or cisgender people, and possibly even worse. But, the LGBTQ invisibility in China's public space is deep-seated. According to UNDP and the Beijing LGBT Center's national survey in 2018, only around 5 percent of LGBTQ people in China choose to come out at work, at school, or within their religious communities. [23] [24] In all these campaigns, queer women were at the front lines. Similarly, there were three queer activists amongst the Feminist Five, a group of women detained in 2015 for planning to distribute anti-sexual harassment stickers.

The reason why queer women are so present in the Chinese feminist movement, according to Zhang Leilei, a #MeTooInChina campaign organizer, is that this movement provided a small but critical space in which people “are more welcome to experiment and to explore alternative ways of life,” and that provided her “with political frameworks to reflect on my queer experience.” Indeed, queer (self-)presentation has been very visible in this movement. For the month of March, 2017, Leilei committed to personally wearing a billboard protesting sexual harassment, and called for other Chinese people to do the same. [25] Leilei also planned to wear pink short hair, a T-shirt, a pink puff skirt, and a pair of pink slippers along with her billboard, intending to disrupt what is considered an “appropriate” dress code for women.

While explicit coming-out stories are largely still absent from #MeTooInChina, the movement has been strongly influenced and supported by the continued contributions of the Feminist Five, Leilei, Meili, and many other queer activists that have been fighting against sexual harassment. Chinese feminist activism has provided spaces and tools for young people to critically reflect on their personal politics and to voice their political demands, which include queer women and other LGBTQ-identified people. By talking to Leilei and Meili, two leading young feminist activists, I can see their confidence in their queer tactics and their long-term visions for both feminist societies and queer lives.

Friday, March 16, 2018 - 2:46pm

Yizhi Huang [26]

Sexual harassment is not only a social problem but also a legal issue. The prevention and treatment of sexual harassment is the legal responsibility of schools and employers, and the #MeToo movement necessarily involves promoting accountability. What role can lawyers, especially public interest lawyers, play in this movement?

It is said that Dr. Luo, who complained to her university about what she

suffered as a student, had initially consulted with a lawyer and considered litigation; but, she chose an alternate approach. Indeed, lawyers did not play a significant role in what developed into a movement involving thousands of young people requesting that their universities establish mechanisms to prevent sexual harassment. It was only one month after Luo's report, when the joint letter actions were drawing to a close, that 13 lawyers issued a statement against sexual harassment and stated their willingness to provide legal aid for victims. [27] This is quite different than the role played by lawyers on this issue in earlier years.

In 2012, a collective action of lawyers on sexual harassment was prompted when the Shanghai Metro's official Weibo account issued a post requiring women to dress appropriately in order to avoid sexual harassment. Starting in Shanghai, many lawyers used “open government information” provisions to request disclosures of measures the public transport authorities took to prevent sexual harassment and later jointly proposed the establishment of a mechanism to prevent sexual harassment. Also in 2012, public interest lawyers were part of a broader advocacy campaign that resulted in the amendment of a national regulation on the protection of women that made employers responsible for preventing sexual harassment. [28] So why in the #MeToo movement have lawyers played a less active role?

This is related to the setbacks suffered by all of civil society in recent years. Some legal advocacy NGOs have been forced to close, and taking joint actions on public issues has become more sensitive. Further, in November 2016, the Ministry of Justice restricted lawyers from engaging in “public participation” or signing onto joint letters. [29] Lawyers who coordinate or provide a platform for such public actions will face particularly significant legal risks.

Of course, representing clients in litigation is another, perhaps safer way that lawyers can participate. However, at least so far, victims have not come forward seeking to file lawsuits. This is another reason why

lawyers cannot be seen.

From the very beginning, however, China's #MeToo movement has sought to design and establish mechanisms that impose legal responsibility on perpetrators of sexual harassment. This process will need to involve lawyers, and so there still may be a role to play. Moreover, if such mechanisms are created and able to provide victims with meaningful remedies, more people may call on lawyers to help them use litigation to remedy the injustice they suffered.

Tuesday, March 20, 2018 - 2:24pm

Xyza Cruz Bacani [30]

The ripple effect of the #MeToo movement in the West caused Hong Kong, a usually silent observer, to start speaking. A city under colonial rule for a long time and still searching for its identity, its silence on many issues is understandable. Although a very Western city, Hong Kong has Eastern traditional values in terms of the treatment of women, gender stereotypes, ingrained patriarchy and sexism, and sexual abuse. But no one spoke out loudly on these issues until the #MeToo movement in the West; the emergence of high-profile cases caused women to find their voices and yell loudly.

The uncensored social media that the city still enjoys, as compared to mainland China, has become a vehicle for these brave women to come out and tell their stories. A local Hong Kong athlete spoke out about being abused by her coach and the city outpoured its support. It also encouraged other women to speak out. [31]

According to the local non-governmental organization (NGO) Rain Lily, one in seven women in Hong Kong has experienced sexual harassment at work. [32] Due to a variety of factors, migrants and ethnic minorities usually keep quiet about the assaults they suffer. One factor that plays a big part is the fear of victim shaming; another is the fear of retaliation, such as losing their jobs or being branded as trouble-makers. It's easier for these women to switch jobs than to lodge a complaint.

The #MeToo movement mobilized government agencies and NGOs in the city, but is it enough to protect the women of Hong Kong society, where they are still very much underrepresented? The city is working towards equality, hence having a female Chief Executive, but there have still only been baby steps towards creating a workplace for women that is safe and where they are not paid less than their male counterparts. [33]

Men in Hong Kong should not be excluded and they should not be scared of these conversations because we need them more than ever as allies. Encourage them to speak out rather than be silent observers, or worse, cast doubts over the movement. The backlash from men also started to creep onto social media, with some saying that the movement is just a trend that Hong Kong women adopted from the West. [34]

The #MeToo movement is important in a city with a large gender pay gap and where the higher ratio of women to men in the population is seen as problematic. [35] We need to encourage women to speak out, include everyone in the conversation, find solutions, and “most importantly” take action. Talk is cheap, especially for the victims and survivors. We should start acting now so that we avoid the dreaded question of: “#MeToo, but what now?”

Agrarian reform is needed to slay apartheid's land demons

26 March 2018, by **Aisha Bahadur**

The security of land tenure of black South Africans remains largely unaddressed since 1994 with insufficient progress on land restitution and redistribution of less than a third of the target 26 million hectares in 24 years since democracy. But if land reform is to address the challenges of disenfranchisement, underemployment, poverty and inequality then the political leadership and will needs to be focused on overhauling state support for agricultural development that targets the poor.

Addressing South Africa's past is essential to agrarian reform. Even before apartheid was introduced in 1948, the state secured white commercial interests, including land for agriculture. The Land Act of 1913 allocated only about seven percent of arable land to blacks. In 1936, the Natives Trust and Land Act increased arable land to blacks to a potential 13 percent but it also formalised the separation of white and black rural areas and put in place restrictions on blacks living in white areas. These laws created a huge reservoir of cheap African labour as pressure on land could not sustain traditional agrarian livelihoods. Further pressure was exerted with the Group Areas Act of 1950 curbing movements and the

Bantu Authorities Act of 1951, which pushed blacks into “homelands” self-governed by ethnic groups recognised by the apartheid state.

A system referred to as “separate development” under South African Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd dominated from 1958 but this amounted to the deliberate neglect driving deprivation and poverty in the homelands, which has entrenched these as the legacy of apartheid. Today almost a third of South Africa's population lives in the former homelands that are characterised as areas of low economic activity with little economic potential and high numbers of people living in poverty. Land in these regions is owned by the state but governed under traditional tenure arrangements to make land available for use to households predominantly for small scale, subsistence farming regions using labour-intensive, traditional production techniques.

In comparison, apartheid's legacy for former white farm areas has created commercial, large-scale agriculture regions held by white capital. For eight decades before democracy, the South African government passed legislation and created institutional capacity to support the development

of white farmers. The Land Bank of South Africa, established in 1912, provided subsidised financial services and credit to white farmers and the Agricultural Credit Board, provided credit to white farmers who did not qualify for borrowing from the Land Bank.

But financial services to farmers were curtailed under liberalisation that followed democracy. Subsidies were cut and the Agricultural Credit Board was closed down on the recommendation of the Strauss Commission (1996).

The commission's recommendation that the Land Bank should receive grants from the national treasury to enable it to expand its developmental mandate to small farmers was never implemented. Lending by the Land Bank itself was also curtailed. Farmers had to borrow from commercial banks at decidedly less favourable interest rates. This created an unfavourable environment for the development of black farmers in the post apartheid era, even more so for small scale black farmers.

The apartheid policy of separate development resulted in a dual system of state supported services in agriculture that existed up to 1994.

One institute provided agricultural extension services to white farmers while another served farmers in the homelands. The former was made up of a relatively small number of well-qualified staff, often university graduates, while the latter consisted of large numbers of less qualified staff. The separate agriculture support services for white and black farmers were not brought together successfully and deteriorated in the decade after democracy. Critical staff vacancies led to the "Agricultural Extension Officer Recovery Plan" by the department of agriculture and funded by the national treasury, aiming to raise the number of extension officers from 2 000 to 5 000. Today the linkages and coordination between the parastatals, science councils, higher education and development institutions and the private sector that make up South Africa's National Agricultural Research System remain weak.

Cooperatives were an intrinsic part of the successful development of white owned farming. The Cooperative Society Act, 1925 established a network of primary producer cooperatives that were able to negotiate cheaper prices and provided services such as grain storage and transport of produce to the market. They also monitored quality, regulated planting quotas and got rid of surpluses through processing. Cooperatives were important financial intermediaries, the Land Bank used them as agents to provide short and medium-term credit to commercial farmers at subsidised interest rates.

Cooperatives were also agents to marketing boards, giving them regional monopoly power to set floor prices. State-controlled marketing boards set up a single channel system and were in charge of price setting of most agricultural commodities, controlling movement, monitoring quality standards and controlling the sale and export of agricultural produce. But reform in the marketing of agricultural products in the transition period to democracy in the early 1990s set up the National

Agricultural Marketing Council that dismantled the marketing control boards and is responsible for managing state intervention in the sector.

Although the African National Congress (ANC) government contemplated re-orientating the marketing boards to promote the interests of small scale farmers, it was not considered economically or politically viable, apart from the sugar cane industry. It was argued that the boards would have perpetuated and increased many of the inefficiencies associated with controlled agricultural marketing; that it would have been a very inefficient way of achieving welfare transfers to the poor, and that the cost of the system would have undermined government's macro-economic policy objectives.

Support by the apartheid state to the agricultural sector was so generous that by the 1990s cooperatives had amassed an asset value of R15.2 billion (about US \$ 3.4 billion at that time) with the top eight cooperatives accounting for 45 per cent of this total. As the political handover of 1994 loomed, white farmers started to fear not only that their land, but also the assets in their cooperatives would be expropriated. The National Party government passed the Co-operatives Amendment Act (No 37 of 1993), a year before they handed over power to the ANC, which provided for the incorporation of co-operatives as public or private companies.

The privatisation of cooperatives led to the accumulation of financial assets accumulated from four decades of state subsidisation to privately owned companies. Many cooperatives consolidated, so for example by 2004, three privatised former co-operative agribusinesses together owned more than 70 percent of domestic grain storage facilities. Some even listed themselves on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, enabling them to reinvent themselves as private agribusiness corporations.

South African agrarian and agribusiness capital, with the support

of the apartheid government, had positioned itself for the new dispensation in the transition period leading up to democracy. This was achieved through a series of connecting "plots" by groups with more knowledge of how agriculture works and greater coherent purpose than the ANC was able to mobilise, and which laid the ground for subsequent market deregulation and liberalisation. Agribusiness, defined as corporate activity upstream of farming (suppliers of seeds, fertiliser, agrichemicals, machinery) and downstream (milling and other processing, marketing and distribution), was highly concentrated in some branches and commodities by the end of apartheid and have become comprehensively more concentrated since 1994.

In 1996, there were 120,000 commercial farms in South Africa but today this has declined by two thirds to fewer than 40,000 mostly as a result of consolidation leading to high capital concentration of amongst a small pool of commercial farmers. It is also proof of the failure to develop sustainable small scale commercial viable farms and transforming subsistence livelihoods that are impoverishing rural households. Today farming accounts for less than eight percent of formal employment and jobs in agriculture are generally low paid and insecure.

Whilst majority of black South Africans still depend on the land to sustain themselves, their ability to survive off the land is no less challenging today than it was under apartheid. Addressing land ownership that remains deeply skewed along racial lines is important. Equally important is the long term commitment of the government to develop agriculture, providing support services, credit and subsidies to rural households to address poverty, vulnerability and inequality especially in rural areas and former homelands.

March 9 2018

[Pambazuka](#)

Temer, we charge you

25 March 2018, by **Insurgencia**

Dear Mr. (unelected) President of the Republic Michel Lulia Temer,

We charge you with historical and conjunctural guilt in the barbarous execution of the human rights activist, from the black social movement, from the women's social movement, a Rio de Janeiro city councilor Marielle Franco and that of the worker Anderson Pedro Gomes.

The lives of our Mari and our Anderson are not the first, nor will they, unfortunately, be the last lives - young and hardworking - that Your Honored Presidency helps to strike down. Your economic and security policies at the head of the country, in total continuity with the trajectory of Your Excellency as Secretary of Security of the government of São Paulo, has been outstanding in the international field due to its lethal productivity.

As thousands cried, outraged with the death of the two comrades on the night of March 14, murders and slaughters of young people, especially black (or nonwhite) people and workers, this is bitter food in the daily life of the poorest neighborhoods in the big metropolises from the north to south of the country. Just as the commissioned murders from peasants, landless, indigenous and quilombola leaders are trivialized by your side. [36]

The difference is that this is a political assassination, in a big city, of an elected representative.

Marielle was silenced, among many other reasons, because she denounced the policy of a systematic extermination of black and poor youngsters from the favelas, the mass incarcerations, the equally vicious killing of police officers, and the abandonment of the families of the victims of the "two sides", by you and your caste's contempt for the lives of

the most vulnerable. She would use her beautiful and brave mouth to speak through the speakers of the movements and of the City Hall to point out the ones who are responsible, in the midst of this stupid drug war based on the sheer repression of the user and small trafficker, on pointless and badly planned (police) operations and on electoral stunts.

Your guilt in these matters is not news, Your Honor. Your Excellency did not pull the trigger of the sophisticated machine gun for sure. Perhaps by now you are even taking action to find those who had her and Anderson killed. But your party-gang, formerly PMDB, now again MDB, was the one who squandered, through scams of corporate tax benefits and large bribes, Rio's public infrastructure and basic social services to the citizens of the state of Rio de Janeiro. [37] While your Excellency acted as a "decorative" vice president to the PT president (your words, sir, your words), your accomplices here created one of the greatest economic and social crises ever experienced by Rio. Experts predict that it will take the state, maybe, 3 years to start recovering from the damage.

As if this structural background were not enough; it was your party-gang comrades who fertilized, for two and a half terms, the weeds of crime amongst the police and turned a blind eye to the militias installed in the communities. It was they who presented the inefficient Unidade de Pol  cia Pacificadoras (UPP's) (claiming "we are simply going to retake these territories and then enter with the social initiatives", who can forget this?) as a panacea for evil that they did not fight and never had any intention or program to fight. [38]

None of this would be quite so appalling if Rio were an island of

misery in an ocean of recovery and a sea of prosperity. However, you and the MDB are well aware that this is not what this is all about. Perhaps memories are failing, but you and your party - as can be found in books and university courses - were protagonists of a broad articulation between political, judicial, business, financial and media forces that brought about the very questionable impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, in 2016. The immediate pretext was so called dodgy accounting, but the main issue for your coup bloc, we remember, was "to save the country from one of the greatest economic and social crises ever lived."

But the answers created by that coup to the crisis has been an enduring nightmare for those at the bottom of the heap, your Excellency. You froze federal investments and wages for 20 years! You've been trying hard to destroy an 80-year labor law. You have been cutting social programs to a minimum. You can make environmental disasters even worse, because you do not comply with even the fragile laws we have regarding these issues. You and your banker finance minister strangled the state budgets - most notably that of Rio de Janeiro. To Rio, they practically prescribed suicide: payment of wages in several installments, retirement pensions and other pension benefits, an increase in contributions, increase of rates, end of state universities, the privatisation of the Companhia Estadual de  guas e Esgotos, CEDAE, the state water and sanitation company. And zero, let's not forget, zero investment.

You, Excellency and your party, MDB are therefore directly responsible for the frightening picture of the economic, social and violence crisis that ravages Rio de Janeiro. It is not coherent that one who wants to run for election (because of course you are not a candidate for re-election) evades

responsibility. At this darkest hour, it is for the first representative of the nation to accept the responsibility for the stupid idea of trying to regain a popularity that he never had through the very serious step of ordering federal and military intervention in Rio.

Gee, Mr. President, even with all the reactionary logic, the fundamentalism and the venality of your allied base, you did not manage to get the 308 votes necessary in the National Congress to approve the Retirement Pension Reform, did you? You should confess that, to escape this defeat and in desperation to gain the swing in the polls needed to elect your most faithful collaborators this year - to save them from prison bars thanks to new parliamentary immunities - Your Excellency decided to play with fire. Literally.

Setting yourself up as a mediator might have been too much. Perhaps Your Excellency has crossed the line in the typical politicking of your party-gang, regardless of which country it happens in - as is characteristic of the overwhelming majority of the political representation of Brazilian businesspeople. Your actions will not create a solution to violence in Rio,

but the escalation of war between criminal factions, between corrupt and uncontrolled factions of the security forces, now with the increased danger of their proximity to the Armed Forces.

By insisting on the same policy with no way out on the war on drugs, mass incarceration and the extermination of black people, putting the Armed Forces in direct confrontation with the traffickers, you gain applause and are responsible for the worst uncontrolled actions that have arisen since 2013 in this country. The worst of what has arisen in the streets, in politics and in the institutions around Your Excellency.

Your Excellency can go down in history as the one that initiated the Mexicanization of Rio de Janeiro and Brazil. Think twice, Mr. President, is this is how you are planning to be elected?

For our part, we will follow the hundreds of thousands who have been taking the streets of Brazil and the world - yes, the world! - rising indignantly against the brutal execution of our companions.

One does not have to be in left-wing to be outraged and come out to the streets. It's not necessary to be against federal intervention. It is not necessary to have taken to the streets before. In fact, nothing is necessary, except to object to the violence and the situation that allowed the tragedy to happen and to demand a thorough investigation.

But we will tell everyone what we know; that Marielle was, in fact, against the 'war on drugs' because she knew that it was this policy that ultimately killed her black and poor brothers and neighbors from Maré and from so many favelas in Rio and Brazil. We will announce that the last article that Marielle wrote was against federal intervention. That Marielle was a Human Rights fighter with capital letters. That Marielle was a black, bisexual and socialist woman. A socialist, indeed and a top quality militant of the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL). We are very proud of that. And we're sure she'd like everyone to know.

Marielle and Anderson live! Black lives matter! Down with Pezãfo, governor of the state of Rio. Down with Temer! Demilitarize the police! End federal intervention now!

The end of a golden age?

24 March 2018, by **Franck Gaudichaud**

In the recent period, there have been many debates about the end of the cycle of progressive and national-popular governments in Latin America, or rather their possible reflux and loss of political hegemony. What do you think about this debate? At this point, can we think that this debate about the end of the cycle is over? And, what can we call the current conjuncture in the face of the 1999-2015 progressive experience?

Edgardo Lander: Indeed, this is a very intense debate, especially in Latin

America, because there had been many expectations about the possibilities of profound transformation in these societies after the victory of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela in 1998. This was the starting point of a process of political change that led to the majority of South American governments being identified with a progressive, or left, orientation, in several versions. These expectations of transformations that would lead to post-capitalist societies posed severe challenges, both because of the negative experience of the socialisms of the last century, and

because of new realities such as climate change and the limits of planet Earth that needed to be faced. Thinking about transformation today necessarily means something very different from what it meant in the last century. When the discourse of socialism had practically disappeared from political grammar in much of the world, it reappeared in this new historical moment in South America. Especially from the struggles of the indigenous peoples, in some of these processes a profound questioning of fundamental aspects of what had been the socialism of the twentieth century

seems to be incorporated in a very central way. They are present in a central way, in part of the imagination of transformation, issues such as pluriculturality, other forms of relationship with the other networks of life, notions of rights of nature and conceptions of good living, which pointed to a possibility of transformation that would be able to account for the limitations of previous processes and open new horizons to address the new conditions of humanity and the planet.

So, you're talking about the initial period, starting at the beginning of the 2000s, when resistance from below was combined with the creation of socio-political dynamics which were more or less disruptive and post-neoliberal according to the case, which managed to emerge at the national electoral and governmental levels.

EL: Yes, a period in which extraordinary hopes were generated that radical transformations of society had begun. In the cases of Ecuador and Bolivia, the new governments were the result of processes of accumulation of forces of movements and social organizations in struggle against neoliberal governments. The experience of the indigenous uprising in the Ecuadorian case and the water war in Bolivia were expressions of societies in movement in which social sectors - that were not the most typical in terms of the political action of the left - played leading roles. It was a plebeian emergence, of previously invisible social sectors, indigenous, peasants, urban people, who came to occupy a central place in the political arena. This generated extraordinary expectations.

However, with time, severe obstacles appeared. In spite of the high-sounding discourses, important sectors of the left that had leadership roles in these processes of struggle had not subjected the experience of twentieth-century socialism to a sufficiently critical reflection. Many of the old ways of understanding leadership, the party, the vanguard, state relations with society, economic development, relations with the rest of nature, as well as the weight of monocultural Eurocentric worldviews

and patriarchy, were present in these projects of change. The historical colonial forms of insertion in the international division of labour and nature were deepened. It is evident that any project that seeks to overcome capitalism in the current world necessarily has to confront the severe challenges posed by the profound civilizational crisis that humanity is experiencing today, in particular the hegemonic logic of the endless growth of modernity that has led us to exceed the supportive capacity of the planet and is undermining the conditions that make possible the reproduction of life.

The experience of the so-called progressive governments came at a time when neoliberal globalization was accelerating, and China was becoming the factory of the world and the main planetary economy. This produced a qualitative leap in the demand and price of commodities: energy goods, minerals and agro-industry products such as soybeans. Under these conditions, each of the progressive governments chose to finance the social transformations proposed through the deepening of predatory extractivism. This had not only the obvious implication that the productive structure of these countries was not questioned but deepened in terms of the neo-colonial forms of insertion in the international division of labour and nature. It also emphasized the role of the state as the main recipient of income from the income produced through the export of commodities. With this, beyond what the constitutional texts say about plurinationality and interculturality, a conception of transformation prevailed, focused primarily on the state and on the identification of the state with the common good. This inevitably led to conflicts around territories, indigenous and peasant rights, struggles for defence and access to water and resistance to mega-mining. These popular and territorial struggles have been seen by these governments as threats to the national project represented, designed and directed by the state as a representative of the national interest. To carry out their neo-developmental projects, despite this resistance, governments have resorted to repression and are assuming

increasingly authoritarian tendencies. By defining from the centre what the priorities are and seeing everything that confronts that priority as a threat, a logic of the state's reasoning that requires undermining the resistance is installed.

In the case of Bolivia and Ecuador, this led to a certain demobilization of the main social organizations, as well as divisions promoted by the government of the movements that generated fragmentation of their social fabric and which weakened the democratic transforming energy that characterized them.

Faced with this analysis, and in particular with regard to reasons of state, the militants and intellectuals who participated in these processes in the governments and the progressive pro-government parties affirmed that, finally, the only way to build an authentic post-neoliberal path in Latin America was to "recuperate" the state first, thanks to the social-plebeian mobilizations that displaced the old party elites and, after overwhelming anti-oligarchic electoral victories, to begin, starting from the state (but with ties to those below), to distribute and reconstitute the possibility of an alternative to "real" neoliberalism.

Miriam Lang: Before starting to address this, I would like to take up again what Edgardo says, because the term end of cycle suggests a little looking at the whole region based on the Argentine and Brazilian experience where the right actually came back. However, the most appropriate reading would be to see how the transformation project has changed during the progressive period and why now we are in another situation than 10 or 15 years ago, also in the countries where there are still progressives in the government, like Bolivia or Ecuador. I refer to what some call the transformation of the transformers, and also to the diversity of political tendencies that make up these governments, where really the transformative lefts are no longer necessarily hegemonic. But these processes have become projects of

successful modernization of capitalist relations and insertion into the world market.

At the end of the day, you have a clear critical stance on the international division of labour, commodities, the use of extractivism, on the problem of the state (often authoritarian and clientelist until today), phenomena that, by the way, did not disappear and even consolidated on several levels with the *progresismos*. But you do not mention here the *bolsa familia*, the significant reduction of poverty and even of inequality, the incorporation of subaltern social classes into politics, the reconstruction of systems of basic services, of public health, the spectacular growth of infrastructures and so on, during the decade of the golden age of progressive governments. In short, if I become a spokesperson for the logic of Bolivian vice-president Garc a Linera, you would be these critical cafeteria intellectuals that he denounces for not having a real empathy for the popular sectors and their daily living conditions. It is at least a classic of the argumentation of *progresismo* and the current debate against the critical left.

ML: That depends a little on the lens with which each of us looks at reality. It is necessary to see, for example, in the Bolivarian constitution and in the Ecuadorian constitution, the transformation project delineated there that went far beyond the reduction of poverty. All that was accumulated from the previous social struggles went far beyond a little distribution of income, which may indeed have the day to day lives of many people easier, at least in the years of high prices of the hydrocarbons. But there is also an aspect that goes beyond poverty statistics. We can say that according to the poverty line, so many people have left it and that is perfect; but we can also look a little closer and say: what kind of poverty are we talking about? In Latin America, the measurement of poverty by income and by consumption still prevails, that is a fact that assesses to what extent a

household participates in the capitalist way of life and, possibly, says little about the quality of life that exists in this household. It ignores the dimensions of subsistence economies, the dimensions of the quality of human relations and so on. To what extent could people really express their needs according to their context? To what extent have these redistributive policies strengthened or territorially expanded the logic of the capitalist market in countries where a large part of the population, because of the enormous cultural diversity that exists, still did not fully live under capitalist precepts?

We could say that this diversity of ways of life constituted an important transforming potential for the horizons of overcoming capitalism. Even if we look at the ecological conditions of the planet, instead of being labelled as poor and underdeveloped, many peasant, indigenous, black or urban-popular communities could have been seen as an example of how to consume less and be better satisfied. On the other hand, what happened is precisely what I call the “device of underdevelopment”; in the context of the “eradication of poverty” they are told: this way of life that requires so little money is unworthy, you have to resemble the urban, capitalist, consumer population, you have to manage money, and the form of exchange is the capitalist market, there are no other valid forms of exchange. The so-called financial literacy, which was part of the progressive policy against poverty, helped financial capital to establish new credit markets for the poorest, often at high interest rates. And the famous inclusion to consumption means in the end, we have populations in debt for consumption, which have generated needs that perhaps they did not have before. That is, it depends a bit on how one looks at these issues. It is a problem of values and perspective, of how we want future generations to live. It is not only about democratizing consumption, but the commitment was to build a world that is sustainable for at least 5, 6, 7 generations later, and I have serious doubts if this way of eradicating poverty has contributed to these ends.

EL: In the Venezuelan case, the use of oil rent in a different way from how it had been used historically had enormous consequences during the first decade of the Ch vez government. Social spending came to represent something like 70 percent of the national budget. This public spending on health, education, food, housing and social security meant a profound transformation in the living conditions of the majority of the population. Venezuela, which, like the rest of Latin America, has historically been a country of profound inequalities, not only significantly reduced poverty levels (measured by monetary income), but also managed to reduce inequality in a noticeable way. The ECLAC pointed out that Venezuela became, together with Uruguay, one of the two least unequal countries on the continent. This is a very important transformation that is expressed in such vital matters as the reduction of infant mortality and the increase in the weight and height of children. There are not secondary issues.

On the other hand, this was accompanied from the political point of view with grassroots organizing processes in which millions of people participated. Some of the most important social policies were designed in such a way that in order to function they required the organization of the people. The best example of this was the Barrio Adentro Mission, a primary health service with wide coverage in popular sectors throughout the country, carried out with the priority participation of Cuban doctors. A program that represented the possibility of other ways of understanding public policies in a non-clientelist way that demanded the participation of the people.

Important steps in the transformation of the health system in the country began with the Barrio Adentro Mission. We went from a medical system that was fundamentally hospital-based to a decentralized system with primary services located in the popular sectors themselves. From a situation in which, for example, a dehydrated child in a Caracas neighbourhood in the middle of the night had to be moved, outside

public transport hours, to the nearest hospital, you move to a situation in which the primary care module, where the doctor lives, is a short distance from your home and at any time you can knock the door and be attended.

Barrio Adentro was conceived as a project that required the participation of the community to function. The doctor himself, especially if it was a Cuban doctor who knew neither the neighbourhood nor the city, could only work with the support of the community. This involved, among other things, a census of the community, the identification of pregnant women, children with malnutrition problems, the elderly, and in general people with special requirements. This constitutes a conception of social policy completely different from a gift that comes from above because it makes the community a coparticipant of its functioning. There was an extraordinarily rich potential in this dynamic.

So, this constituent and disruptive potential of the process was depleted? Is that what you are saying?

EL: During the years of the Bolivarian process not only was the productive structure of the country not altered, but the country became more highly dependent on oil exports. Public policies directed towards the popular sectors have been characterized at all times by their distributive nature, with a very limited impulse of alternative productive processes to oil extractivism. This dependence on high oil revenues imposed severe limits on the Bolivarian process.

The dynamic character, encouragement of popular organizational processes of public policies, was running out for different reasons. In the first place, because not all the Missions (generic name of the different social policies), had the wealth that they had in some areas such as literacy programs and Barrio Adentro. But also because of the fact that the larger-scale organizational processes that were organized, up to the Communal Councils and the Communes, were processes in which there was always a strong tension

between the tendencies of self-government, autonomy, self-organization and so on, and the fact that almost all the projects that could be carried out from these organizations have depended on the transfer of resources that come from above, from some state institution. This has generated a recurrent tension between the political-financial control from above and the possibilities of more autonomous self-organization. These tensions operated in a very different way, depending on the conditions existing on the ground: the presence or not of previous local leaderships; the existence or not of organizational political experiences of the community before the Bolivarian process; as well as of the political conceptions of the officials and militants of the PSUV (United Socialist Party of Venezuela) responsible for the relations between the institutions of the state and these organizations. The fact is that there has been an extraordinary dependence on the transfer of resources from the state. There was no possibility of autonomy for the majority of popular grassroots organizations because they did not have their own productive capacity.

When, with the current economic crisis that begins in 2014, transfers of resources to these popular organizations were reduced, they tended to weaken and many of them entered into crisis. Another factor of this weakening has been the creation of the Local Supply and Production Committees (CLAP) as a mechanism for the distribution of highly subsidized basic foods to the popular sectors. In practice, these have become clientelist organizational modalities dedicated exclusively to the distribution of food and lacking autonomy, that tend to replace the Communal Councils.

Latin American solidarity and cooperation policies have also been highly dependent on oil revenues. To carry out international policies such as the subsidized oil delivery programs to Central American and Caribbean countries, financial support to Bolivia and Nicaragua, and other diverse initiatives that the Venezuelan government took on the Latin American terrain, it was necessary to guarantee short and medium term an

increase in oil revenues. When Chávez died in 2013, oil represented 96 percent of the total value of exports, making the country's dependence on oil higher than ever before.

In Venezuelan oil history, the first decade of the century was the time at which the best possible conditions were given to debate, reflect and begin to experiment in other practices and other possible futures for Venezuelan society beyond oil. A privileged moment to address the challenges of the transition to a post-oil society. It was a juncture in which Chávez had extraordinary leadership and legitimacy. He had the capacity to give a sense of direction to Venezuelan society and, with oil prices that reached up to 140 dollars per barrel, there were resources to respond to the needs of the population and begin the initial steps of a transition beyond of the oil. The opposite happened. In those years, the intoxication in abundance was repeated, the imagining of a Saudi Venezuela that had occurred at the time of the first government of Carlos Andrés Pérez in the 1970s. No one in Venezuela thought that it was possible for a decree to close all the oil wells from one day to the next. But the government policies were far from taking steps, albeit timid and initial, to overcome the dependence on oil, what they did was to deepen that dependence. In conditions of overabundance of foreign currency and in order to try to stop the flight of capital, an absolutely unsustainable controlled exchange rate parity was established. In this way, the so-called Dutch disease was accentuated, which contributed to the dismantling of the productive capacity of the country.

The distribution policies and the political initiatives of the state managed to improve the living conditions of the population and encouraged the strengthening of the social fabric, with broad experiences of popular participation. However, this was not accompanied by a project to transform the productive structure of the country. This marked the limits of the Bolivarian process as a project for the transformation of Venezuelan society. This means that the broad-based organizational processes that have involved millions of people were

based on redistribution and not on the creation of new productive processes.

Now, following Garcia Linera again (because sometimes he summarizes more intelligently what other opinion leaders, followers and what I call intellectuals of the palace try to say and write in this line of argument): according to him, this tension between state and self-organization, between government and movements, between vindication of good living and extractivism in the short term are normal and creative tensions of a long process of revolutionary transformation in Latin America. For him, the critics of the radical left towards the progressive processes do not understand that they are necessary tensions and, supposedly, they want to proclaim socialism by decree.

ML: One problem is that the progressive governments, insofar as their members came from processes of social movements and protest with a left political identity, have assumed a kind of vanguard identity. As if they already knew what people need. In this way, spaces for real dialogue, where diverse people can effectively propose, have been lost. And political participation has become a kind of acclamation of the executive project. That is precisely where it is impoverished. There are many examples in European history that make me think that this is an inevitable dynamic, which we tend to underestimate a lot. The left that manages state apparatuses finally is immersed in powerful dynamics of these apparatuses and they are transformed as people, through the new spaces in which they move, because the logics of the position offer them other experiences and begin to mould their political horizons and their culture too. Their subjectivity is transformed, they incorporate the exercise of power. And then, if there is no corrective action on the part of a strong organized society, which can claim them, that can correct, protest, and also criticize, this must necessarily divert the project.

On the other hand, it is not so much a matter of criticizing the times in which

things are changed - because in that I agree, deep transformations need a lot of time, they need a cultural change and can even take generations. It is about looking at the direction that a political project of transformation takes - that is, whether it is going in the right direction or not, at whatever rate. And there I believe that the question of deepening extractivism simply cancels other possibilities for future transformation. If we are closing certain future options that were important to us by more short-term calculations, or also because of difficulties that arise at the moment, we cannot say that it is a question of temporality; it is a question of direction. You can market or de-commodify, but if you say first I will commercialize everything and then de-commodify, I do not think there is much logic; if you say: I am de-commodifying but it will take more time, however, you can see that I am taking steps in the indicated direction, it would be fine. So, I think there is a fundamental difference in the reading of processes.

EL: In the critical debates on extractivism one of the issues that I believe is fundamental is: what do we understand by extractivism? If we think of extractivism only as an economic model, or as Alvaro García Linera says as "a technical relationship with nature" compatible with any model of society, one could conclude that it is necessary to deepen extractivism not only to respond to social demands, but also in order to accumulate the necessary resources to invest in alternative productive activities that allow extractivism to be overcome. But if one understands extractivism in broader terms, if one understands that extractivism is a form of relationship between human beings and nature; which is part of a pattern of accumulation of global capital; which is a specific form of insertion in the world capitalist system and in the international division of labour and nature; if it is understood that extractivism generates and reproduces certain institutionalities, state models, behavioural patterns of its bureaucracy; if it is understood that extractivism generates social subjects and subjectivities; that builds culture, necessarily leads to other conclusions.

Just look at the one hundred years of extractivism in Venezuela. We have deeply installed a culture of a rich country, a country of abundance. Since we have the largest oil reserves on the planet, we expect that the state satisfies not only all our needs, but also our consumption aspirations. We imagine that a society with rights is possible, but without responsibilities. We think oil should be free. These cultural patterns, once firmly rooted in the collective imagination, constitute a severe obstacle to the possibility of a transformation not only to overcome capitalism but also to face the civilizational crisis that humanity is experiencing today. These imaginaries of ever-increasing material wealth serve as support for economist/consumerist conceptions of life that leave out a wide range of the fundamental issues that we would have to confront today. This blocks the possibility of recognizing that the decisions that are being taken today have long-term consequences in a completely divergent sense of what the official discourse proclaims as a future horizon for Venezuelan society.

From this imaginary El Dorado, a land of infinite abundance, it is assumed as necessary, for example, that there is large-scale mining exploitation in the so-called Orinoco Mining Arc. Through a presidential decree, Nicolás Maduro at the beginning of 2016, decided to open 112 thousand square kilometres, a territory the size of Cuba, 12 percent of the national territory, to large transnational mining companies. It is an area that is part of the Amazon rainforest (with the importance this has in the regulation of global climate systems); an area inhabited by different indigenous peoples whose territories should have been demarcated according to the Constitution of 1999 and whose culture, including their lives, are today severely threatened; a territory where a good part of the basins of the main rivers of the country are located; the main sources of water; a territory of extraordinary biological diversity; a territory where there are hydroelectric dams that produce 70 percent of the electricity consumed in the country. All this is threatened in an opening that has begun with the call to 150 transnational companies. It is conceived as a special economic

zone where fundamental aspects of the Constitution and the laws of the Republic, such as the rights of indigenous peoples and environmental and labour legislation do not have to be fulfilled. This in order to create the most favourable conditions possible to attract foreign investment. They are thus taking decisions that are outlining a national project that may have consequences for the next 100 years.

Another essential issue, according to my understanding, for the discussion is the geopolitical problematic, and in this case the advances in the level of regional integration connected to the evaluation of the new strategies of imperialism and its interference in the continent. Critics of the left often say you disparage and do not correctly measure the impact of the interference or destabilization of the United States, essentially focusing on an internal criticism of the processes and governments. This is what the Argentine sociologist Atilio Borón affirms, among others: several of his texts insist on the fact that it is necessary to understand that no matter how moderate the progressive governments, they opened a new wave of integration without the USA and that this would represent a gigantic step in regional history with a Bolivarian perspective. So, what do we think of the state of Latin American integration, what are the advances and limits at this level today?

ML: Ten years ago, there were really interesting and hopeful proposals and impulses at the global level from Latin America, in the sense that regional integration was considered in a different direction than that of the European Union with its neoliberal constitution, especially in terms of what was the Bank of the South that was going to promote projects of sovereignty and sustainability and not of development in classic terms, or with the SUCRE project. Unfortunately, these initiatives have not been successful over the past 10 years, especially because of the resistance of Brazil, which obviously has an important role in the region

and which was more oriented towards its fellow BRICS countries and prioritized its interests as a world power.

E.L: In the end, Brazil agreed with the Bank of the South provided it was another development bank...

If we now see the case of the deep Venezuelan crisis, which has polarized intellectuals (as well as Venezuelan society obviously), we have witnessed the translation of this polarization around two international appeals. First the appeal that was made (with the active participation of Edgardo) from Venezuela, "Urgent international call to stop the escalation of violence in Venezuela. Looking at Venezuela, beyond polarization" that you signed and, secondly, the response entitled "Who will accuse the accusers?", given by the members of the "Network of Intellectuals and Artists in Defence of Humanity" (REDH), which is a rather hostile response. [39] One of the central arguments of the members of the REDH is to affirm that the crisis of Venezuela is first and foremost the product of an imperialist aggression and an insurrection of the neoliberal right as well as an "economic war". They insist that we are in a regional context of the return of the right, after the coup in Brazil, and that this forces the left to close ranks behind the governments that face this aggression, leaving aside "secondary contradictions". On the contrary, the call signed by the two of you says: "We do not believe, as certain sectors of the Latin American left affirm, that today we are trying to defend a popular anti-imperialist government. This unconditional support of certain activists and intellectuals not only reveals an ideological blindness, but it is harmful since it contributes unfortunately to the consolidation of an authoritarian regime".

ML: A colleague recently told me that geopolitical perspectives make the interests and voices of the people invisible. And I do not know if that is a

secondary contradiction. It seems to me very deplorable the way in which this confrontation has taken place, because it closed spaces of reflection instead of opening them. I think that what we need at this moment is just a deeper reflection, spaces of debate and not of closure, in order to find a solution to the Venezuelan crisis. And I have the feeling that the further away people are from the Venezuelan process, the more they need to affirm a kind of solidary identity, which is rather a sort of rather abstract anti-imperialist reflex, detached from what happens on a day-to-day basis in Venezuela. I believe that the solidarities that we need to build are different. They should not revolve around ourselves, our needs to affirm a political identity such as a profession of faith, but rather be a search for paths together, between concrete peoples. Solidarity should be with the actually existing people, who often do not have the same interests as a government.

And this leads me to a self-criticism: Recently I returned to Venezuela and had the opportunity to talk with some sectors of critical Chavismo, and it was only at this moment that I understood how this field has been transformed in recent years. And how complicated it is to show solidarity, even in a critical and differentiated way, in the hyperpolarized scenario that exists today. The letter that I signed should have been thought about more, discussed more before circulating it, and I myself had to take more time to talk with the different sectors of critical Chavismo before signing; just to be consistent with my own approach. Although I still think that it is necessary to defend democratic institutions and certain liberal values, as the letter does, we must expand and deepen them but at the same time defend them, as results of past struggles. And above all, I think that an external aggression can never justify the mistakes that are made inside.

This polarization that has occurred in Venezuela and other countries as well, which does not allow grey shades beyond black and white, is very negative and very harmful to the transformation. It makes it very difficult to stand in solidarity without

causing harm on one side or on the other. As a feminist, I also feel that the way in which this whole debate takes place is extremely patriarchal, full of simplifying binarisms, war logic and self-feeding egos, while what we should do is build ties and other ways of doing politics, that is, accompanying us on paths of search for alternatives.

Indeed, it seems that a certain dialectic of critical thinking has been lost in this debate. Regarding the polarization in Venezuela, the unconditional supporters of Maduro underline that the polarization is above all between the right wing allied to imperialism versus the “people” and the Bolivarian government. Such analysis is obviously based on concrete elements of the coordinates of the current conflict, but it does not leave space to understand the tensions, differentiations and contradictions internal to Chavismo and also within the popular field.

ML: There is a kind of artificial construction of a unity between government and people, as also happened a lot in relation to Cuba, for example. In other words, the Cuban people are one and the one who speaks for the Cuban people is necessarily their government. As if there were no relations of domination and conflicts of interest in Cuban society. Between men and women, but also between state and society, or between blacks, mestizos and whites, or between country and city. From this perspective that unites government and people in a single symbolic block, nothing emancipatory can really be born. Finally, what we want is to reduce or overcome those relations of domination if I understand the task well. In this dichotomous construction, of polarization, a logic of war is reactivated, which is a cultural legacy left by the Cold War, and which already in that historical moment allowed us to avoid many necessary lessons. A legacy that maybe was partially overcome by the revolt of '68 with its cultural impacts on societies but is suffering a re-enactment now that I feel is quite painful.

Edgardo, on the situation in

Venezuela: personally, I did not sign any of the two international calls, because I really felt that none responded at the same time to the urgency of the situation, to the necessary denunciation of imperialist aggression, of the right and its openly pro-coup sectors, and at the same time to make a clear and critical analysis of the authoritarian drift of *Madurismo*, not only by the formal defence of the 1999 Constitution but also by the necessary recuperation of the forms of popular power, of the experiences of self-organisation, of the communal project which survives, despite everything, in the interstices of the process.

EL: Obviously, there has been a sustained offensive on the part of the Empire, by the United States. Since the beginning of the Chávez government there have been attempts by the United States government to undermine this process, both for geopolitical and economic reasons. We know that Venezuela's oil reserves, such as gold, coltan, uranium and other abundant mineral reserves in the south of the country are essential for the United States, either for itself or to limit the access to them. of its global rivals. Since 1999, Venezuela represented a point of entry for changes in the continent, and that is why the US also supported the 2002 military coup and the 2002-2003 business lock-out oil strike that paralyzed the country for two months, with the express intention of overthrowing the government of President Chávez. We know that groups and parties of the Venezuelan far right have counted on permanent advice and funding from the State Department. The financial blockade and the explicit threats of armed intervention formulated by Trump cannot in any way be taken lightly. There have also been important interventions by *Uribismo* and Colombian paramilitarism. This type of aggression is part of the panorama of the current crisis in Venezuela, and no one from the left can avoid it or put it in the background.

Now the problem of the Bolivarian process is: What do we want to defend? and How should we defend it? Do we have to defend any government

to have a discourse faced with the US? Or do we have to defend a collective process of a democratic, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist nature that points to a horizon that responds to the profound civilizational crisis we are going through? Do we have to defend the increasingly authoritarian government of Maduro, or do we have to defend the transformative potential that emerged in 1999? Today, for the preservation of power for the Maduro government, clientelism and the threats of cutting off access to subsidized basic goods play a much more important role (in conditions in which for a high proportion of the population this is the only way to have access to food), that the appeal to popular participation. And there, in the background, a theme of the debate is what do we understand today by the left? Can we think of the left without questioning what the socialism of the last century has been? When forces that sought to overcome bourgeois democracy ended up being authoritarian, vertical, totalitarian regimes ... Today, in Venezuela, we have to ask ourselves if we are moving in the direction of deepening democracy or if the doors are closing to direct participation of the people in the orientation of the destination of the country.

In Venezuela, in 1999 a Constituent Assembly (CA) was held with very high levels of participation, a referendum was organized to decide whether a CA was to be held, the deputies were elected with high participation, the results were approved with a majority of 62% of the votes, enormous resources were spent to modernize the electoral regime, establishing a totally digitized, transparent system with multiple control mechanisms, and an audit. A reliable electoral system, virtually proof from fraud as has been recognized by numerous international organizations and electoral experts around the world. But, in December 2015, the opposition wins the parliamentary elections with a large majority, and the government is faced with the dilemma of respecting these electoral results and remaining faithful to the constitution of 1999, or on the contrary, doing everything possible to remain in power, even if this meant ignoring the will of the majority of the population or

sacrificing the electoral system that had conquered such high levels of legitimacy. It has clearly opted to remain in power at all costs.

Step by step decisions are being made that define an authoritarian drift. The holding of the recall referendum in 2016 was impeded, the elections of governors in December of the same year were unconstitutionally postponed, the attributions of the National Assembly are unknown, and these are usurped between the Supreme Court of Justice and the executive power. As of February 2016, the President began to govern by way of a state of emergency ("economic emergency"), expressly violating the conditions and time limits established in the Constitution of 1999. Assuming powers that according to the Constitution correspond to the sovereign people, Maduro called a National Constituent Assembly and electoral mechanisms were defined to guarantee total control of that assembly. A monocoloured National Constituent Assembly was elected, its 545 members are identified with the government. This assembly, once installed, proclaimed itself supra-constitutional and plenipotentiary. Most of its decisions are adopted by acclamation or unanimously without any debate. Instead of addressing the task for which it was supposedly chosen, the drafting of a new draft Constitution, it begins to make decisions referring to all areas of public powers, dismisses officials, calls elections in conditions designed to prevent or make very difficult the participation of those who do not support the government, approves what it calls constitutional laws, which in fact produces the abolition of the 1999 Constitution. They adopt retroactive laws, such as the decision to outlaw those parties that did not participate in the mayoral elections of December 2017. The participation of left-wing candidates different from those decided by the PSUV leadership is impeded. Meanwhile, the National Electoral Council carries out a fraud to block the election of Andrés Velázquez as governor of Bolívar State ...

What is at stake here is not the formal defence of the Constitution of 1999, but the defence of democracy, not a

formal bourgeois democracy, but the opening towards the deepening of democracy that represented the 1999 Constitution. that there has been a unique milestone that defines a rupture of the democratic constitutional order created in 1999, like a salami, that democratic constitutional order has been sliced step by step, successively, until we find ourselves in the current situation in which this is no longer recognizable.

So, after this very complex panorama where *progresismo* experiences brusque or gradual setbacks, where the critical or radical lefts do not manage to emerge as a massive popular force, where the actually existing alternative electoral forces are, at the moment, right-wing neoliberals, even insurrectional in some cases like Venezuela, how to think concrete alternatives in this end of hegemony of the progresismos and return of a late neoliberalism? From the perspective of good living and ecosocialism, from criticism of the limits and contradictions of progressive governments, from popular or decolonial feminism, how to think about utopias with concrete perspectives for Our America?

EL: In Venezuela, the only source of optimism for me at this moment is the fact that the crisis has been so deep and has impacted the collective consciousness in such a way that it is possible that the charm of oil, of rentism and of the magical state as provider and benefactor begins, slowly, to dissipate. The entire left-right political debate in recent decades has operated within the parameters of the oil imagination, within this notion of Venezuela as a rich country, owner of the largest oil reserves on the planet. The policy has revolved around the demands that different sectors of society make to the state to access these resources. I begin to see signs, still lamentably weak, of an acknowledgment that it is not possible to continue on that path. We begin to assume that a historical cycle comes to an end. People start scratching their heads, and now what?

I have had relationships for years with what is the most continuous and most vigorous process of popular organization in Venezuela, Cecosesola. This is a network of cooperatives operating in several states in the centre and west of the country that links a wide network of agricultural and artisanal producers with urban consumers, as well as a big cooperative health centre and a funeral cooperative. I have been struck by the presence of topics such as the recuperation and exchange of seeds in everyday conversations. The recognition of a before and after the beginning of the current crisis. Recently, when someone in a farming community came down from a nearby town, they told him to remember to bring me a can of tomato seed. That was the everyday. These were seeds of imported, selected and hybrid tomatoes that did not reproduce, not necessarily transgenic, but sterile after the first sowing. With the economic crisis, that access to seeds is abruptly cut off. Ancestral peasant practices are recuperated. Meetings between farmers begin in which the question is posed, who has seeds of what? Autochthonous seeds that were only preserved on a small scale begin to be exchanged, potato seeds, tomato seeds and so on. This opens up new possibilities. We are going to wake up from this dream (which turned out to be a nightmare) and think about the possibility that we are somewhere else, in another country, in other conditions and life goes on but now it is going in a new way.

Miriam, what Edgardo says is interesting but describes, for the moment, very small embryos of popular power, which may seem not very operational in the face of immense regional challenges, financial globalization, world chaos

ML: Of course, that is, it depends a bit from where you see things, I think that here, for example, in Europe, what we have to do is start to become aware of the effects that the consumer lifestyle causes in other parts of the world. It seems to me that the dimensions of the destruction that this causes, not only in environmental terms but also in terms of social fabric, of subjectivities, are much more

important than what is presumed in Europe, where all this remains practically invisible, camouflaged by consumer environments which are pleasant and anesthetizing.

EL: Or the belief that the standard of living of the North does not depend on extractivism in the South.

ML: Some of us call this the imperial way of life, which automatically assumes that the natural resources and cheap or enslaved labour of the whole world are for the richest 20 percent of the world population that lives in the capitalist centres or the middle and upper classes of the peripheral societies. And if it's cheap, that's good. It gives the feeling that the planet is going to collapse ecologically and socially because of the enormous number of gadgets that are produced, that nobody really needs except "the markets", for everything that capitalism suggests as artificially constructed needs. So, here in the capitalist centres there is a very important task of reducing the amount of matter and energy that is spent. For example, the movements around degrowth have a good perspective in terms of cultural transformation, where because of the discomforts with neoliberalism that you mentioned earlier, people rediscover other non-material dimensions of quality of life, and also the wealth of self-production clothes, or honey, or other things.

Yes, here in France too, there are currently a lot of alternative rural networks, self-managed collective experiences, areas to defend (ZAD), alternative currencies, and so on but they are still very small.

ML: Of course, they are small networks for now, however the important thing is to infect more people with these different imaginaries, so that the change is made not by force, or not by the crisis, but by desire itself. That people can feel, experience in their own flesh that there are other dimensions of good life that can easily compensate for having less materially, and that a decrease does not have to be experienced as loss.

EL: Not as a sacrifice to stop having

things ...

In fact, here, there is more and more talk about the necessary conquest of a happy sobriety and voluntary austerity against consumer waste, it is an interesting, powerful concept that can be connected to good living and ecosocialism.

ML: I feel every time I go to Europe that there is a lot of discomfort with this super-accelerated lifestyle that prevails here, I have many friends who are sick, if not physically psychologically, with stress, depression, burnouts, panic attacks. The dimensions that this acquires are hidden quite systematically in the dominant discourses that continue to associate wellbeing with economic growth, and much more so in what is perceived from the global South. Seen from Latin America, here in the countries of the centre, everything is necessarily a wonder. Then, to visualize these discomforts and make visible the other forms of life that already result from them, would be an important step. Because in the South, curiously everyone believes that it is better to live in the city, while in Germany or Spain, on the contrary, the ecological communities that go to the countryside are multiplying. In other words, it would be a step to help break this hegemony of imitative development, which forces the South to repeat all the mistakes that have already been made in Northern societies, such as clogging cities with cars, for example. But here in the North some of these errors are being overcome by the new generations, as in the division of labour between men and women. Now, in the generations from mine down, sharing the tasks of care not only in the couple but beyond the couple, perhaps in the building, in the community that can be generated in a reduced space of coexistence, has become more normal.

This is also another important element, building community against forced individualization, both in the countryside and in the city. I do not mean the community understood as the small peasant village, ancestral, fixed in time, but political communities in movement, which

incorporate their tasks of care as collective tasks and then reorganize life around what life reproduces, and not around what the market or capital demands. And I think we should make visible all the efforts that are already being made in this sense, where people live relatively well, both in the North and in the South. In the South, in part, they will be ancestral communities, but there are also new ones, while in the North they are usually newly constituted. It's about changing the domination of one way of thinking and looking at the things that exist, you do not have to invent everything from scratch.

For example, there is a view that urban suburbs are hell, in the global South above all. But if you are going to look closer, there are many logics there that are absolutely anti-capitalist, that of not working, that of giving priority to partying, that of exchanges not mediated by the logic of money ... Maybe it's not the model, anyway there is no model and there should not be, that is very important to emphasize. We are not going to have, after twentieth century socialism, a new unique recipe which we will all sign up to and follow, but rather to allow that diversity of alternatives, so that we can build from each culture and context, from the people who are involved in them. Good living is plural.

We also have to generate a culture of alternatives that allows us to err, to make mistakes, to learn from mistakes. These spaces of social experimentation where we say, good, we are going to try that, it does not work, we are going to try something else, but in cohesion and without competing, according to the principle of cooperation and not competition. A book called "The future of development" affirms that the percentage of the world population really inserted in the circuits of the neoliberal globalized market is barely half, and that the rest is still in what we would call the margins. [40] That gives hope, it also means that half the world population is in something else, beyond the dominant model, so we should start looking around.

Very good, thank you very much.

Poor black South Africans are ready for real land reform, but who will benefit?

23 March 2018, by **Boaventura Monjane**

Earlier this month, the South African parliament voted for a motion to amend the constitution that will allow the government to expropriate private land (largely in the hands of white South Africans) without compensation. There is a general assumption that the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) is talking about white-owned private farms, but neither the African National Congress (ANC) nor the EFF have said anything to clarify exactly which (if any) lands the government will expropriate. Debates about land reform in South Africa predate its democracy. Market-oriented land reform policies have been tried since the end of apartheid, but they have failed. The “willing buyer-willing seller” mechanism failed, as it did in Zimbabwe. More than two decades after democratisation, the white minority still controls most of the country’s productive lands.

The expropriation without compensation option was always considered in South Africa, although with little resonance and little effect. Political and public debates over this “radical” measure however have gained prominence relatively recently. Its new proponents – the EFF as well as some “left” forces, such as the Black First Land First movement, the African People’s Democratic Union of Southern Africa and some non-governmental organisations working on land and agrarian issues (that no one took seriously, until – apparently – very recently) have advocated that buying “stolen” land from white owners was unjust, and a radical economic transformation was urgent in South Africa.

The truth of the matter is that “white South Africans own over 72 percent of [the] total of 37 million hectares of farm and agricultural holdings by individual land owners”, according to

the Land Audit. According to the Alternative Information and Development Centre, “even the 13 percent of land for black Africans in the former homelands is effectively held by the state in ‘trust’ [in the case of Ingonyama Trust, in KwaZulu Natal], and controlled by state-paid kings and chiefs”. White people also control other key economic sectors in the country. To give an example, only three per cent of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange is black-owned and the major banks are [white-dominated](#), heavily tied into international banks, especially European banks. This is how unequal the issue is, if we use race as a marker of the distribution of the means of production or economic productive resource.

The unpopularity of controversial former President Jacob Zuma urged him to consider land expropriation without compensation when his political life was already uncertain in early 2017 – many called this proposal political opportunism – but it was probably too late. His successor, Cyril Ramaphosa, took up the issue in his State of Nation Address, but it was the EFF that submitted the motion that was passed in parliament by an overwhelming majority of 241 votes (against 83), but how realistic is expropriation without compensation in the current juncture in South Africa?

Some groups, such as the Inyanda National Land Movement, have already expressed support for the policy of land expropriation without compensation. According to Inyanda “this is a decision that was long overdue”, but there are also sceptical voices, even among disadvantaged South Africans, posing questions about which land are the proponents of expropriation “[talking about who will it be given to, and for what](#)”.

I have visited rural South Africa on a regular basis since 2009, for research and field visits. I have ranged as far as the Eastern Cape, the Western Cape, KwaZulu Natal, Limpopo and Mpumalanga. I have interacted with farm workers, farm dwellers, small-scale farmers, landless peasants, poor urban communities and some (white) commercial farmers – truth be told, it is not easy to get a white commercial farmer to talk to you. At the moment when the motion was passed, I was doing field research in the West Coast, Western Cape for my doctoral thesis.

Rural South Africa is powder keg. Exploited farm workers and landless people are hungry, angry and ready to take land. The conditions for a “Zimbabwe-style” land reform have been created. If amended, the constitution would just “constitutionalise” what would happen soon or later. Land occupations and rural uprisings have happened on a small scale, right across the country, as well as in urban settings. They have focused on housing, livestock and farming. Occupied land not only concerns the white farms: it includes municipally owned and common lands. Most of these occupations are repressed and the people evicted, but some have resisted and settled. The mainstream media and academic scholarship have attached little relevance to this, but rural struggles for land and dignity are mushrooming everywhere in South Africa.

Rural grievances, land and agrarian questions in South Africa are indeed complex. The assumption that “all blacks want (farm) land” and “all whites own – or are benefitting from – land” is very simplistic and highlights “race” over “class” in this complexity. The agrarian structure and rural conflicts are not solely between white (commercial) farmers and black

(landless) peasants and farm workers. It is between commercial farmers themselves, between black indigenous people themselves and with their traditional chiefs, and between all of the above with the state (municipalities and central government). Simplifying the land and agrarian conflicts to blacks and whites (colonialists and colonisers) is a misleading approach. Customary lands are as contentious as private farmlands. Municipalities governed by the ANC are as problematic in the way they have managed and addressed land reform as those governed by the Democratic Alliance and other opposition political parties.

Based on my discussions with different people, there is no homogenous voice about how people see the vote among either the landless (blacks) or the

landed (white) elite. I have heard black small scale famers saying that if not followed up, "this move will be troubling". I have seen white landowners laughing at me when I asked about land expropriation - since it seems that they are not taking this seriously - as well as commercial farmers saying "let them try and come to my land. I will shoot them to death". But I have also heard both black and white people opining that land redistribution is the necessary measure to solve historical injustice and inequality.

South Africans urgently need a national land debate that is extended to all segments of society to continue the process rural and agrarian democratisation. Such a debate must capture as many voices as possible in

order to build a popular national land reform programme that goes beyond the replacement of white capitalist land owners with black capitalist land owners, whilst also addressing racial discrepancies. A resolution of the land question must, however, be in accordance with the needs of those who work and live off the land. This means the destruction of all existing tribal and feudal relations in the rural areas and the nationalisation of the land. A new division of the land and its management must be undertaken by committees that are democratically elected and answerable to the people.

[Pambazuka-><https://www.pambazuka.org/land-environment/poor-black-south-africans-are-ready-real-land-reform-who-will-benefit>

Mar 09, 2018

Three central issues facing the Catalan independence movement

22 March 2018, by **Martí Caussa**

Puigdemont's step back is a factual recognition that the relationship of forces is lacking to make him president and establish the Republic. And the alternative solution proposed by JuntxsCat and ERC [41] was to combine an autonomous government headed by SÃ nchez with a Council of the Republic situated in Brussels.

This solution needed at least two votes in favor from the CUP if SÃ nchez was to be elected in the second round (assuming that the Constitutional Court did not prevent it). [42] But the anti-capitalists are only willing to abstain, because they do not want to support an autonomous government. They want the Republic proclaimed on October 27 to become effective and the transitional laws to be implemented.

The position of the CUP is not an absolute impediment to SÃ nchez's investiture "because it is still

possible to negotiate and because Puigdemont and ComÃ n [43] could renounce their oath as deputies and make way for two substitutes "but it is an indicator of the differences within the independentist movement. These differences are not limited to the parties, as the ANC has decided to call a demonstration on March 11 [44] to demand the new government "obey the mandate of October 1 and implement the Transitional Act and institutions of the Republic."

This is not a discussion about individuals, therefore, but about basic political orientations. Vicent Partal has summed it up [6] as a "great background debate that is masked by the negotiations: do we need to move straight to building the republic or if it is necessary to first look to build whatever can be managed in the framework of regional government, accepting, therefore, the rules imposed by the *coup d'état* of the

central government in Madrid. [45].

I too think the substantive debate is being concealed and that to make it visible, three central issues should be addressed: what has failed, where we really are now and what strategic direction is needed to advance towards the Republic. If this debate were to be held, I believe that the dilemma posed by Partal would be revealed as simplistic.

Three necessary debates

In my opinion we must begin by analyzing what really happened on October 1 and in the days that followed.

We have known for a long time that the fundamental factor in the success of the October 1 referendum vote was

the people who wanted to have a referendum, whatever the outcome, and that not all of these people were pro-independence. We also know that the government did not plan either the occupation or the defense of the polling stations. And we have also seen confirmed (by new statements before Judge Llarena) that the government planned to stop the October 1 vote at noon, but we still do not know who was favorable and who, fortunately, resisted.

We also know that the government celebrated the outcome of the referendum, but had doubts about what to do with the victory; the general strike of October 3 was not a government initiative either, although it favored it. A week later, the combination of indecision, divergences and the fear of being overwhelmed by the movement led the government to tighten the brakes so as not to lose control.

In a long and interesting interview in RAC-1, Puigdemont said he made a mistake on October 10 when he proclaimed the Republic and left it suspended a few seconds later because he relied on promises of state dialogue. Now he believes that the Republic could have been proclaimed and "the position defended." This seems to me the beginning of an interesting reflection, but it is incomplete because you have to go a step further and say how you could have defended the position. This is a fundamental point if you do not want to repeat the same mistake in the future.

Taking into account what everyone now knows about the reaction of the Spanish State (and that could be foreseen prior to October 1), it is clear that a declaration of independence and the implementation of the transitional legislation would not have sufficed, because these are only words and papers. Nor would it have been enough to ask the Mossos [the Catalan police] to protect the government and the Parliament because, in the (uncertain) assumption that they would have obeyed massively, they were too small a force against which the State could mobilize (without using the army).

What was needed to effectively defend the Republic was not only more votes in favor, but a peaceful and massive uprising of the population, beyond the more than two million people who voted on October 1, and in the Spanish state a movement of solidarity against the repression of the peoples. But it never occurred to the government to prepare something like that and, if it had been improvised at the last moment, it is not clear that it would have succeeded because its entire policy before October 1 did not facilitate but hindered a democratic uprising of this scope "both because of its economic policy contrary to the interests of the popular classes (for example, the most recent budgets), as well as its lack of democratic radicalism (for example, breaking the promise to start the participatory phase of the constituent process prior to the referendum).

In the days before and after the October 1 referendum, many people believed that a democratic revolution was beginning, but it seems clear that it was not the intention of the government to do anything like that. It sought only a demonstration of controlled force that would allow it to negotiate with the State. with the support of the European institutions. The King, Rajoy and the State apparatus had a better assessment of the situation, acting more quickly and more forcefully: with the implementation of article 155, the Spanish mobilizations and the police and judicial force.

In the aforementioned interview with RAC-1, Puigdemont acknowledges that on October 27 the relation of forces did not exist to make the Republic effective. Now we can suspect with foundation that there was never that intention. The one who has said it most clearly has been [former Catalan president] Artur Mas in statements before Judge Llarena: according to him all the deputies who voted the unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) "presumably this refers to the deputies of JuntsxCat and ERC, because the deputy of the CUP Mireia Boya has said explicitly otherwise "knew that there was no real means [to implement it]."

And as proof that it was a purely

symbolic "parliamentary action," the former president stressed to the judge of the Supreme Court that after this UDI the government of the Generalitat did not meet to make any decision. "In the world of politics there is a symbolic and aesthetic component. Often an argument is exaggerated or inflated in order to make a good impression on the public. Is this a deception or an exaggeration? It can be." We also know now that the dispersion of the government was not the result of any previously designed and agreed plan.

Why are all the shortcomings and mistakes not analyzed courageously? Wouldn't that be the best guarantee that they would not be repeated?

Nor is there a desire that the situation created on October 27 be acknowledged clearly. When the RAC-1 interviewers ask Puigdemont if the Republic is real, he answers with a riddle: it is in the minds of many Catalans; it is from an institutional point of view because it was declared in Parliament and has been validated in two elections; but there are no Republic structures.

The reality is that we only have a symbolic declaration of a Republic and that the abandonment of the government and of the institutions in the face of article 155 decreed by the adversary signified an important defeat. The dignity of non-surrender, defended both from prison and from Brussels, does not eliminate this defeat. The electoral victory of December 21, however much it once again demonstrates the will of the majority of the people of Catalonia and the undemocratic character of the State, is not enough to compensate for the defeat of October 27. This can only be overcome with a massive mobilization that forces the freeing of the prisoners, the return of the exiles and the elimination of all the consequences of article 155, and that is situated in a framework of struggle for more democracy and more social rights for the whole of the people of Catalonia, whether independentist or not, in the struggle for the Republic, without renouncing disobedience and unilateral measures when necessary to secure these demands.

Neither autonomism nor direct implementation of the Republic

Neither JuntxsCat nor ERC are promoting such an orientation. Their proposal places the fight for the freedom of the prisoners, the return of the exiles and the withdrawal of 155 in the framework of the normalization of an autonomous government combined with international pressure from the [exiled] Council of the Republic, hoping that in the future the conditions will improve for negotiating with the State (Puigdemont recognizes that his exile can last for years). This is not a realistic path for achieving the Catalan Republic, because none of the deficiencies that were revealed before and after October 1 are being corrected.

But this criticism does not mean that we can “move straight to building the republic” as claimed by Vicent Partal in the article I quoted, and by the CUP or the leadership of the ANC. In order to move forward, we must realistically acknowledge what the current situation is, and what is the point of departure. We must accept that this point is not the activation of the laws of transition, nor even the restitution of the legitimate president and government.

We must open the discussion on a path to the Republic that avoids the false starts of autonomism and proceeding directly to a republic “

admitting that we have a problem and that there are disagreements, but avoiding condemnations. Ideas have already begun to emerge in this regard and it is appropriate to think about them, even if one does not agree with them. I will mention two.

Roger PalÀ has written: “The independence movement is at a crossroads: either continue feeding the theories of wishful thinking, or make some decisions based on pragmatism. There is no indication that the Republic proclaimed in October can be implemented imminently, that it exists beyond the legitimate longings of hundreds of thousands of people. ... From a rational point of view, recovering self-government “ even if it is under the interventionist pressure of an unbridled PP [Spanish premier Rajoy’s People’s Party] “ can be the necessary starting point to recover forces and rearm with ideas.”

The other quote, more controversial, is Joan TardÀ’s: “However, the independence movement will only succeed if it understands that it must accumulate forces (“we are not enough,” we have repeated many times) ... republicanism must converge with the political forces that also defend the binding referendum, led by Xavier Domènech, [46] and must open channels of frank dialogue ... with the Catalan socialism of the PSC, [47] of a Miquel Iceta who has to decide whether to stick to or lend credence to the regression in rights and freedoms.”

I do not believe that it is possible to open avenues of dialogue with the leaders of the PSC while they continue

to defend article 155, although dialogue is possible with the PSC base. But it is evident that “we are not enough” and that means convergence in action with the Commons is essential in the fight against article 155, the defense of democracy and social demands, or the promotion of the debate on the constituent assembly (as Jaume López recently recalled).

In my opinion, it can be accepted that the effective government that can be had immediately is of an autonomous nature, provided that, at the same time, the struggle to defend the economic, social, democratic and cultural needs of the population with the aim of winning the Republic is set in motion. What is decisive, in my view, is to promote a plan of struggle of the movements and social entities, not to await what the government will say but to put demands on it, to promote disobedience and unilateralism when necessary, to aim for a mobilization that is more massive, autonomous and self-organized than October 1, with a national, democratic and social content, and that actively works as of now to win active solidarity from the peoples of the Spanish State (on the basis of opposition to the monarchical regime and the defense of the republic) and from Europe. It seems difficult and certainly it is, but we have already found that sometimes things that are presented as easy “ like the passage to independence as “from one law to another” “ are the most unreal.

[Life on the left](#)

March 6, 2018

"Women’s strike on March 8th, shows that without us, the world doesn’t go round!"

21 March 2018, by **Marta Cotta, Pauline Forges**

Pauline Forges: How did the movement “Non una di meno” start?

Marta Cotta: It began a year and a half ago, with three collectives: Io

decido, a network of feminist collectives in Rome established three

years ago; DIRE, the national network of refuges against violence against women; and UDI, the union of Italian women, a feminist organization that has existed for many years. After an umpteenth femicide that happened in Rome, there was an assembly, and we took the decision to give a stronger response. At the same time, there was the movement "Ni una menos" in Argentina. We launched a call for a national demonstration on November 26th, 2016, followed by a national assembly. It was a mixed demonstration: the organization was non-mixed but it was open to other movements (LGBTQI or those in solidarity with women). At the assembly on November 27th, it was supposed to be mixed but there were practically only women present.

PF: Was it a success?

MC: There were 700 people at the assembly. The objective was to write together a national plan to fight violence against women. There were eight workshops, in order to discuss violence in all aspects of a woman's life, starting from the fact that it is systemic. Among the themes, there was health, refuges against violence against women, sexism in the mixed political movement, work, the media and the means of communication and gender education in schools. After the assembly of November 27th, 2017, there were others, to write the national plan to fight violence against women, but also to prepare for March 8th. From then on, it was understood that it was the assemblies that took decisions (and no longer the organizations that had taken the initiative of launching the movement). Little by little, especially after March 8th last year, assemblies of « Non

una di meno were established in different towns and cities, to participate in the national plan, while at the same time conducting campaigns at the local level.

PF: How did things go on November 25th last year?

MC: We organized a big demonstration with the slogan "We have a plan," because we finished editing our national plan to fight violence against women, in the shape of a little 50-page book that analyses the situation and proposes measures. The movement around #Metoo was also important; we demonstrated with the slogan "From #Metoo to #Wetogether".

PF: What did you organize on March 8th last year?

MC: We launched a call for a general strike which was supported by the minority unions in Italy. There was trade-union work to be done, because the majority union confederation (the CGIL) did not want this strike. It was a strike of productive (paid) and reproductive (unpaid) labour. Every town and city decided how to organize its March 8th. For example, in Rome, we occupied two squares around two themes, education and health, and we organized a big collective demonstration. We gave a lot of thought to women who did not have the possibility of going on strike; we thought of ways in which they could show solidarity by wearing the colours of the strike of the strike (black and fuchsia-coloured clothes), or by wearing a badge.

PF: What is a strike of "reproductive" labour, unpaid?

MC: The idea was to show that without us, the world stops turning. We stop working, we organize a big public lunch, or collective childcare, we dump dirty washing in the squares... This year, in Milan, there will be a sound system with music that recalls witches' meetings, to accompany the demonstration, but also to be heard by women who cannot take part in the strike.

PF: What is the place of Communia in "Non una di meno"?

MC: Degender, the feminist and LGBTQI collective of Communia-Rome, was involved in Io decido, which was involved in the initiative of the movement. In Rome, there is an assembly of "Non una di meno" every Thursday. But we are also active in other cities.

PF: How is March 8th this year shaping up?

MC: The difficulty of this March 8th is that there are parliamentary elections on March 4th. Some sectors cannot go on strike for five days before and five days after the election. Besides, now that we have a national plan to fight violence against women, the question is to decide what we will do. What gives us momentum is that there is a big movement on the international level, in Argentina, in Poland... that gives us strength. There is an international coordinating body of "Non una di meno". This year, there are three themes that will be put in the forefront on March 8th in Rome: sexual harassment in the workplace, health (with the fortieth anniversary of the law on abortion) and women's refuges (there are only four in Rome!).

"The feminists are here"

20 March 2018, by Julia Camara

1. The call for a feminist strike signified a qualitative leap in the conception of March 8th as a day of

struggle. The massive demonstrations, with a million participants in Madrid, 600,000 in Barcelona, 300,000 in

Saragossa and 100,000 in Seville, were not, as in previous years, isolated acts of protest. They were the

culmination of many hours of meetings, strike pickets and all sorts of activities. Over and above the demonstrations, the strike was in evidence throughout the day in the neighbourhoods, the schools, the universities and workplaces. Faced with the ineffectiveness of purely symbolic actions, the feminist movement has provided a demonstration of force that gives a new dimension to the classical slogan "The feminists are here".

2. The dimension of unemployment became a multiplier of the impact attributed to the strike. The reference point of the strike broke with the ritual aspect of celebration and made ridiculous any attempt to reduce the day to fashion, to the consumption of cosmetics and to compliments to the feminine mystique. It is true that for months we listened to the repetition of the idea that feminism was in fashion and that everybody wanted to get in on it. Nevertheless, it is not possible to take part in a strike in an abstract way. So there is a point of rupture. The last minute recruits (something which provoked a polemic, among others between the journalist Ana Rosa Quintana and the Vice-Secretary of Studies and Programmes of the PP, Andrea Levy) and the drop in the

audience for most television programmes rendered impossible any attempt to interpret this day in terms of normal demands.

3. The incapacity of the traditional political actors to understand what was going on was manifest. The role played by the two main trade-union confederations (the CC OO and the UGT), oscillating between incomprehension and boycott, reinforces the image they have acquired in recent years of being stupefied mastodons that look in perplexity at what is happening around them. The refusal to call for a 24-hour strike and the call for partial strikes not only sowed confusion among many women workers, but constituted a real factor of demobilization. To reflect on the way we will conduct from now on necessary trade-union activity and on how we will manage to respond to the aspirations of many women who, after March 8th, are talking about labour disputes and organization in the workplace: these are tasks that lie before anti-capitalist feminism.

4. If we have learned anything from the preparation of the strike, it is above all the establishment of

networks of women. The construction of political complicities and affectionate alliances between neighbours, mothers, girls, grandparents and hitherto unknown women has been the basis of an ambitious and necessary programme of struggle (the content of the manifesto read in unison in the different cities is a good example), but also the building of collective bastions in our concrete lives. Tens of thousands of women stopped to applaud, during the demonstration in Zaragoza, a cleaning woman who waved a rag from a window on the third floor of a building. The refrain "You are not alone" in Madrid for a woman who was watching from a balcony with her head in her hands, crying. The popular canteens in Barcelona, places to meet in the neighbourhoods, the children's crèches in Valencia. The feminist strike is the end of isolation, the rediscovery of collective action, the conquest of the right to exist. Of course, much remains to be done. But starting from today, we march together, and whoever is in the street rarely spends time at home. "The feminists are here."

This article was first posted on March 10, 2018 on the site of *Viento Sur*.

Victory of Assad Regime in Ghouta Is Major Defeat for Those Fighting Racism and Capitalist Authoritarianism Globally

19 March 2018, by **Frieda Afary**

There is no lack of evidence about the barbarity of the Assad regime. Supported by Putin's Russia and the Iranian regime, it is currently massacring 400,000 innocent civilians in Eastern Ghouta, a suburb of Damascus which it has kept under siege since April 2013 and subjected to chemical warfare as well. The intensified daily bombing and shelling of Eastern Ghouta which started in

November 2017 and has led to hundreds of deaths of innocent civilians in just the past few days, is part of the Assad regime's systematic destruction of the Syrian revolution since 2011. Ghouta has also suffered from the practices of a reactionary Salafist movement, Jaysh al-Islam, which has repressed and killed democratic activists.

While the U.S. and European powers

such as France shed crocodile tears over Ghouta, by now it should be clear that neither the U.S., nor any of the Western powers ever genuinely supported the Syrian revolution or wanted the overthrow of the Assad regime. At most, they wanted the regime without the person of Assad because they considered the regime necessary for imposing "stability" in the region. Even in April 2017 when

the Trump administration carried out a missile strike against a Syrian government airbase where a chemical attack was launched, its aim was to show the U.S.'s imperial might.

None of these powers could ever have any genuine concern for the Syrian masses who rose up against an authoritarian and butcher regime. The capitalist and imperialist foundation of these powers would not allow them to do so.

Need for a New Discourse of Solidarity

Those who oppose both the Assad regime and the Jihadists and all the imperialist powers, need to focus on a glaring fact: The authoritarianism that we see in the Assad regime, Putin's Russia and the Iranian regime is increasingly growing in Western countries as well. Assadism and Putinism might be the face of the future of the Western liberal democracies. Indeed, support for Assad and Putin has become a rallying cry for Western white supremacist, Islamophobic and anti-Semitic organizations and parties from the U.S. alt-right to the Italian far-right Forza Nuova, all of whom are becoming more and more mainstream.

Facing up to this fact, can also help us find a pathway forward in our solidarity work: We need to show that opposing the Assad regime's war on the Syrian masses is absolutely necessary for fighting the growth of white supremacy in the U.S. and other Western countries. Indeed it is necessary for challenging the growth of capitalist authoritarianism around the world. Assad's Syria could be our future.

The current evidence about the relationship between the Assad regime and the U.S. and European far-right, reveals that Assadist totalitarianism has become an "inspiration" for various parties representing the more openly authoritarian and racist direction of capitalism. [48]

Thus the need to oppose the Assad regime's bombing of Eastern Ghouta and Idlib is not only a concern for people in the Middle East but should also be a concern for anti-racist activists around the world. Allowing Assad and his allies to continue their massacres in the name of "fighting terror" will greatly strengthen those who want to repeat that scenario in the U.S. and Europe and elsewhere. It will have consequences for Black Lives Matter, Latinos, all people of color, Muslims and Jews.

Supporting Kurds Requires Opposing Assad, Erdogan & All Imperialist Powers

Closer to Eastern Ghouta, the current victory of the Assad regime will have direct and horrible consequences for the Kurds in Afrin and Rojava. Since the Summer of 2012, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), which leads the autonomous region of Rojava in Northern Syria, has claimed that while it does not support the Assad regime, it has chosen to not engage in aggression against it in order to advance its own political project. The collaboration of the Syrian anti-Assad opposition with Turkey and their support for Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan have also convinced the PYD that its course vis-a-vis the Assad regime has been correct.

Since January 20 however, when the authoritarian government of Erdogan intensified its ongoing war on the Kurds and attacked the Afrin canton with support from Russia, and by using Syrian Arab fighters from the anti-Assad Free Syrian Army and the Islamic fundamentalist forces, the PYD leadership has openly asked the Assad regime to come to its aid. On February 22, following a meeting between Saban Hamo, a leader of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) and Russian and Syrian government officials, and with the backing of Iran, Syrian regime militias swept into Afrin. [49]

How could a butcher regime which is currently engaged in decimating the people of Eastern Ghouta and has been responsible, for the past seven years, for the murder of half a million mostly innocent civilians, be called upon to "save" the Kurdish masses? This is also a regime with extreme Arab nationalist and racist policies toward the Kurds, some of whom were not even recognized as Syrian citizens until 2011.

The Syrian regime might negotiate a deal with the Erdogan government and Russia, and gain full and official control of the Rojava region and hence temporarily stop the Turkish ground and aerial attacks on Afrin. However, the PYD's deal with the Assad regime will only exchange one brutal assault with another. What called itself the autonomous region of Rojava can no longer continue under these conditions.

Two years ago, when the Alliance of Syrian and Iranian Socialists was formed, its founding statement of principles stated the following: "While we insist on upholding a principled position of support for the Kurdish national liberation movement and its struggle for self-determination in Iraq, Syria, Turkey and Iran, we think it is also necessary to challenge many of those on the left who separate the struggle for self-determination of the Kurdish people in Syria from the dynamics of the Syrian revolution. It was the 2011 Syrian revolution that made it possible for the autonomous cantons in Rojava to come into existence. Without a Syrian revolution there can be no democratic Rojava. . . . The liberation and emancipation of the Kurdish people is linked to the liberation and emancipation of the people of the region."

This statement is more true than ever. The victory of the Assad regime and its allies in Eastern Ghouta is a major defeat not only for the Syrian Arab revolutionaries but also for the Kurds, all other ethnicities in Syria, and all those fighting racism and capitalist authoritarianism around the world.

February 24, 2018

[Alliance of Middle Eastern Socialists](#)

Ramaphosa and Gigaba have allowed a good crisis to go to waste

18 March 2018, by **AIDC**

Budgets do not represent the sum total of a government's economic policy. They indicate the direction of things to come. As many suspected, the 2018 budget will hit poor and working class people harder. They will bear the brunt of expenditure and tax proposals meant to resolve the debt crisis the economy was heading towards.

Gigaba and Ramaphosa have set us on a path of economic regression. The optimism that greeted the demise of former President Jacob Zuma and Ramaphosa's ascent to power will be eroded. It will be eroded by a futile attempt at going back to GEAR and an outdated reliance on the Mineral Energy Complex. The poverty, unemployment and inequality these strategies have spawned will get worse.

This budget is GEAR-like, in the deep cuts in expenditure and the reliance on anti-poor tax policies. The industrial strategy it envisages is based on stimulating mining and related heavy industries into somehow becoming "sunrise" industries. In fact, their time has passed. There will be no significant rise of the gold, platinum, coal and iron sectors.

It is also GEAR-like in its wager that the global economy and opening further to foreign investors will rescue the South African economy. Even when SA had an iconic President in the form of Mandela, foreign

investment failed to materialise. New president Ramaphosa should not be under the illusion that "Special Economic Zones", subsidised wages for big business and privatisation of state-owned enterprises will bring "manna from heaven".

The government should not have increased VAT! There are several alternatives that can provide sufficient funds to deal with the social and economic misery that the vast majority suffer. For example, and contrary to mainstream belief, personal income tax could have been adjusted to restore the effective tax rate on the rich as it was 12-15 years ago. This alone would realise over R100 billion. No doubt, we will now experience how unscrupulous shop owners increase prices by much more than 1 percentage point of VAT allow them.

A tax on meaningless financial trades can realise substantial resources. Halting illicit financial flows, base erosion and profit shifting would contribute tens of billions of rand to the budget and change the entire budgetary framework. If government wants to combat transfer pricing and avoidance measures it would speedily introduce a separate tax avoidance act.

Given the fact that the Government Employees Pension Fund (GEPF) is over-funded by up to R50 billion per year, borrowing at a regulated interest rate from GEPF can significantly bring down the state cost of borrowing,

without affecting any benefits of current or future pensioners. This would cut government's annual interest bill of R180bn by at least 25% and stop this bill from increasing. It also has the merit of freeing us from some of the pressure of the financial markets and credit rating agencies.

The process of initiating free higher education indicates what is possible when there is political will. The same should and could be done with regard to housing and health services. However, the start of this important reform is undermined by extensive cuts in basic education infrastructure expenditure. Over three years education infrastructure is cut by R14 billion in real terms, Health infrastructure by R1.2 billion and Human settlements by R9 billion.

Over the next three years government will slash R85.7 billion in expenditures compared to the 2017 budget. Provincial and local government will be at the coal face of these cuts. These cuts contradict the plan to combat youth unemployment, but Ramaphosa and Gigaba rely on wage subsidy programs and precarious employment. The government should instead oversee the roll out of socially owned and insourced renewable energy programs to create hundreds of thousands of jobs. The water crisis in Western, Northern and Eastern Cape shows how easily jobs can be found if we seriously want to address both unemployment and climate change.

YPJ as a symbol of women's resistance

17 March 2018, by Andy Heintz

Andy Heintz - Can you describe your work as a member of the Kobane Reconstruction Board?

Hawzhin Azeez - My work was primarily focused on preparing information and reports on the different areas of needs in Kobane, such as documenting the level of damage to the education or healthcare system. It involved connecting with NGOs, solidarity groups, individuals and associations who wish to learn more about the rebuilding and wish to contribute and support the rebuilding process. This process also involved speaking to journalists, solidarity movements, academics and organizations who wish to know more about post-war Kobane. Another important aspect of my job involved documenting all projects and their progress in report, photo and video form and developing an archive of the rebuilding. This was very important as we wanted the world and future generations to see how the rebuilding of the city was conducted in light of such severe limitations and barriers.

More recently, I have co-founded an NGO on the ground here in Kobane, called Hevi- meaning Hope in Kurdish. Our effort is concentrated in providing humanitarian aid to the people of Rojava, as the ongoing humanitarian embargo from Turkey, the Assad regime and the Kurdistan Regional Government heavily incentivized by the Erdogan regime ensures that the economic situation is critical at the moment. Although co-operatives and communes are emerging at a fast pace there is still an urgent need for basic needs such as medicine, antibiotics, vaccinations, education, shelter and other needs within the community. The ongoing operation in Raqqa, the massive displacement that occurred in Aleppo and previously in Manbij means that thousands are internally displaced within Rojava and require urgent help. We hope to use Hevi to be a vehicle for support and solidarity for the displaced and the struggling communities here in Rojava.

Do you see the YPJ's as serving as role models for women in the Middle East when it comes to promoting gender equality between the sexes?

The YPJ serve as a symbol of resistance and self-protection for all minoritized, racialized, colonized women, not just in the Middle East but across the globe. They serve just as much as a symbol of resistance for women in the Middle East and Latin America and Asia as Western women since their resistance is not just against "Daesh" (ISIS) but against the oppressive political and economic conditions within the capitalist, neoliberal, statist system as well as obviously the patriarchal system. As a result of the close and interlinked connection between the capitalist system and the patriarchy all women suffer to varying degrees from the unequal conditions and the associated gender and sexual oppressions. Additionally, we need to note that the YPJ is not a solitary entity that engages in seismic socio-political and economic changes within the region. The YPJ is an extension of the Rojava Revolution and the efforts by the people in north Syria to implement a radical form of democratic model known as "Democratic Confederalism". This radical model was developed by the imprisoned Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan, the founder of the revolutionary liberation movement the PKK (The Kurdistan Workers Party) who aimed to liberate the Kurds from the oppressions and violent assimilation policies of the Turkish regime. However, when Ocalan was captured through international collaboration with the Turkish deep state the aims of the PKK and later the liberation psychology and approach of the Kurds changed. The evolution occurred through Ocalan's reading of Murray Bookchin's work which led to a radical shift in Ocalan's ideology. The entire approach to the liberation of the Kurds and the so called Kurdish Question changed from a nationalist purely state-centric approach to a

radical, stateless, democratic, confederal and multicultural approach- an approach which saw the liberation of women, defined as the first colonized people by Ocalan, as integral and imperative. The formation of the YPJ is therefore an extension of other socio-political, cultural and economic changes which are occurring in north Syria and not just purely a military one- which often the YPJ is reduced too.

For this reason, it is problematic to believe that the YPJ only serve as a model of gender equality for women in the Middle East; instead they should be seen as models for all women in dismantling the roots of the oppressive capitalist, white supremacist, neo-colonial state-centric system. Moreover, I would go further to argue that the entire Kurdish women's movement, which now is very multicultural and includes Syrian, Christian, Arab, Armenian and other ethnic and religious groups- of which the YPJ is part of- should be seen as a collective movement of revolutionary women attempting to impact serious regional changes. Something which they have managed to do incredibly well.

How has the YPJ's role in battling ISIS, Bashar Assad and the al Qaeda linked al-Nusra front played in changing the perceptions of men towards women in your region? Do you hope the YPJ breaks down some of the patriarchal barriers in Kurdish culture?

The YPJ has served to break down many gender barriers not just regionally but also globally- but again we must remember that the YPJ is an extension of a socio-cultural, politico-economic and gender changes being implemented in Rojava and does not stand alone as a movement. The YPJ as a military movement have demonstrated most effectively that women are just as capable of engaging in traditionally masculine work, and the most difficult work of all-

defending the community and even succeeding where men may have failed. But more than that, they have managed to fundamentally re-order and challenge orientalist, Eurocentric views of what Middle Eastern women are capable of. In fact, their resistance was of such significance for gender, socio-political and cultural rights that it has caused flow on effects across the Western, so-called developed world, which still struggles with entrenching its own women and gender rights.

However, there is still an element of exoticization of Kurdish women fighters, Orientalizing them, turning them into some mythical, Amazonian, extraordinary figures of unusual courage and strength in battling Daesh, al-Nusra, and other similar organizations. An effort which the statist, capitalist, imperial international system attempts to water down and dilute the significance of the YPJ. In fact, the YPJ are normal, ordinary women who have been placed in the difficult position of having to defend themselves and that of other women's rights in the absence of appropriate alternatives and the failures of the international statist, capitalist, neoliberal system.

But we must also remember that the YPJ did not form within a vacuum, or emerged without a background context and ideology. It is really Abdullah Ocalan's radical democracy of Democratic Confederalism, which paved the way for not only the formation of the YPJ but also the collective social consciousness which was necessary to allow women the freedom to join the YPJ in defense of their communities- whose predecessor existed in the YJA-Star movement which is the women's self-defense units in the PKK. Without the essentiality of this ideological core the YPJ would have never formed, nor would the community had the necessary foundational consciousness to allow for such progressions to occur, developments which are still deemed unthinkable within the Western, capitalist, imperial world.

At the same time, it is essential to note that long term, comprehensive, effective and organic social change and progress is not something that

can occur overnight. In order for these changes to be organic and accepted long term by society the changes need to be understood and accepted by the community. For this reason, the YPJ have done some of the work, though obviously essential work, there is still a significant amount of work that needs to be done before all women within society here in Kobane, in Rojava, in the region can be free. Although for instance, at the moment, thanks to the YPJ and YPG the women in the Rojava region are politically free from the Assad regime and the threat from terrorist organizations has reduced significantly, gender equality has a long way to go yet. It is important to note that the Rojava Revolution is not actually over; but rather that the revolution is an ongoing effort to engage in social change across cultural, political, economic, social and gender spheres. We must not forget that gender equality must also encompass LGBTQAI+ communities as well This is still an ongoing global problem in even in the most developed, privileged societies, let alone in war-torn and destroyed communities like Rojava and the Middle East. Therefore, we cannot view gender liberation as solely a women's liberation from oppressive, violent, and abusive brown men but rather a complete rupture of societies internal and external social, cultural, religious, economic and gender-based relations to reflect a deeper, more critical and radical understanding of individual and collective freedom- all of which are concepts that Abdullah Ocalan focuses on intensely in his ideology of Democratic Confederalism.

I think it's really problematic to be asked whether the YPJ will serve to breakdown the patriarchal practices within Kurdish culture because patriarchy is a global issue and crisis. It is something which is just as prevalent in the East as it is in the West. In America, one of the most 'democratic' countries in the world women are slowly losing basic rights that the suffragettes had fought and even died attempting to implement and institutionalize. The increased move towards right wing politics, Trumpism, liberal feminism personified in Hillary Clinton's politics which ignores imperial impacts of

Americanism on the developing world has contributed to a gender and rights crises and regression. Sexual abuse, domestic violence, sexual harassment in public spaces, lack of access to reproductive rights, ongoing belief that women's primary role is still in the home in caretaker roles, lack of LGBTQAI+ protections and rights, the ongoing abuse of transgender women among other issues mark the social problems that the West is currently experiencing. In contrast, what I believe will have a profound effect on reducing the patriarchal practices within the Middle East and Kurdish culture is reduced imperial and neo-colonial interventions and interferences, entrenched and promoted by the statist, capitalist international system through the imposition of artificial states. The levels of patriarchy in Kurdish culture and community is a direct response to the decades of state-sponsored terrorism and violence, ethnic cleansing and genocides, and aggressive assimilation policies that led to the erosion and loss of basic cultural, linguistic and previously egalitarian gender relations. The very existence of the YPJ and the PKK guerrillas and other Kurdish women fighters across Kurdistan is a reflection of the egalitarian gender relations that has always existed in Kurdish culture but has been suppressed, or deteriorated as a result of modern violence and oppressions.

Can you describe the YPJ's role in saving the Yazidi population trapped on Mount Sinjar in Iraq from ISIS?

The YPJ joined the YPG and the PKK to help save the Yazidis when they were attacked by ISIS in August 2014. ISIS was attacking the Yazidi people and threatening them with either the choice of death or conversion to Islam. The tragedy that ensued included 13 thousand KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) members abandoning the Yazidi people in Shengal, northern Iraq and even leaving their weapons for ISIS to take over. There was no effort made to warn the Yazidi people of the advancing terrorists. Thousands died, many were massacred and thrown in mass graves, thousands of women were captured as sex slaves and hundreds of children were

traumatized, dehydrated, blinded, starved and lost their lives. Thousands ended up escaping to the mountain tops of Shengal in order to get away from the advancing ISIS terrorists, but faced immediate starvation and dehydration. The American, Australian and UK air force made urgent humanitarian food drops but the situation looked critical.

When it became obvious that a humanitarian crisis was occurring, and that thousands more were in danger of being massacred in the genocide the PKK, YPG-YPJ forces moved in and cleared a humanitarian corridor to bring the people down from the Shengal mountain to safety. A refugee camp was set up by the PKK-YPG-YPJ forces housing thousands of traumatized people; but as a result of the action of the PKK-YPG-YPJ forces hundreds and thousands of people, women and children were saved.

The YPJ played an important part in the rescue operations and were integral in saving the Yezidi people. Since then the Yezidis have been encouraged to create their own self-protection units (called the YPS), along the line of the YPG-YPJ forces so that they will never again be vulnerable to such attacks and terrorism. This is very important as the Yezidis have been subjected to 74 genocides across history. To ensure that such a tragedy does not occur again the YPJ forces were integral in educating and speaking to the Yezidi people, but especially the women to encourage them, support and train them in protecting themselves.

Do you think the fact that many ISIS fighters are fearful that being killed by a woman in combat because they think it will mean they are banned from Paradise gives the YPJ a mental edge over their adversaries? Why or why not?

No, I believe, in my experiences of living here in Kobane, in something contrary to what has been widely reported about the YPJ. I think this notion is really something that has been propagated by Western media and its Islamophobic tendencies. The YPJ do not need a mental edge in this form, nor do they need this form of

propaganda to dilute the courage and strength it takes to go to the frontlines and fight ISIS. Their mental edge comes from having been women who have lived in deeply oppressed societies and experienced the double oppression of being Kurdish and women who now have the capacity to not only defend themselves but also their communities and other women from terrorists and violence. Their mental edge comes from the liberation ideology which is Democratic Confederalism and their personal commitment to understanding and learning this ideology as a foundational approach towards their lives, and individual and collective liberation of women and society. What is underestimated here is the experiences of oppression of Kurdish women as racialized, minoritized, colonized and oppressed women and Kurds. Experiences which have contributed to the need to develop a liberation ideology that addresses these oppressions and experiences; but one which is radical, critical, anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, anti-colonial and anti-racist. The liberation ideology as defined by Democratic Confederalism is not just something that applies to Kurdish women or Kurdish society but all oppressed and marginalized communities. Knowing this, the YPJ engage in their resistance against not only ISIS but also capitalism, imperialism and patriarchal global practices entrenched in systems and institutions within the statist system. The YPJ is therefore much more than just a "military" force fighting against ISIS. It is a reflection of historical oppressions that existed and impacted women's lives long before ISIS and its ilk rose up.

The Western media has focused a lot on the YPJ's role in fighting ISIS, but little has been said about the group's political ideology? Can you describe the ideological orientation of the YPJ? What role does austerity, socialism, charity and discipline play in the YPJ's overall ideology?

The YPJ is a deeply disciplined militia-I am hesitant to call them a military force because they do not fulfil the traditional function of a military which always tend to be an invasive,

patriarchal, colonizing force. Their aspirations are defined by two core goals. The first is to fight physically against the forces of patriarchy because they recognize that without military capacity their attempt to dismantle patriarchy is heavily limited. This is in direct contrast to liberal feminism which views legal and social changes as the limit to the changes they require to attain gender equality. However, the conditions within the Middle East are significantly different and a military self-protection element is required. The second goal of the YPJ is to face immediate threats of state and local terrorism such as Assad regime's terrorism of the Kurdish people or ISIS, al Nusra and other similar groups who have directly attempted to target women as a form of gender-based terrorism.

Returning to the notion that the YPJ is an extension of the social and cultural changes occurring within the women's movement, the overarching women's organization the Kongreya Star (Star union) represents the social, cultural, economic, political and legal changes being implemented. The YPJ is the physical and military arm of this movement. The continuous effort to focus on, romanticize and exoticize the YPJ has come at the detriment of the collective women's movement and changes they have been implementing. In fact the social changes being implemented is the foundational base that continues to prop up the YPJ and provides it with the widespread support it requires.

How important is it to include people from other races and ethnicities in the YPJ?

It is foundational to the underlying ideology of Democratic Confederalism which the YPJ follow. It is important to note that the formation of the YPJ is a reflection of the radical form of co-existence that the Rojava community has accepted. This system under the model of Democratic Confederalism is multicultural, democratic, promotes ethno-religious diversity and the right for differences to exist. For this reason, the YPJ is open to all women who wish to join and views itself as representing all women rather than just a Kurdish or a Middle Eastern movement. However, why women

choose to join the YPJ is also just as important. The YPJ encourages the notion of women's self-protection in a deeply capitalist, patriarchal, statist world. Hundreds of international volunteers have joined the YPG-YPJ movement, and continue to flow into Rojava to join. Although some have been deeply problematic in being clearly right wing and conservatives whose ideological orientations were contrary to the aspirations of the revolution here. However, some have been clearly ideologically aligned and affiliated with the leftist, socialist, feminist and ecological aspirations of the people here. Ivana Hoffman (code name Ava?Ãn Teko?Ãn Gne?), a South African with German citizenship who joined the YPJ and lost her life fighting against ISIS in early 2015 in Til Tamer represents that international, revolutionary, fiercely ideological and committed group of activists and fighters who have come from all over the world to stand with and in the revolution.

We have had people as far as Australia, Canada, America, England, Scotland, Germany, Sweden and Ireland come and join. We have also had shahids among these groups who gave up their lives so that the revolution can succeed and achieve its aims. This is something that needs to be touched on-the love, adoration and worship of the shahids and the immense sacrifices they have made for humanity and for the oppressed. Their pictures color the roads and streets of Rojava whether international or otherwise. It is essential considering the immense sacrifices made by so many that we ensure that we achieve the democratic, feminist and ecological aspirations of Rojava Revolution. It is an ideological, psychological, revolutionary and moral imperative that we honor those who have fallen and those who continue to fight, risking their lives every single day by ensuring the democratic confederal system is entrenched and implemented solidly here.

[[Can you describe the importance of the term "Heval" to the YPJ?

The term "heval" is a Kurdish word meaning friend, but it functions similar to the word comrade as well. It is a term signifying solidarity,

commitment and unity towards a similar ideological revolutionary goal. It is also a political term which in the military sense means that a heval is closer than family, and represents your ideological comrade and friend. It represents the rupture from old ties, such as ties to the family which are traditional social constructs of the capitalist, patriarchal system, and instead ideological ties based on free will and association. The term heval is this and much more, and its difficulty of concrete definition is representative of the difficulty of the Kurdish movement itself and the liberation efforts of the Kurds. In fact, I feel to define the term is to try to grasp the mists of the mountains of Kurdistan or to capture the meaning of freedom for a deeply oppressed, colonized people. It is to try to understand the causes of the thousands of graves of freedom fighters scattered across Kurdistan, or to grasp the gravity of the genocides and the massacres, the ethnic cleansings and entire cities and thousands of villages razed to the ground. It is, in other words an impossible task to define an emotion that has yet to be defined, and whose power is in its definitionless state-as if, like the Kurdish liberation movement, it is a term, a concept, a feeling, a commitment, an ideological and revolutionary wave that can redefine and reformulate itself with the necessity of the time and the urgency of the situation.

Do you think the Western media has accurately depicted the Rojava revolution? If not, what are some of the things the media have gotten wrong?

The Western media has rarely depicted the struggle of the people and the liberation efforts accurately. But there is no reason to expect that the oppressive, capitalist, neo-colonial system which is responsible for the ongoing oppression of our people and other colonized and marginalized communities would depict our fights, our struggles and liberation from this very said system accurately. And let's be clear, our struggle with ISIS is only a temporary, surface conflict. Our greater objective is an ideological shift and the re-ordering of the existing status quo.

Western media has used oppressive and inflammatory terms to sell their stories. The Kurdish people are often depicted as "terrorists", "rebels", "US-backed fighters"; more often than not there is a reference related to Turkey viewing the YPG as a terrorist organization but no reference at all as to the unbelievable levels of state imposed terrorism that the Kurds and other minorities have experienced in Syria. All of these labels erase what the Kurdish people and the people of Rojava are trying to achieve. However, it is no surprise that the mouth pieces of the capitalist, statist system make every effort to whitewash and erase the efforts of the people there. What is also disturbing is that the fight against ISIS is most often depicted as a fight between ISIS and the Kurds. There is no effort to see that what the YPG-YPJ forces are attempting is to eradicate a deeply violent terrorist organization that is a direct threat to all of us.

More disturbingly, social media including Twitter and Facebook consistently censor Kurdish activists and allies when they post about the Kurdish struggle. All PKK and Abdullah Ocalan related images and posts, flags and mentions are removed from social media with lengthy bans and even removal of pages. This censorship does not occur in isolation but is a part of a global effort to reduce content, information and support for the Kurdish people in Syria.

How can people not living in Rojava show solidarity with the revolution?

There is a lot of confusion about what is happening in Rojava due to lack of information, due to language issues, and the ongoing border issues which prevents the easy flow of people. However, there is still a fair bit of information emerging from the region and it is essential that those who wish to stand in solidarity with Rojava take the time to inform themselves, read about the ongoing efforts of the people, both on the military and the civilian side. Just as importantly, it is imperative that solidarity groups and allies read about Abdullah Ocalan's ideology of Democratic Confederalism and learn who the Kurds are, and what their liberation struggles have

involved. You cannot understand the struggle and the revolution in Rojava if you do not understand who the Kurds are and the historical and political oppressions that they and other minorities have experienced.

We also need to remember, that this is not a nationalist - not a Kurdish revolution alone - it is rather a global, humanist revolution that attempts to restructure oppressive societies and produce a bottom up form of democracy, that empowers citizens and reduces the authority and decision making capacity of the state; which as we know can often be oppressive and exclusionary. For this reason, everyone who wishes to live in a better world, needs to take ownership of the Revolution, to educate themselves, to learn the ideology, and to make every effort to support the efforts of the people there

by speaking about it, to join local solidarity movements, to donate to relevant NGOs and make an effort to keep the Rojava Revolution in focus. At the same time there is significant misinformation and deliberate anti-propaganda emerging about the Revolution. To determine what is true and what information is false we need to hear from sources on the ground, from activists who have been here and who have experienced the situation first hand. The fact that the region, relative to the rest of Syria is a peaceful, inclusive, and safe zone which has taken in hundreds of thousands of refugees from Iraq, including Yezidis and civilians fleeing ISIS in Mosul, to displaced people from Raqqa, Aleppo and Idlib speaks for the basic ideology which functions here. It is because of its immense capacity to enforce change and progress that Rojava now faces a harsh and crippling embargo

spearheaded by Erdogan's AKP government.

It is essential, that we stand in solidarity with one another, as feminists, as anarchists, as communists, Marxist-Leninists, as socialists, as whatever we define ourselves so long as we are moved by the pain and the violence experienced by the oppressed. It is after all, the reason for our ideological orientations and leanings, it is the reason that we believe at the core of it all that we are capable of great and collective social change and progress, of humanity and of love.

* Andy Heintz is a freelance journalist who has been published in the Culture Project, Europe Solidaire Sans Frontieres, Foreign Policy in Focus, Secularism is a Women's Issue, Balkan Witness and CounterVortex

Our comrade Marielle Franco murdered

16 March 2018

She was 38 years old and, according to political scientist Maurício Santoro, she "embodies a hope of renewal, at a time when most political leaders in Rio are in prison or about to be," for corruption.

On Saturday, March 10, she relayed on her Twitter account accusations of the inhabitants of the favela of Acari against the 41st police battalion, one of the most brutal of Rio. "This week, two young people were killed and thrown into a pit. Today, the police threatened the inhabitants. It has always happened but it got worse with the intervention. "Marielle Franco was investigating assassinations apparently committed by police who wanted to eliminate people who knew

too much about their actions," said Liberation Zeca Borges, coordinator of Rio's Disque-Denúncia, a service that allows people to denounce acts of violence anonymously. [50]

She was returning from a public meeting of black women "making things happen". The car she was traveling in was riddled with bullets by killers. She and the driver were murdered.

This is obviously a summary execution of the style practiced by death squads: the only question that arises is who is the sponsor.

That is why, in many cities of Brazil as well as in other countries gatherings are organized to demand that all the light is made on this summary

execution of an activist who did not stop fighting the militarization of the city of Rio imposed by the putschist government of Michel Temer. "Those who believe that we can silence the voices that defend the poor and the victims of injustice," said Ivan Valente, PSOL MP.

One of Marielle Franco's articles, which retraces the struggle since 1975 for the social rights of black women, was recently published by Le Monde Diplomatique Brasil. [51]

Which reminds us that their "democracy" does not recoil, even from murder.

Website [Marielle vive](#)

Decree 66 and the Impact of its National Expansion

15 March 2018, by **Joseph Daher**

Initially the decree promulgated by Bashar Al-Assad allowed the Damascus governorate to expel the populations of two large areas in Damascus, including Basatin al-Razi, in the district of Mazzeh—a residential area near the presidential palace and Kafr Soussa—where the development of the high-end real estate project of Marota City is under construction. The second area includes Qanawat, Basatin, Daraya, and Qadam and is approximately 880 hectares (2,174 acres), or 10 percent of the area of Damascus. The evacuation of its inhabitants is announced for 2018. The inhabitants of these areas are mostly working and lower middle class, who previously lived in rural areas and migrated to the city. This decree, according to the Syrian authorities, is aimed at improving the living conditions of the inhabitants by eliminating properties built informally and replacing them with comfortable and modern properties. However, the decree selected two areas that supported the opposition while areas inhabited by regime supporters, and where housing conditions are not better off, were left intact.

Decree 66 is inspired by some aspects of a 2007 Damascus Master Plan not implemented due to the popular uprising in March 2011. This area was and still is considered as an immensely lucrative real estate opportunity due to undeveloped farmland and informal housing; some within walking distance of the center of Damascus. [52]

Programs on reconstruction plan to build 12,000 housing units for about 60,000 people, targeting mainly high-income households in the neighborhoods of Basatin al-Razi, renamed “Marota City.” The reconstruction process includes

schools and restaurants, places of worship; even a multi-story parking structure, and a shopping center. According to the Syrian authorities, 110,000 job opportunities and 27,000 permanent jobs will be created by this project. [53]

The development of the residential projects that could be built in areas under Decree 66 would actually be carried by holding companies owned by governorates or municipalities, but the construction and management of the projects would likely be contracted to private sector companies owned by well-connected investors.

In the case of Marota city’s project, several new business figures have appeared that developed close links with the regime. The most important rising figure is Samer Foz, who, throughout the war, became one of the country’s most powerful businessmen. [54] He is the son of a former Sunni member of the Baath party in Latakia during the 1970s, and his father was very close to Hafez al-Assad.

Other business figures and organizations have also benefited from lucrative contracts with Damascus Cham Holding, which will undertake the management, construction and investment works of this area: Mazen Tarazi; Talas Group, owned by businessman Anas Talas; Exceed Development and Investment Company, owned by private investors Hayan Mohammad Nazem Qaddour, and Maen Rizk Allah Haykal.

The total investments already exceed the hundreds of millions of dollars in the project of Marota city.

The city of Homs might be the next scene of similar investments. The reconstruction plan in Homs focuses on three of the city’s most destroyed

districts—Baba Amr, Sultanieh and Jobar—and will rebuild 465 buildings, able to house 75,000 people, at a cost of \$4 billion, according to Homs’ governor. The new urbanism plan has taken inspiration over the past “Homs Dream” project directed by the former governor of Homs, Mohammad Iyad Ghazal. [55] He was dismissed by Bashar al-Assad at the beginning of the demonstrations in 2011 because he was a major part of grievances by protesters in Homs city. This project was announced in 2007 by Mr. Ghazal who planned the destruction of parts of downtown to rebuild more modern buildings and skyscrapers. This urban plan was presented at the time as an opportunity to embrace modernization and urban improvement, but was rejected by important sectors of the local population. For example, the project did not guarantee residents the right to stay in the traditionally middle-class neighborhood. [56] Instead, the municipality had suggested alternative housing in another neighborhood or “financial compensation,” which raised fears that the master plan would result in a form of gentrification and prevent residents from returning home.

Many inhabitants from Basatin al-Razi, in the district of Mazzeh, have complained over the years of reconstruction plans announced by regime or pro regime media and the absence of suitable alternative housing, lack of any housing, and unaffordable alternatives. – [57] While others, now refugees and living outside the country, have not received any form of compensation for their property taken over by the state. The possibility of housing provided for original inhabitants affected by the Marota project is very low.

In addition to these problems, the return of civilians to areas affected by current reconstruction processes is more difficult because of various measures requested by the different regime's security institutions. An individual first has to possess the necessary documents to access their destroyed property. The war demolished many Syrian land registries, including at the deliberate initiative of pro regime forces in some recaptured areas of the country such as Zabadani, Daraya, and Qusayr, in addition to Homs, making it complicated for residents to prove home ownership. [58] According to approximate prewar estimates by the Ministry of Local Government, only about 50 percent of land in Syria was officially registered. [59] Another 40 percent had boundaries delimited, but had not yet been registered. The multiple land registries were paper-based and often not properly stored.

In addition, a significant section of displaced people have lost their ownership documents or lacked them in the first place, according to Laura Cunial, a legal and housing expert at the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). [60] Nearly half of Syrian

refugees surveyed by the NRC and the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) said that their home had been destroyed or damaged beyond repair by the war, while only 9 percent had their property title deeds with them and in good condition, according to the survey published in 2017. Wide sections of those refugees actually came from informal areas, which represented around 40 per cent of all housing units in Syria- where property records were often absent. Analysts estimated that it was likely that more than 2 million lawsuits by Syrians to seek restitution for lost and damaged property could be filed at the end of the conflict. Property restitution is a right under international law. [61]

However, even those who had the necessary documents often find it difficult to access their properties. The process of entry into the areas controlled by the regime often required obtaining entry permits from various branches of security to cross checkpoints. This process involves blackmail, bribes, and potential detention. If a resident received a security clearance to enter the city, another permit is required before the

reconstruction of a destroyed house can begin. Residents were also required to pay electricity, telephone, and water bills for the years of absence during the war, which equated to nearly 50 percent of the cost of these assets. [62]

Not to mention opposition activists and supporters not likely to return out of fear of detention and torture or who do not see any possibility of compensation by the regime because of their political activities.

By allowing the destruction and expropriation of large areas, Decree 66 and its national expansion can be used as an efficient instrument for rapid and large development projects that will benefit regime cronies, while at the same time operate as a mechanism for punishment against populations known for their opposition to the regime. They will most probably be replaced with higher social classes and new elites of war, who are generally less inclined to rise up against the regime.

[Atlantic Council](#)

March 7, 2018

New rise of women's movement puts women at forefront of fightback

13 March 2018, by Fourth International Bureau

- The strike has become a tool for the feminist movement. The women's strike shows not only whose waged work makes the market function, but also shows whose labour and activity - waged or not - makes the society as a whole function and sustains living conditions for all. At a time when informal work, the process of returning paid work to the home through home-working, or the conditions of semi-slavery are generalized, the women's strike makes it possible to organize these invisible and feminized spheres.

The strike in 2018 has deepened its impact since 2017. In 2018, in the Spanish state for example, 5.3 million women, with the backing of 10 unions took part, while in Argentina more than one million took to the streets across the country. In Poland, women organized again in 2018 remembering that their mobilizations in support of women's abortion rights brought the first victory so far achieved against the reactionary Pis government. In Britain, women already taking action in defence of their pension rights or jobs, linked up with the women's strike movement. In Italy the Non Una

di Meno movement against violence against women along with trade unions called for a strike that severely hit transport and schools.

The diversity of the demands raised on March 8 continues to grow. In Tunisia, for example, over 1000 women marched to demand equal inheritance rights, whereas in the Philippines women denounced President Duterte as among the worst violators of women's rights while in the Central African Republic women's access to education was the main focus. In Iran, we are sure that protests against

compulsory veiling are continuing.

In Pristina, the capital of Kosovo, women carried placards saying ‘we march, we do not celebrate’. In Turkey women rallied behind slogans such as “We are not silent, we are not scared, we are not obeying”. In Pakistan alongside broad protests against violence instigated by the fundamentalist Talibans, women took the opportunity of March 8 to launch a new socialist-feminist organisation Women Democratic Front (WDF), for democracy and secularism, while in Ireland there was further step towards a new referendum to abolish the anti-abortion provision in the constitution, planned for the end of May.

- The response to the call for the International Women's Strike launched by the Argentine movement in 2017, as well as the Women's Marches around the world, has been the starting point for a new cycle of mobilizations.

A central vector of radicalization in this cycle is the fight against male chauvinist violence that remains unpunished throughout the planet. This had been prepared in previous years. Already in December 2012 we saw gigantic demonstrations in India. On 7 November 2015, 500,000 women mobilized in Madrid; in 2015 in Argentina, hundreds of thousands of women mobilized in response to several murders that made a big impact in that country. The extension of murders and disappearances of

women in Mexico marked by drug trafficking to a hitherto unknown level also resulted in strong mobilizations. More recently, the #MeToo phenomenon has highlighted the extent of sexual violence and harassment around the world and of an increasingly collective resistance too it.

- In addition, this new wave has allowed those who were previously relegated and made invisible in the women's movement to take a greater role. Racialized and migrant women, as well as LGBTI + subjects and sex workers, have been an important part of the mobilizations of recent years.

- Since last year, the building of women's strikes has made it possible to link sexist violence to the precarity in work and living conditions that most women suffer, but also to denounce the reactionary offensive of capitalism in crisis. The first strikes and mass mobilizations that both Macri (Argentina) and Trump (USA) faced were feminist in nature, notably the massive mobilizations on 21 January 2017 on the occasion of Trump's inauguration, which laid the ground for relaying the call for the women's strike to the USA and beyond.

- This cycle of women's struggles is facing a reactionary offensive in many countries with the rise of neoconservative and fundamentalist currents, as well as increasingly authoritarian forms of neoliberalism

and attacks on democratic rights that undermine freedom of expression and protest in more and more places in the world. The political agenda of reaction means challenging fundamental rights: the right to live, financial and social independence from men (fathers, brothers or husbands), reproductive rights such as abortion and reinforcing the role of the family. The capitalist crisis is worsening the living conditions of the majority of women in the world, this is the context of today's fightbacks.

- The role of women at the forefront of social resistance in the last decade shows that it is not a sporadic outbreak, but a potential that covers the entire world and very diverse struggles. The main tasks of revolutionaries are to explore that potential, to be part of the self-organizing experiences of women learning from them; to generate stable links between different struggles and resistances; as well as deepening and maturing the systemic criticism manifested by broad layers of women, giving body to this implicit anti-capitalist dynamic.

- The women's movement and feminist movements this 8 March have shown that there are alternatives to capitalist xenophobic and authoritarian policies - where they build walls of hate, women build bridges of solidarity.

Executive Bureau of the Fourth International
13 March 2018

A new phase of economic governance?

13 March 2018, by **Daniel Albarracín**

The formation of “extreme centre” governments (to use Tariq Ali's phrase) representing, with new formations or coalitions, the shared nucleus of political orientation by neoliberal and social-liberal parties that have been supporting the European political regimes of the last thirty years, in a scenario of temporary cushioning of the economic

crisis, could lead to the modification of the existing economic and institutional architecture. This could reorient, among other elements of economic governance, the resources of the European Union, which today are meagre in comparison to those available to the member states, ridiculous for any significant fiscal policy, and, for example, far below the

already modest, in relative terms, US public budget, towards a more consistent policy as regards the capacity to demand structural adjustment measures. In order to strengthen the fiscal discipline policies, means would be promoted - in any case, insufficient - for the stabilization of the financial system that could alleviate a coming banking

crisis. Old structural and social investment programs would be redirected, making possible a limited counter-cyclical action in crisis-hit countries, as long as they have complied with neoliberal reforms in their economic, budgetary and spending structures.

There has been a debate among European elites, circumscribed to the institutional dimension, on the causes of the weakness of the structural and economic dynamics, which has accompanied some existential political discussions of the EU project. While the neoliberal agenda, in its different formats, blames the crisis on budgetary indiscipline and the absence of structural reforms in less competitive countries, there are others who attribute the problems to the investment crisis, financial hypertrophy, or inequality. Regardless of the diagnosis or the perspective, they all start from the fact that a new financial crisis could put the Eurozone in doubt, and a banking crisis could trigger a new and deeper recession. Those who are favourable to the current architecture of the Euro System, both the neoliberals of the extreme centre and the German ordoliberals, take the initiative to try to consolidate it, so that the EU does not fall apart and continues to serve the financial oligarchies and the European transnational corporations.

Institutional unblocking and extreme centre governments

The proposals still lack precision, but they already have a basis of resolutions that could give them institutional coverage. What had been a sounding out is closer to a proposal with concrete deadlines, 18 months, to reach some consensus among the governments leading the EU project, newly formed or to be formed shortly.

France has a president, Emmanuel Macron, who represents better than few others the project of the extreme centre, which is fighting for a federalist and neoliberal revision of

the EU. Meanwhile, Germany may have left behind the scenario of a Jamaica government, opening the way to a possible reissue of the grand coalition, with the CDU and the SPD. If there is no government with the FDP, who oppose any proposal of the European Monetary Fund (EMF) type, this path, even in its less ambitious version, is cleared. [63] It is in this context that the European Commission can feel supported in initiating a reform of the institutional and financial architecture of the EU. This revives a debate that has gone on, under different variants, in the last two years, based on the reports of the five presidents on the future of the EU's finances, the White Paper on the future of the EU, which called for further deepening in the Economic and Monetary Union, or what had also been discussed in the European Parliament on the budgetary capacity for the Eurozone.

The elite debate on the European Monetary Fund

The debate on the fiscal or budgetary capacity of the Eurozone has been taking place for some time in the European institutions, with different approaches, which does not prevent them from having many common vectors. The Macron project expresses one of those aspects, different from Merkel's German project. Both the federalist-technocratic-neoliberal side of the former, and the more ordoliberal option of the latter, opt for financial stability- a euphemism to hide the priority of protecting the financial system - providing the European budget with a financial instrument that would give it greater capacity.

The substantial difference between the federalist-technocratic variant and that embodied by Schaulbe, proposed to be chair of the Bundestag, is that the neoliberal federalists plan to establish compensation mechanisms such as a European deposit fund or an unemployment benefit system at the scale of the EU, or have a margin to borrow, and an instrument that would promote investment, subject to the

logic of competitiveness. The European People's Party has strongly opposed direct indebtedness and European unemployment insurance and would maintain serious doubts about a deposit fund, as would the central European governments. [64] The departure of Schaulbe from the German government may have helped to unblock this, even though finally his political line has in the main been asserted. Unemployment insurance is not considered in the proposal, but the deposit fund is. But the European deposit fund could also be endangered if the German SPD, in agreeing to govern or support the CDU, do not force the arm of the latter concerning the proposals that Germany will bring to the European institutions.

The CDU would agree with an instrument that contributes to fiscal stability in a single currency environment, without resorting to internal transfers that, in the view of the establishment, would imply some kind of redistribution, since for them this would reduce the moral hazard for what, according to the Central European stereotype, are poorly disciplined countries.

This European Monetary Fund (EMF), with a great capacity for leveraging and financing, up to 500 million euros, being backed by guarantees from the states (and who pays, commands). It would have various capacities to lend to countries at systemic banking risk and would be able to discipline them. to ensure a policy of austerity in accordance with the spirit of the Stability and Growth Pact. The logic of this pact, already part of the treaties, would therefore not have an intergovernmental status but a greater capacity for legislative obligation. Until now it has been irregular or poorly fulfilled, but now the EMF will be the mechanism to apply austerity policies more effectively.

The proposals of the European Commission

The European Commission has proposed a "road map for the

deepening of the Economic and Monetary Union”, which gives development and continuity to the agenda of the Five Presidents’ Report, to facilitate the agreement and the realization of measures, applying them before 2025. The proposals to reform the euro zone are part of a work programme that will culminate in the meeting of heads of state and government in June 2018.

- The first and most notable proposal is the establishment of a European Monetary Fund, which would be anchored within the legal framework of the Treaties and which would be built on the basis of the existing European Stability Mechanism (ESM). The EMF will assist member states in situations of financial difficulty. It would also be a support mechanism for the Single Banking Resolution Fund, which could receive 55 billion euros in 2023, and would act as a lender of last resort to facilitate orderly resolutions of insolvent banks. It will not mean an increase in additional financial efforts, but rather it takes advantage of the resources of the ESM. As a financial instrument, it is endowed with public guarantees provided by the member states that would support the issuing of bonds with the financial capacity to lend.

- It is proposed, therefore, that this budgetary instrument for the Eurozone should operate to support member states in their structural reforms, for those who are in processes of access to the Euro, or as support for the Banking Union, and as a stabilizing mechanism of investments in case of short-term crises.

- The reform package proposes a partial conversion, at least 6% as a reserve, of the European Structural and Investment Funds, establishing common rules applicable to the Regional Development Funds, the European Social Fund, and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, coordinating them to support structural reforms in the spirit of the European Semester, that is, policies subject to structural adjustment. The support programme for structural reforms for 2019 and 2020 will be extended to almost 223 million euros, almost doubling it.

- The Commission proposes in this sense a “fiscal stabilization instrument”. The idea is that it can support countries in crisis and with little margin to maintain investments. The idea is that this instrument offers loans or guarantees with funds from the Community budget or through the future European Monetary Fund, although only for those countries that do not exceed the usual 3% public deficit.

- A European Minister of Economy and Finance is proposed in the governing bodies, who would also be Vice-president of the Commission and president of the Eurogroup, a true economic government of Europe, now governed by the European Treaties.

Conclusions and alternatives

Through a reordering of pre-existing institutional resources and instruments, the EU’s economic governance is once again entrusted to sophisticated financial instruments. [65] The EMF is a mechanism that enhances the financial capacity of the European institutions, but in exchange for imposing fiscal discipline while also involving a very powerful vehicle of debt socialization. The EMF would represent, in short, a financial whip that aims to govern us all.

Until recently, the mechanisms of misalignment of income and expenditure, as well as the division of the budget or public spending effort, explained the conversion of the huge private debt into a public one. Now, as was seen in the Greek case, the European institutions promote a fund with a mechanism that loads the taxpayers with the effort and risk, since the guarantees are funds nurtured by public resources. Thus, public resources, in the form of public guarantees, endow an instrument that is intended to be a firewall and be used for a systemic banking crisis.

In other words, if this fund is lent to a state, it will mediate to promote restructuring of the banking system, which will be partially borne (8% of the liabilities) by shareholders or

creditors, but which will possibly require a complementary contribution and public loss. Although, the average taxpayer suffers from four angles, because the guarantees are public - and lost in the case of failed operations- and originate mainly from their tax contribution; because there may be public rescue costs; because the public policies into which the country will be forced will be under the auspices of adjustment policies in the area of wages, social rights and public policies, privatizations and so on; and because the state requesting the loan will contract a debt with interest that will also have to be honoured.

In the event of a bank insolvency crisis, the Banking Union plans to begin with bail-in measures, that is, a bank’s crisis will be charged to shareholders and creditors. This will surely happen first in the peripheries, with the Italian banks possibly being the first case. The model foreseen by the European institutions predicts that these would be punctual situations. There are reasonable foundations in the medium term to think that its impact could be more extensive and serious, but this analysis would require a separate article.

This mechanism of bank restructuring in the periphery would provide an instrument, ultimately, for possible systemic banking crises of greater magnitude. That is to say, it facilitates bank restructuring in the periphery, it is endowed with an instrument of discipline over entire countries, and it would be able to cover the risks of a banking solvency crisis in the centre of Europe, at the cost of the citizens. This is their “well-known stability of the euro zone”, equivalent to the stability of the banking system.

A possible alternative policy would consist of combining two mechanisms that simultaneously involve redistribution and promotion of a socio-ecological investment plan capable of making the change to a productive model based on renewable energies and minimizing the use of raw materials and fossil fuels to adequately satisfy social needs.

The first would be to have an alternative budget, better endowed

with income, which should progressively reach at least 8% of the Community GNP (a basis to minimize the enormous failures of a market economy), with a progressive fiscal regime, supported by the economic capacity of the countries, with progressive contributions based on their production, and with new taxes that are charged mainly on corporate profits and the assets of the wealthy, or with taxes imposed on short-term financial transactions, and a solid crackdown on tax evasion, which entails the prerequisite of an upward

fiscal harmonization, beginning with substantial effective minimum rates.

This has to be accompanied by mechanisms of redistributive spending and a large endowment for investment aimed at changing the productive model and creating jobs, prioritizing tasks in relation to ecological transition. The second, complementary (and of course not in the first place, as is claimed by the conservative forces), a mechanism of mutualised financing capable of

funding public investment in socially necessary areas and in environmentally sustainable activities that is also a vehicle of democratic redistribution. [66] The question that we face is whether anything like this fits in the current institutions, given the condition of blockage represented by the rule of unanimity and the coalition of countries that dominate the Eurogroup and the Council, within the framework of an institutional framework and Treaties that consecrate policies of austerity, without a hint of their modification.

A radical political turning point

12 March 2018, by **Houshang Sepehr**

Regardless of the immediate consequences of this event:

- either the movement of the workers and the people will have a decisive impact on the evolution of the movement;
- or it will be crushed in a bloody fashion.

In the meantime, one thing is certain: it will be impossible for the current regime to continue to govern as before. The recent protests have undermined all the political, cultural and ideological foundations of the capitalist-Islamic regime, as well as the myth of what is called the "Islamic revolution".

Facts and figures

The protests that began on December 28, 2017 in Mashhad, Iran's second largest city, quickly spread to more than 80 cities, including Tehran, the capital, and Qum, the religious capital. The participants were mostly young people under 30, but in some cases parents with their children. Some government buildings and state banks were set on fire by protesters. Portraits of Khamenei and Khomeini, the two symbols of the existing regime, were burned along with the

flag of the regime.

Compared with the mass demonstrations that took place in 2009 after Ahmadinejad's fraudulent election as president, these demonstrations present several important differences:

1 ° From the first day, they directly opposed poverty and systemic corruption;

2 ° They included the broad participation of the working class (proletariat), many unemployed and retired people, men and women;

3 ° From the third day, they quickly became politicized and radicalized. There were slogans calling for the end of the Islamic Republic, the death of Supreme Leader Khamenei, President Rohani (the liberal translation of Rohani is "the clergy") and "the guardians of the revolution", as well as the end of Iran's military intervention in Syria and Lebanon;

4 ° In some cases, women bravely removed their headscarves or veils in public places, and encouraged others to follow their example;

5 ° After the shock and confusion of the first two days, the regime and all of its tendencies (hard,

fundamentalist, moderate and reformers) decided to violently crush the mass protest by any means. The balance sheet was heavy: according to the authorities, 27 dead on the streets, 4,972 arrests, including to date 12 deaths under torture in prison and 493 still in detention.

Since the 1979 revolution, this uprising has been the first major event that bears the mark of the class struggle and the absence of any religious sign, symbol, personality or slogan. The demonstrations were based on those who have no place in the dominant discourse: the voiceless ones, without leader, guide or organization. The crowds who mobilized were a mixture of workers, students, young people and pensioners.

Never had the poorest, the marginalized layers of the cities, the masses usually silent and discreet, been so numerous in the streets: precarious workers, street vendors, seasonal or temporary workers, unemployed.

These events had an explosive dynamic because of their geographical extent, the radical slogans and the diversity of approaches. This is an unprecedented phenomenon since the 1979 revolution. The rules of the

political game have been suddenly changed. Those who had been relegated to the depths of normal politics suddenly stood up and imposed their language and their way of doing things.

The political economy of the riots

Those who explain that "invisible hands" were supposedly behind the revolt should start by looking at the quite visible hand of the economic and social crisis. That is what sparked off the socio-economic and political riots. All dictators facing social crises speak of "conspiracy". They are followed by some of their campist friends who claim to be "the anti-imperialist left". The only "conspiracy" is that of the bourgeois-clerical system whose logic is contrary to the interests of the majority of the population. The accelerated process of proletarianization of small producers, as well as the extent of the collapse of the middle layers, have created a deep gap between capital and labour.

Without a doubt, the deep roots of this crisis lie in the capitalist mode of production and in globalization. But in Iran, what has increased the gravity of the crisis and made it explosive is the deployment of a neoliberal militarist economic policy during the last two decades.

The process of redistributing the country's wealth to the capitalist-mafia gangs who hold political power, as well as the astronomical corruption at the expense of the very impoverished working classes, began in the 1990s, in the aftermath of the war between Iran and Iraq. This redistribution of wealth has taken place through an accelerated and savage accumulation of capital based on the destruction of small farms and craft enterprises, massive imports and the privatization of public goods at derisory prices.

In January 2017, economic sanctions against Iran were lifted following the signing, on July 14, 2015, of the nuclear agreement between Iran and

the major powers. Rohani and his government then boasted of having achieved a huge political and especially economic success. The Iranian economists in his service, neoliberal disciples of the Chicago School, of Hayek and Friedman, presented figures extolling the successes of Rohani's economic policy.

And today what do we see? Riots against poverty!

"Well said, old mole. How can you work so fast underground?" (*Hamlet*, Shakespeare). This blind animal makes its way stubbornly, patiently digging its tunnels in the darkness of history. It then appears, sometimes in bright sunlight. It embodies the refusal, in difficult times, to resign oneself to any idea of an "end of history".

When the masks fall

This movement, which particularly targeted the Supreme Leader Khamenei, has many causes.

1 ° The terrible fall in the standard of living of the workers, of various popular classes, and of the petty bourgeoisie;

2 ° The disappointment of the social base of the regime in the face of the evolution of the situation, and its frustration with the incapacity of the regime (all of the currents within it) to improve living conditions;

3 ° The shock caused by the non-fulfillment of Rohani's electoral promises, as well as the rapid shift of the government towards a right-wing and ultra-liberal policy, from the first measures taken at the beginning of his second presidential term;

4 ° The emergence of a new impoverished layer, the colloquial term for which can be translated as "those who are cleaned out". These are hundreds of thousands of ordinary people who have lost their meager savings after large-scale banking scams, committed with the complicity of the government.

5 ° These scams coincide with the

revelation of the astronomical level of corruption of those in power.

Slogans like "Our country is home to thieves, it is the most corrupt in the world" underline the disgust of the population against the astronomical levels of corruption of the regime.

Despite stiff censorship, the growing rivalry between the regime's factions, especially after the signing of the nuclear deal, has allowed corruption to be taken up by the media. People were particularly irritated by the enormous amounts (a third of the country's budget) diverted to clerical institutions. In these difficult times, the vast majority of the population believes that this money should have been spent on social assistance. It is therefore not surprising that besides the slogans against the whole regime, there were others that targeted the clergy as a group: "people beg, clerics take themselves for God", or "Mullah, shame on you, let go of the country".

The long-awaited moment of a historic settling of accounts with the clergy seems to have arrived.

6 ° The earthquake, measuring 7.5 on the Richter scale, that struck western Kurdistan last autumn showed incompetence and indifference on the part of the administration, as well as the total mistrust of the people in its ability to deal with it. Within 24 hours, residents of Kermanshah, the nearest town to the epicentre of the earthquake, sent more than 1,000 trucks to help the victims abandoned by the government. Their example was followed by people from many other regions. It was as if people had lost hope that the government would have a realistic and effective response to the disaster.

In the end, the recent uprising is the result of the convergence of all the points mentioned above. They are the ones which have dealt a heavy blow to the hopes of the people. The people has become aware that no faction of the regime is better than the other. It has understood that participation in the electoral masquerade, leaving no other choice than that between the bad and the worst, could not solve anything. This understanding has put an end to the scenario that had lasted

for more than twenty years.

The crowds who took to the streets and burned the regime's flag and the portraits of its leaders no longer accept the electoral games, the political manipulations and the deceptions of the system. After decades of their voices being suffocated, their cries sound the alarm.

The weak points of the movement

The recent uprisings were spontaneous and unorganized. Thousands of nuclei and horizontal networks organized around civil rights activists and social activists played a leading role in initiating and coordinating movements.

In the era of satellites and the internet, the use of new means of communication has provided additional means for developing and organizing collective movements and facilitating the expression of spontaneity and horizontality.

This is particularly the case in countries with a dictatorial regime where political, trade union and associative organizations are embryonic. This has been the case during recent events in Iran. Their spontaneous character was probably at the beginning an important point of support, to start the movement and to make it safe. But it does not guarantee either the persistence or the development of mobilization. Its dispersed and disparate leadership, while reflecting the social and political diversity of the population, is not necessarily a response to the need for convergence and consolidation.

In the mobilizations of early January 2018, there was a convergence around the slogans designating what the demonstrators wanted to see disappear: "No to..."; "Down with..."; "Death to..." etc. But the "positive slogans" about what they want to appear were still missing. These mobilizations remained a protest movement that knew what it did not want anymore, but had not yet found what it wanted in its place.

In the absence of organization and leadership representing a clear progressive alternative to the regime, these events are destined to:

• fail and suffer repression,

• be manipulated by foreign interests,

• be hijacked by the first populist demagogue to come along.

It is at this stage that many political forces representing antagonistic class interests will try to take control of the movement and mislead it for their own purposes.

It is not surprising that Donald Trump - who two months ago banned Iranian citizens from entering the United States, accusing them of terrorism - suddenly became an "ardent friend" of the revolted peoples of Iran.

Not surprising either that Reza Pahlavi, the son of the dethroned shah (who has spent the last four years in Las Vegas nightclubs and casinos), pretends to be on the side of the Iranian labour movement and allows himself to launch a call for a general strike!

If we want this uprising, like so many others, not to fizzle out like a spark, but to endure and succeed, we must overcome its weak points. Achieving historical, political and class consciousness, as well as the capacities that are proper to a collective movement, are determining factors in the survival and consolidation of the movement. There lies the importance of independent, organic and persistent leadership. Not only in its loyalty to the political and class interests of the exploited, but also in the fight against attempts at manipulation.

This is not only a condition for the structuring of the present decentralized leadership, but also for responding to the need to integrate the lessons of past experiences, as well as the development of a class political consciousness with a programme based on the interests of the working masses.

What now?

It is certain that neither police repression nor demagogic and ideological deception will be able to conceal and resolve the existing contradictions, nor to plug the breach opened by this uprising. We can predict with certainty that the next uprising will not be long in coming.

"On the other hand, proletarian revolutions, like those of the nineteenth century, criticize themselves constantly, interrupt themselves continually in their own course, come back to the apparently accomplished in order to begin it afresh, deride with unmerciful thoroughness the inadequacies, weaknesses and paltrinesses of their first attempts, seem to throw down their adversary only in order that he may draw new strength from the earth and rise again, more gigantic before them, recoil ever and anon from the indefinite prodigiousness of their own aims, until a situation has been created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves cry out:

Hic Rhodus, hic salta!

Here is the rose, here dance!"

Karl Marx (*The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*)

Images of the brutal repression against the youth, workers and women of Iran have provoked a wave of indignation around the world. Given the cowardice of the "reformist" bourgeois-clerical oppositionists, and given that the entire system is being challenged from below, the road is now open, but it will be long and difficult.

It is not difficult to discern the reasons. The regime has proved that it has no difficulty in imposing an even more savage repression. The Iranian regime is not only a capitalist regime, but it is also an ideological regime, organized in a fascist way, and it will fight to survive. It has powerful military forces, as well as a well-organized paramilitary militia with very important financial interests.

It is difficult to predict what will

happen. However, we can be sure that nothing will be any longer as it was before. It is therefore a very important, delicate and long confrontation. It is essential that those who fight in Iran get broad and effective support from leftist and progressive forces. The struggle for democracy and civil liberties must be one of the dimensions of our common struggles.

Our association, Socialist Solidarity with the Workers in Iran (SSWI), by defending the interests of the Iranian workers, by maintaining a firm and consistent stance, both anti-imperialist and anti-regime, will do its utmost to expand and relay a large campaign of support to the struggles of the Iranian people.

We seek to act with all Iranian and international forces that share these principles. On the other hand, it is not

possible to unite with the defenders of one or the other faction of the regime, nor with those who wish for war or foreign sanctions, in the hope of thus avoiding a change from below. We will not suspend our criticism of those who tolerate imperialist war or economic sanctions, measures that are harmful first and foremost to the workers and the popular masses of Iran.

February 27, 2018

China Can't Save Capitalism From Environmental Destruction

11 March 2018, by **Peter Dolack**

What has drawn less attention are President Xi's statements on the environment, something the elites of capitalism find rather less convenient. This past October, at the 19th Chinese Communist Party Congress, for example, [he delivered this statement](#): "Man and nature form a community of life; we, as human beings, must respect nature, follow its ways, and protect it. Only by observing the laws of nature can mankind avoid costly blunders in its exploitation. Any harm we inflict on nature will eventually return to haunt us. This is a reality we have to face." He set a goal of "restor[ing] the serenity, harmony, and beauty of nature" and elevated the environmental-protection agency to the level of a ministry.

Given China's huge contribution to global warming and the heavy pollution it suffers from, such statements are welcome. But does this truly mean that China will now become a country that puts the environment first and, perhaps, save capitalism from its excesses? That is very unlikely, given Beijing's integration into the world capitalist system and the dynamics of capitalism, in which all incentives are for more growth – a system that *requires* growth.

In addition to the basic laws of capitalism, an interesting paper by Richard Smith, an economic historian who frequently writes on the impossibility of "[green capitalism](#)," argues that the nature of China's system is a further barrier to any turn toward environmental primacy. In his paper, "[China's drivers and planetary ecological collapse](#)," Dr. Smith argues that despite the power that President Xi has seemingly gathered into his hands, changing the country's economic incentives are far beyond his capability. Dr. Smith writes:

"Xi Jinping cannot lead the fight against global warming because he runs a political-economic system characterised by systemic growth drivers – the need to maximise growth beyond any market rationality, the need to maximise employment, and the need to maximise consumerism – which are, if anything, even more powerful and even more eco-suicidal than those of 'normal' capitalism in the West, but which Xi is powerless to alter. These drivers are responsible for China's irrational 'blind growth,' 'blind production' and out-of-control pollution, what Xi himself describes as 'meaningless development at the cost of the environment.'" [pages 4-5]

Three factors drive Chinese growth, Dr. Smith writes: import-substitution industrialization (the need to compete successfully as a national economy against the U.S. and other leading capitalist countries); employment generation (the main reason for Chinese authorities to not allow companies to go out of business); and consumerism. In his paper, he argues that, for all the market reforms introduced in recent decades, China's state-owned enterprises don't operate by the rules of the market. He writes:

"For all the market reforms since 1978, the government has not allowed a single major SOE to fail and go bankrupt, no matter how inefficient, no matter how indebted, because those industries serve a different purpose. They do not exist just to make money. They exist to fulfil the wishes of China's Communist Party rulers, especially as they contribute to import substitution and national industrialisation." [page 6]

Tens of millions laid off from state enterprises

Ensuring social stability is unarguably

a goal of Chinese leaders, but Dr. Smith appears to under-estimate the extent of ordinary capitalist behavior of Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs). A 2006 paper published by the China Labour Bulletin, "[Swimming Against the Tide](#)," notes not only the continuing consolidation of SOEs, but the resulting mass loss of jobs resulting from those restructurings. The report says:

"In the late 1990s, however, the government massively intensified the restructuring of SOEs. This process disenfranchised and marginalized tens of millions of workers, while at the same time creating a new class of powerful capitalists with close and highly influential links to local government. Crucially, at this time, the central government seemed to abandon any thoughts of additional remedial measures and basically gave local government officials and SOE managers free rein to carve up the state's assets between them.

From 1995 to 2002, SOEs cumulatively laid off as many as 30 million workers. ... Meanwhile, SOE managers used their power and connections with local governments to work behind the scenes to secure enterprise assets at ridiculously low prices, elevating themselves from being mere managers to actual owners of the enterprise. According to one survey, over 20 percent of the private enterprises created in the first half of 2006 emerged from the restructuring of state-owned and collective enterprises."

Minqi Li, in his book, *The Rise of China and the Demise of the Capitalist World Economy* -> https://monthlyreview.org/product/rise_of_china_and_the_demise_of_the_capitalist_world_economy/, in examining the development of the Chinese economy, pulled no punches in describing the lack of concern for working people:

"Throughout the 1990s, most of the state and collective-owned enterprises were privatized. Tens of millions of workers were laid off. The urban working class was deprived of their remaining socialist rights. Moreover, the dismantling of the rural collective economy and basic public services had

forced hundreds of millions of peasants into the cities where they became 'migrant workers,' that is, an enormous, cheap labor force that would work for transnational corporations and Chinese capitalists for the lowest possible wages under the most demanding conditions. The massive influx of foreign capital contributed to a huge export boom." [pages 64-65]

By July 2017, SOEs accounted for just 16 per cent of China's jobs and less than a third of industrial output, according to [an HSBC report](#).

Capitalist dynamics are firmly in place in China's economy, a development that will only intensify, given the Communist Party leadership switching [the role of the market](#) from "basic" to "decisive" in 2013 at a key Central Committee plenum, and the continuity with this course that was laid down by the party at the October 2017 party congress, again [stressing the "decisive role"](#) of the market.

Waste, planned obsolescence add to consumerism

Nonetheless, Dr. Smith is correct in noting that there is more state guidance of the economy than in ordinary capitalist economies. China is by far the biggest consumer of industrial raw materials, a function of the country's frenzied pace of investment. Wastefulness extends to consumer items as well, he writes. Planned obsolescence is out of control. Because of the incentives to produce beyond any rational demand, unnecessary infrastructure, to the point of "ghost cities," is built; buildings are demolished after a couple of decades; and large appliances, such as refrigerators, are designed to break down within only a few years to spur more consumption.

He argues that the introduction of market reforms has amplified, instead of reducing, tendencies in the old bureaucratic economy toward redundant investment. Provincial and local officials seek to build their own industrial bases, which discourages

cooperation and efficiency. Although the Communist Party can remove millions of people to clear the path for construction projects, it can't enforce dictates on the environment or excess development. There are too many interests, according to Dr. Smith:

"[M]inisterial officials, provincial governors, local officials, and SOE bosses mostly need not worry. Why is that? How is it that a highly centralised neo-totalitarian police state cannot force its own subordinate officials to obey its own orders, laws, rules, and regulations? This is a most interesting question. The answer, I suggest, is to be found in the collective nature of China's ruling class. Beijing can't systematically enforce its writ against resistance from below because it can't systematically fire subordinates for insubordination: they're not just employees, as in capitalism. They're Communist Party members, members of the same ruling class as the leaders in Beijing.

If you're head of a ministry or an SOE, especially a big 'national champion' SOE that Beijing wants to forge into a world-beating industrial competitor, then Beijing is willing to overlook your pollution. ... China's coal and oil ministries and its giant SOEs are very powerful and profitable, with millions of party bureaucrats and employees. Heads of large SOEs have ministerial rank. Of the 120 SOEs directly managed by the central government, fully fifty-four heads of those firms enjoy ministerial rank. They like things the way they are and they intend to keep them that way." [page 16]

China's de-centralized administration leaves each province striving to achieve as high a measure of self-sufficiency as possible. This includes energy, meaning that energy is produced for local consumption, and not necessarily in an economically rational manner:

"In 2015, China spent a record \$102 billion on wind, solar, geothermal, and other low- or no-carbon renewable energy. Yet in 2016 wind turbines produced just 4 percent of China's electricity generation, and solar barely reached 1 percent. By comparison, the

US invested just \$44 billion in 2015 but in 2016 wind produced 6.9 percent of its electric generation – nearly double China’s production with less than half the investment. The reason China produces so little renewable energy despite all the investment is that so much of its renewable energy is –curtailed’ (wasted). Nationally, the government concedes that about 21 percent of wind energy is curtailed, as much as 40 percent in some provinces and even more than 60 percent in Xinjiang (ironically, the province with the most installed wind power).” [page 22]

Enough housing for half the world’s population

That investment will continue at a breakneck pace is exemplified by news that when all the plans for new housing are added up, there will be enough [housing in China for 3.4 billion people](#) by 2030, which an article reporting this in Shanghaist dryly notes “seems a tad excessive.” The source of this overdevelopment, Shanghaist reports, is “more than 3,500 county-level new urban areas planned by local governments.”

Just one project, the Xiongan New Area, will cover an area three times the size of New York City, The Guardian reports. This planned city, near Beijing, set off a [real estate frenzy so intense](#) that it was said to create gridlock on roads leading to the area, and land prices were reported to have doubled in hours after the government announced its plans. And of course Chinese investment is not limited to within its borders. People’s Daily Online estimates that as of 2016, approximately 30,000 Chinese companies [had invested \\$1.2 trillion](#) in China’s “One Belt, One Road” infrastructure initiative.

Private profit, and all the problems that revolve around that, has become the driving force of the Chinese economy. Timothy Kerswell and Jake Lin, in their recent Socialism and Democracy article, “[Capitalism Denied with Chinese Characteristics](#),” noted that SOEs operate like like private

firms and are controlled by “a handful of wealthy businessmen and executives, who mostly are the [party] princelings and their families.” By the early 21st century, they wrote:

“Urban China had gone from a highly protected –iron rice bowl’ system that guaranteed state workers’ permanent jobs, cradle-to-grave benefits –” and a relatively high degree of equality –” to a market-determined contract-based employment system at its core, and massive informal and unprotected sectors at its periphery.” [page 45]

Land speculation on the part of local governments is rapidly paving over farmlands, another contributor to global warming. Land sold to commercial interests can be 40 times higher than what is paid to farmers, Dr. Kerswell and Dr. Lin write:

“In many respects, urbanization in China can be understood as the process of local government driving farmers into buildings while grabbing their land. The pseudo-collective-ownership of rural land has also increasingly become a front for rural cadres’ rampant corruption and cronyism in pursuit of personal interest in the process of transferring use rights. From 2005, surveys have indicated a steady increase in the number of forced land requisitions, and about 4 million farmers were losing their land annually.” [page 39]

Incentives for more investment, more global warming

This is not a system that is going to give priority to the environment. And because so much of China’s sweatshop-based economy is built on assembling parts made elsewhere into final products –” first the parts are shipped from around the world and then the final product is sent elsewhere as well –” the transport inherent in these global production chains hugely contributes to pollution and global warming. So however much we might quibble with Dr. Smith’s

characterization of SOEs, he is quite correct that all incentives are for China’s contribution to global warming to continue to increase and thus Beijing can not contribute to reversing global warming and future environmental collapse.

There is no substitute to consuming less. Dr. Smith concludes his paper with these lines:

“[T]he only way to effectively meet the climate emergency we face is with an emergency shutdown of useless, superfluous, unnecessary and harmful industrial production around the world, but most particularly in China and the United States, the biggest polluters. ... If the Chinese don’t organise a rationally managed retrenchment and shutdown of unsustainable industries, Mother Nature is going to shut those industries down for them and in a much less pleasant manner. There’s no way around this very inconvenient truth: Making too much stuff has to stop.” [page 27]

Not that Beijing should be asked to shoulder all blame. Western multinational corporations willingly moved their production to China, greatly adding to global warming. Nor should Western capital’s role in facilitating Chinese projects be soft-pedaled. The World Bank provided [loans for the Three Gorges Dam](#) project that displaced 1.3 million people, and Canadian, French, German, Swiss, Swedish and Brazilian capital were also necessary to build the dam.

It’s hard to avoid the argument that the Western peoples were allowed to enjoy highly consumptive lifestyles, and it would be unfair to force lower living standards on those in the global East or South. That is a reasonable argument. But we only have one Earth, and humanity is consuming resources far beyond sustainability –” at the [rate of 1.6 Earths](#). If the entire world consumed at the rate that the U.S. does, we’d [need four Earths](#). (Kuwait is tops in this category, with a ratio of 5.1 Earths, followed by Australia at 4.8.)

Such consumption is quite impossible in the long run. Those living in the advanced capitalist countries are

going to have to consume much less. Yet that is impossible in a global economic system that requires growth, and will not provide jobs for those dependent on polluting industries. Industrializing the solar

system, even if that proves possible, would only delay the inevitable. We can have a sustainable future with production geared toward human need, or we can continue to produce

for private profit until we find out the hard way that you can't eat money.

March 4, 2018

[New Politics](#)

Austerity, Brexit and the Corbyn challenge

10 March 2018, by **Phil Hearse**

The negative effects of neoliberal deflation can be seen in the recent collapse of the giant Carillion construction conglomerate, a company showered with government contracts. As Alan Davies points out:

Carillion highlights everything wrong with a system of private sector greed alongside years of public sector austerity. Already, as workers are laid off by the thousand and sub-contractors go to the wall, the vultures are out seeing what assets can be stripped and what contracts can be picked up at rock-bottom prices. [67]

This grotesque saga is only possible because of the outcome of the June 2017 general election. Buoyed by favourable opinion polls, May called a general election in the expectation of substantial Labour losses and a significant increase in the Conservative parliamentary majority. Tory leaders talked privately of being in power for the next 40 years. The opinion polls were spectacularly wrong: the election revealed a substantial 9.6% swing to Labour, based on the votes of youth and students especially, who rallied behind Labour's most left-wing leader ever, Jeremy Corbyn. The Conservatives remained the largest party, but had to rely on the votes of the Northern Ireland Democratic Unionist Party - a hard right Loyalist grouping - to secure a shaky and uncertain Commons majority. The results were also a substantial blow to the Liberals, reduced to a mere 12 MPs, and UKIP - the extreme-right UK Independence Party - that lost its only MP.

The election results weakened May's

authority in the Conservative Party and her ability to control her rebellious nationalistic right wing, who demand a 'hard Brexit' - that Britain should leave the European Union with a maximum break of trade regulation and other links with the 27 other members of the European Union. These 'Brexiters' are represented inside the cabinet by people like former London mayor Boris Johnson (now foreign secretary) and former education secretary Michael Gove (now environment secretary). Outside the cabinet, the Brexiters are led in particular by MP Jacob Rees-Mogg, whose archaic persona and ultra-reactionary Catholic views have led to him being dubbed 'The Honourable Member for the 18th Century'.

It wasn't only the Conservatives whose internal conflicts were reshaped by the election result. A substantial number of right-wing Labour MPs (called 'Blairites' after the former prime minister Tony Blair) hardly concealed their hope that Corbyn would suffer an electoral debacle, and thus be replaced by someone well to his right. A BBC TV documentary which followed Stephen Kinnock, Labour MP for Aberavon and son of former party Leader Neil Kinnock, during the election campaign showed him and his family [68] clearly shocked and disappointed when news of Corbyn's success came through. Hopes of an early end to left-wing dominance in the Labour Party were dashed.

In order to make sense of these counter-currents, we have to answer

three related questions: a) What explains the sudden and unexpected rise of Corbyn to the Labour leadership? b) Why did Britain vote to leave the European Union in the 2016 referendum? c) Why does conflict over Europe still divide the Conservative Party?

Oooh Jeremy Corbyn!

On June 24, 2017, just two weeks after the election, Corbyn appeared on the main stage of the internationally renowned Glastonbury music festival and was given a rapturous reception by tens of thousands of young people present. This reception, including the chant Oooh Jeremy Corbyn! was a reprise of the barnstorming rallies Corbyn had held during the election campaign, all around the country - a return with a vengeance to 'old fashioned' political meetings.

Surveys showed that two thirds of people under the age of 25 had voted Labour. After this *The Economist*, a bellweather of pro-capitalist opinion, said 'there are worse things than a Corbyn government', and that such a government would be a 'setback, not a disaster' - provided Corbyn could be controlled and his actions moderated.

Election results showed Labour had achieved some remarkable results where there were large numbers of students. For example, in Canterbury where there are two universities and more than 40,000 students, the incumbent Tory MP Sir Julian Brazier, a Brexiteer and former defence

minister, saw his 9000 majority overturned. He put it down to 'a student movement on social media'. Eight thousand new voters registered in the constituency before the election. And indeed the left-wing Corbynista faction Momentum ran a brilliant social media campaign.

In fact, young people delivered Corbyn not only his relative electoral success, but also his leadership of the party. He became Labour leader in 2015 when the party decided to offer cut-price party membership online and a leadership vote for new members. Membership of the Labour Party has gone up from about 120,000 under Blair, to more than 600,000 today - the biggest political party in western Europe. How can this apparent radicalism among young people be explained? On the one hand there has been a general radicalisation over the past two decades on issues like the environment, racism and human rights. This was expressed in the growth of the Green Party prior to the 2015 election, which went from around 40,000 members to around 50,000. The advent of Corbyn has swamped the Greens with a much bigger and more mainstream radicalisation.

But another key factor is the dire economic situation that many 'millennials' in the UK find themselves in. *The Guardian*, quoting a report by the Resolution Foundation said:

The report ...paints a gloomy picture for all young adults across the developed world - apart from the Nordic countries. It highlights how incomes are depressed, jobs scarce and home ownership is slumping for the millennial generation compared with the baby boomers that preceded them.

But it also reveals that on many measures - apart from unemployment - British millennials have suffered a more significant decline than those in other countries.

The situation facing young people is a subset of the damage done by neoliberalism to the workforce in general. Because of the lack of social housing and an absurdly expensive

housing market, many young people find themselves paying 50% of their income on housing - either for sky-high rents in private accommodation or a steep mortgage. Jobs are poorly paid and often based on 'zero hours contracts', with no guaranteed hours or pay levels. Because of the privatisation of utilities, charges for gas, water and electricity are also high. Factor in some of the highest transport prices in the world, and expensive restaurants, pubs and other places of entertainment, it results in just one thing: massive levels of debt and young people relying on credit cards for everyday spending - an unsustainable mountain of debt. No wonder lots of young people are fed up.

One would have thought that senior Labour figures would have been ecstatic about the huge surge in membership, but for scores of Labour MPs and hundreds of Labour local councillors, this is not the case. Without doubt the Blairite right would be happy to see an exit of some hundreds of thousands of Corbynistas who are making their life difficult. Sharp conflict has taken place across the party on a number of fronts. Organisationally, the right wing has fought a rear-guard action to keep control of the National Executive Committee (NEC), a fight they have for the moment lost. In January three vacant seats on the NEC were all won with the support of Momentum, the left-wing grouping that supports Corbyn. Among the victors was Jon Lansman, Momentum's secretary and a veteran of the 'Bennite' [69] movement of the 1970s and '80s. The left won these seats with votes between 62,000 and 68,000, as against a vote of 38,000 for the highest polling Blairite candidate Eddie Izzard, the well-known stand-up comedian. Izzard claimed to stand for no faction or grouping, but his material was printed and published by the Blairite group Labour First.

The Labour right wing has lost control over the national disciplinary committee and has suffered another loss with the resignation of Blairite-leaning general secretary Ian McNichol.

But the Labour right wing is hanging

on tenaciously at local level, in particular trying to prevent left-wingers being selected as local council candidates, but especially trying to prevent any MP being 're-selected', that is, replaced with a more left-wing candidate. In fact the Corbynista left seems to have little stomach for such fights. Many of the new levy of members are inexperienced and reluctant to get involved in bitter local infighting. The net result is that even if Labour wins the next election, it may be very hard to mobilise the majority of Labour MPs in support of radical measures.

In some localities - for example Haringey and Walthamstow in London - bitter fights are taking place over 'redevelopment' projects. In these, right-wing Labour local councils are attempting to force through plans to demolish social housing and replace it with retail centres and expensive housing schemes, only a small part of which will be in any sense 'affordable'. The left charges that these projects are in effect a form of 'social cleansing', where poor people will be pushed out - certainly pushed out of the borough and probably out of London. Corbyn has backed local Labour activists fighting alongside trade unionists and community activists against this social cleansing. [70]

Nationally the Labour right are waging a series of campaigns that in reality are aimed at Corbyn and his supporters. First, in a campaign run directly by Blair and his former press secretary Alistair Campbell, they accuse Corbyn, together with deputy leader John McDonnell of being too reluctant to come out in favour of Britain remaining in the European single market and customs union after Britain leaves the EU. However, on February 26, Corbyn changed Labour's position on this, saying they would now fight to remain in the customs union, a move that will take the wind out of the Blairites' sails on this issue. Potentially this could result in the government being defeated in the Commons, if pro-EU Tories form a bloc with Labour, the Liberals and the Scottish Nationalists.

Second, and scandalously, the Labour right is accusing the Corbynistas of

being ‘anti-Semitic’. This campaign is based on just one real fact: the Corbyn team stands for Palestinian national rights. This is enough to qualify as ‘anti-Semitism’, and it is a slander repeated endlessly in the right-wing press and taken as good coin by some in the left of centre liberal media, for example some journalists on *The Guardian* newspaper and on the most radical TV news programme, *Channel 4 News*. Key people on both these outlets are viscerally hostile to Corbyn. The Israeli government itself has every reason to be interested in this debate. The last thing they want is a Corbyn government, which would disrupt their system of international alliances.

The Blairites are also trying to undermine a key trade union ally of Corbyn, UNITE general secretary Len McCluskey, by claiming there were irregularities in his election. If the government Certification Officer were to remove McCluskey, it would be a major blow to the left on the Labour NEC.

Finally the right wing is running another campaign aimed at the Corbynistas, one based on gender. Right wing MPs Jess Phillips and Harriet Harman, among others, are insisting that the next leader of the party ‘must be a woman’. This is based on the assumption that the left does not have a credible woman candidate, and will want to propose McDonnell when Corbyn retires (he is 69 and will likely be in his 70s when the next election occurs).

Brexit, UKIP and the Tory right

Labour’s internal fights are paralleled by acute tensions within the Conservative Party and the catastrophic crisis of UKIP. Although many people on the left didn’t see it this way [71], the 2016 vote to leave the European Union was a political disaster. The referendum was used by the hard right of the Conservative Party, aided by UKIP, to take control of the party and to impose their own anti-immigrant, anti-welfare state agenda. In particular, the Brexiteers want to pull Britain out of compliance

with the European Court of Human Rights and make a bonfire of worker and environmental rights the EU insists on.

During the referendum campaign this was most precisely called by Nicola Sturgeon, Scottish First Minister and leader of the Scottish National Party, who described the referendum as an ‘attempted coup’ by the Tory right. [72]

Anti-Europeanism has always been the calling card of the Tory right, a badge of its extreme nationalism. The problem is that it doesn’t correspond to the objective interests of most sections of the British capitalist class: both the financiers of the City of London and large-scale manufacturers want to have access to the European single market and customs union. External investors in Britain, like Japanese carmakers, want their operations in the UK to have immediate access to the rest of Europe. As a result of these objective capitalist interests, a big majority of Conservative MPs were against leaving the European Union. But not their base: only 38% of Conservative voters cast their ballot to remain in the EU.

During the referendum campaign the majority of the Conservative leaders, together with Labour, the Liberals, the Scottish Nationalists and the Greens – as well as Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland – were all for staying in the EU. How then did the Brexiteers win by 52% to 48% (about 17 million to 16 million votes)?

The Brexit case was hammered home daily in the influential right-wing press, and the core of it was anti-immigrant racism. “Take back control” was the Brexiteers slogan and this mainly meant ‘take back control’ of ‘our’ borders to keep immigrants out.

At the same time the vote represented a rejection of mainstream politics by a significant number of working-class voters, especially in poor working class northern and Midlands towns. Ironically many of these voters will agree with Labour on properly funding the health service and local government, and on re-nationalising

utilities like gas, electricity and the railways. But they will not agree with Labour on immigration. Racism and xenophobia are the Achilles heel of the more backward sections of the British working class. The right wing of the Labour Party is putting forward the demand for a new referendum, and are calling for Corbyn to take a much more clear-cut position in favour of Britain remaining inside the single market and the customs union. Corbyn has shifted on the latter but will not put forward the demand for a new referendum, which would open Labour up to accusations of defying a democratic vote.

UKIP has suffered catastrophically from the outcome of the referendum. In the pre-referendum election in 2015, UKIP won 3.8 million votes, 12.9% of the total. In 2017 this was down to 550,000, just 2.1% of the vote. A party set up on the single issue of getting Britain out of the EU naturally suffered when that objective seems to have been achieved. But more than that, UKIP’s right-wing politics post-referendum dominate the Conservative Party. What’s the point of UKIP when the governing party is adopting its policies? UKIP has suffered the same marginalisation fate that the fascist National Front suffered after Margaret Thatcher was elected prime minister in 1979.

After the 2015 election, UKIP’s leader and best known figure Nigel Farage went off to work in the media and hob-knob with the likes of Donald Trump and Rupert Murdoch. Farage expressed delight that he would no longer have to regularly mix with ‘low grade people’, a searing dismissal of the petit bourgeois reactionaries that make up UKIP’s activist base. Since Farage’s departure, UKIP has had three leaders, the latest of whom, Henry Bolton was forced out after it was revealed that his newly acquired glamour model girlfriend had tweeted posts referring to Black people as ‘ugly’, and saying that Prince Harry’s mixed-race fiancée Meghan Markle would ‘taint’ the British royal family.

As the European Union turns up the heat on May, demanding major concessions in return for a transitions

period and new favourable relationship with the EU after Brexit, the conflicts inside the Conservative Party are becoming intense. At the same time the Tory feral right, represented by the parliamentary Brexiteers and the key right wing daily papers - the Telegraph, Sun and Daily Mail - keep up a barrage of slanders against Corbyn and his team. The latest, which ended very badly, was the accusation by Tory vice-chair Ben Bradley that Corbyn had sold British state secrets to Czech intelligence during the 1970s and '80s. This preposterous piece of mendacity - as if Corbyn were actually privy to state secrets - resulted in Bradley admitting the whole story was fabricated and having to pay libel damages.

In the wake of the referendum there was a spike in attacks against immigrant workers. The Home Office, Britain's interior ministry, has utilised anti-immigrant sentiment to step up its deportation campaign against 'illegal' residents, including people who have lived in Britain for decades - indeed, some people who came to the UK from the Caribbean as children in the 1950s have been told to leave. A consequence of this is that sectors that depend on immigrant workers - for example the health service, care homes for the elderly and agriculture - are running short of staff. It is estimated that up to 40,000 European nurses who would otherwise have come to work in Britain, either went home or decided not to come after the referendum.

Disillusionment with mainstream politics runs right through the working class, especially the understanding that Britain is rapidly becoming more and more unequal. The disastrous July 2017 fire in the high-rise Grenfell Tower in west London, in which more than 70 people died, was widely seen as a symptom of the contemptuous treatment of the poor by the rich elite. Grenfell Tower was a centre of social housing, occupied by many low paid and immigrant workers, whose management was hived off by the Tory council to a semi-private management company that neglected basic safety concerns, despite repeated warnings.

Despite myths by some left wingers,

working class disillusionment was not the core of the Brexit vote. About 65% of Labour voters voted to remain in the EU. The core of the Brexit vote was older voters and middle class voters in the shires and affluent suburbs, which parallels the core support for the Conservatives. A big majority of people under 45 voted against leaving the EU. Among under-25s it was nearly 70%. The majority against leaving the EU was huge in multi-racial London.

Conservative finance minister Phillip Hammond clearly sees the need for the British economy not to suffer a sudden lurch out of EU membership and has put forward a version of a 'soft' Brexit, which he said would be "a lot like the present situation". This prompted a furious response from the Brexiteer right, and a retreat by Hammond under pressure from May. The central problem for May and her Brexit minister David Davis is this: they want at least a transition period during which Britain will have full access to the single market, but the price demanded by the EU for this is free access to Britain for EU workers, and the right for these workers to stay in Britain after Brexit. This is anathema to the Conservative right wing, for whom stopping immigration was the key point of the referendum in the first place.

Conflicts inside the Conservative Party are also fuelled by the obvious fact that the Brexiteers' much vaunted economic 'advantages' for Britain going out of the EU are completely delusional. The idea that Britain will rapidly conclude super- advantageous trade deals with the rest of the world, which will be better for British trade than the existing EU deals, is a pipe dream.

Perhaps the most intractable post-Brexit dilemma for Theresa May is the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. For twenty years there has effectively been no border as far as trade and travel are concerned. Nobody on the island of Ireland, not even hard-line Loyalists in the north, want to see a new policed border and customs posts in place, which would damage the economy of both north and south and perhaps revive a Republican campaign against

the border. But how can a hard border be avoided if the United Kingdom, of which Northern Ireland is a part, is outside of the European Union while the Republic remains inside the EU - which of course it will be? If there is no hard border, then goods, services and people can come into Northern Ireland from the EU, and once there it will be very difficult to stop them getting into the rest of the UK, especially as the Democratic Unionists will cease all support for the government if there is any attempt to construct a 'border' between Northern Ireland and the rest of Britain.

Conservative austerity holds sway for one reason only, because Thatcher's anti-union laws, which subsequent Labour governments refused to repeal, prevent effective action strike against the public sector pay cap and public service cuts. Of course that does not mean a total absence of industrial struggle. The last six months have seen rail workers mounting days of action to 'keep the guard on the train'. British Airways cabin crews have held repeated strikes over pay. In the manufacturing sector, BMW workers have been striking in defence of pensions and earlier in the year Fujitsu workers had walked out in protest against mass redundancies. There is currently a major national strike by university teachers over pensions. School teachers in the South East had been on strike against education cuts. And there have been many more small, if militant, strikes. But that cannot disguise the fact that the number of strike days is at an historically low level. Like the myriad of local campaigns against NHS, school and council service cuts, most of these are defensive struggles.

In this situation immense hopes have been invested in the possibility of a left Labour government led by Corbyn. Just as the Brexiteer Tories have marginalised UKIP, so the Corbynistas have for the moment marginalised the left that remains outside the Labour Party, although of course that left remains active in the unions and in the battles against public sector cuts. British politics has entered a period of intense turbulence and for the first time in decades the radical left is a

Crisis and Olympic diplomacy

9 March 2018, by **Pierre Rousset**

After his election in May 2017, the new South Korean President Moon Jae-in tried to open a dialogue with the North Korean regime. Kim Jong-un had rejected the overtures, stripping all credibility from this initiative, which, moreover, displeased Washington. [73]. The North-South dialogue, however, was suddenly unblocked during the preparations for the Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games. On January 9, 2018, a meeting was held in Panmunjom, a village in the demilitarized zone separating the states along the 38th parallel and serving as a point of contact between the two capitals. Pyongyang's participation in the Olympics was announced, as well as the organization of official military talks. For its part, Seoul has obtained the postponement of the United States/South Korea naval aviation manoeuvres scheduled for February. The diplomatic process was engaged on for real

It is obviously too early to know how long this will continue after the close of the Olympics, and how far this moment of détente goes, but it has already changed the geopolitical situation. It also sheds new light on how the question of reunification arises, particularly in the South.

The symbolism of détente has gone significantly further than the minimum necessary. At the opening ceremony on February 9th, North and South Korean sportsmen and women marched together in a single delegation. A joint ice hockey team has been formed. Kim Yong-nam, head of state with symbolic functions, made the trip from Pyongyang, as well as a large contingent of "cheerleaders" and a group of artists. More importantly, for the first time, a high-level dignitary of the northern regime went to the South, and not just anybody: Kim Yo-

jong, younger sister of Kim Jong-un, the only woman to have entered the leading nucleus, where her influence seems important. She sent a letter of invitation to Moon Jae-in to go to Pyongyang.

"Sporting diplomacy" has a long international history, but why did the Pyeongchang Games allow a "thaw" (despite temperatures often below -20%!) which was so spectacular, even if momentary? The two regimes have a common goal: to regain control and no longer be hostages to decisions made by Trump who is not used to consulting his ally (Seoul) and to consider the consequences for the civilian population on both sides of the demilitarized zone of a US military intervention - which has been repeatedly threatened. Neither North Koreans nor South Koreans want to die to allow Washington to assert its hegemony.

Transformations in the North

The North Korean regime has, for its part, reached a plateau in the development of its nuclear and ballistic capabilities, although there are probably still unresolved operational problems. On the eve of the opening of the Games, it organized an important military parade; but a pause in this area may be welcome. Moreover, the constant tightening of sanctions decided at the UN is not trivial. Pyongyang certainly knows how to circumvent them or reduce their impact on the centralized economy; but since taking office in 2011, Kim Jong-un has promoted the rapid development of an informal market economy with a greater reliance on international trade.

The North Korean economic system is hybrid, in transition, imbricating the state sector (often under the control of the military), the licit and illicit markets, and flourishing smuggling, with corruption as lubricant. If the situation of a large part of the people remains very precarious, social inequalities widen, the enrichment of a minority appears, new lifestyles are diffused in a non-negligible part of the population: consumerism, imported goods, solar panels, electric bicycles, taxis, computers, urban modernization (especially in the capital) and so on. For Philippe Pons, "The system is based on an iron triangle: the regime's elite - starting with the military hierarchy, which controls entire sectors of the economy - the apparatchiks - who cash in their sinecures - and the market operators, who "grease their paws" to turn the machine." [74]

Social elites are diversifying and expanding, now including entrepreneurs. North Korea is no longer the "hermit kingdom" of yesteryear - a success for the totalitarian Kim Dynasty that consolidates its base, but at the same time makes the regime more vulnerable to internal isolation, even if imperfect and circumvented.

On the symbolic side, since 2017 during the New Year's greetings, Kim Jong-un presents himself in a business suit and no longer in Mao outfit - as for the portrait of his grandfather Kim Il-sung, it was on this occasion no longer visible. The use of classical terms such as Songun (priority to the army and not to the party), the ideas of "Juche" (Korea's model of socialist construction), "Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism" (in honour of the thought of his predecessors) is reduced or abandoned. For the first

time in 2018, Kim named the South Korean head of state as “President Moon Jae-in”, calling for reconciliation, but announcing that he would reactivate the pressure for a reunification of the “ethnic nation”. This year, the date of the military parade celebrating the founding of the army has been changed. It was held on April 25 in reference to the creation by his grandfather, in 1932, of a Korean anti-Japanese guerrilla unit operating in China; it will now be held on February 8 in reference to the constitution, in 1948, of the national army of the North. Kim Jong-un must be idolized for himself and no longer according to his ancestry.

A generational rupture in the South

In the South, President Moon Jae-in belongs to a political movement for whom the national question (namely reunification) has always been central: his approach is not simply opportune or opportunistic. However, the Games have brought to light a profound break in the generations. Young people overwhelmingly supported Moon in recent elections against the corrupt and militarist right then in power. They do not want to be dragged by Trump into a devastating war, but they do not dream of reunification. The division of the peninsula dates back sixty-five years and a lot of water has since passed under the bridge. They have no parents in the North, they have another story and fear a decline in their standard of living. Refugees from the North welcome the

president’s policy more favourably, but some who are unable to cope with the capitalist hyper-competitiveness of the South plan to return to their country of origin. [75].

Some groups have mobilized against the organization of the Games because of their environmental impact, their cost and the huge projects carried out in order to hold them, whose usefulness post-Games is very doubtful. As for the combative wing of the labour movement, it has not regained all its freedom of action. Union leaders imprisoned under the previous, authoritarian, right-wing government are still in detention and Moon Jae-in is pursuing neoliberal policies.

The desire for Korean reunification remains the majority sentiment among the whole population (although more weakly than in the past), but it has become a minority among youth. Many young South Koreans judge that Seoul is paying too much for the presence of northerners in Pyeongchang. They are furious at the fate of their ice hockey players: the creation of a single team has ended their hopes of medals and, faced with the virulence of the critics, President Moon had to apologize for not having paid more attention to the future of these sports. The Seoul government does not seem to have seen the scale of the generational breakdown before.

The present issue: the military de-escalation

The ongoing transformations in the peninsula evoke others. In the North, a transition with a capitalist horizon is initiated, as in China in the late 70s. In the South, the feeling of belonging to the same nation and the aspiration to reunification weakens, as was the case in Taiwan (and in a very particular context in Hong Kong). The historical memory of the Japanese occupation and the Korean War (1950-1953) no longer occupies the same place within and beyond the 38th parallel. These evolutions will have very important consequences and must be followed with attention: the future is even less sure inasmuch as, today like yesterday, world geopolitics imposes itself brutally and can modify the Korean dynamics.

What matters in the immediate future is that a blow has been put dealt to the war drive on the peninsula. Washington has increased verbal provocations, tightened sanctions until the opening of Games, and manifested its bad mood. From Tokyo, Vice President Mike Pence had warned Moon Jae-in that he would not allow North Korea to use the Olympics for propaganda purposes. The United States and Japan have now had to take note of the *fait accompli* of Pyeongchang. For now, nuclear tests and firing of missiles in the North have been interrupted. US-South Korean naval manoeuvres are postponed (to June?); the question is how big will they be and if the North will be ostensibly the target as before? War and peace are in the balance. The de-escalation movement initiated by the Koreans must extend beyond the Olympics - and international solidarity must contribute to it.

We are going on strike together: young women are organizing to change everything

8 March 2018, by Julia Camara, Vivi Arana

When we think of radical action, cohesion, mutual solidarity and the

capacity for mobilization, the purple color comes to mind almost

immediately. And the media reach that the feminist movement has received in

recent years is undeniable: hundreds of demonstrations, protest statements, hashtags of denunciation, rallies in support of those sisters who are victims of sexist violence, the Oscars and Hollywood, massive demonstrations of 25N, the unstoppable wave of March 8, the Goyas [76], Argentina, Mexico, United States, MeToo, "We are the pack" [77], every time there are more fists that raise consciousness of the oppression by a system that excludes, belittles, mistreats, isolates and even murders us.

Women who did not live under the dictatorship or the Transition, who were born after decriminalizing abortion and who were only girls when the comprehensive law against gender violence was passed, have had sold to us the notion that we live in a world where the problem of machismo has already been solved. No one prevents us accessing technical studies, and therefore we should not mind that only 24% of students in scientific careers or engineering are women. The law does not allow direct wage discrimination, so we should not challenge the wage gap that makes us "work for free" an average of 54 days a year. We do not know if formal equality has been achieved already, but what we do know about the thousands of young women who have taken to the streets in the last months is that discrimination and violence are still very real in our daily lives.

We grew up with stories of pink princesses, blue princes and happy endings, as we grew up, realizing that pink is not our favorite color, how much we are frustrated by the communicative deficiencies of the prince, that unwanted kisses are not romantic but abusive and that happy endings will not be possible while capitalism exists. That being mothers is not our goal in life, that the kiss we wanted was that of the princess and that, if we are asked, we would prefer to see the end of archaic and patriarchal institutions like the monarchy.

While it is true that the feminist

movement stands out because of the plurality of subjects that create it, young women have played a significant role in all the recent mobilizations. We have created non-mixed collectives in universities throughout the state, promoted feminist assemblies in many institutes, opened the debate about the lack of female role models and the need for a feminist education, and we have reappropriated our self-organized parties to defend ourselves collectively from sexual aggressions and sexist violence. There are those who look at us with surprise, but this increase in mobilization in the sectors of younger women is nothing but a clear indication of the fatigue, frustration and need to break with the old regime that the new generations are showing.

The questioning of the status quo transforms our social identities to the point of generating a state of rupture between what we should have been and we will never be. It is not enough to understand the injustices and oppressions that await us in a class society marked by power relations: we need to create bonds of sisterhood and concrete experiences of self-organization to empower and liberate ourselves together. We need to make feminism, even more than it is already, a massive social movement that includes all women and that puts us in contact with women whose material situations are different from our own. We need to establish ourselves as our own subject capable of breaking with a system that humiliates us, makes us invisible, despises us and exploits us. For this and much more, the student women, the precarious young women, who gather on park benches, the ones that are tired of not being able to dance without being harassed, the ones take care of our grandparents, the ones that face pressure over our appearance and the that do not understand why we are expected to subordinate ourselves to our partners, we will strike on March 8.

This March 8 should not be understood as the end of a long history of mobilization, rebellion and

feminist insubordination, but as a reason and a time to build something much bigger. The feminist strike is an opportunity to get in touch, to weave alliances between collectives and assemblies, to recognize each other and to advance collectively. Let's build a strike together that is capable of bringing together a great diversity of realities and subjects with the same objective, and that wants and knows how to give continuity to this purple pack. A strike that does not have as its aim the mere mobilization and denunciation of a system that we cannot and will not support, but that understands the potential of rupture that is offered to us if we know how to look beyond this Thursday.

The creation of solid networks that aim to create common spaces of struggle and solidarity becomes a necessary condition for the continuity of this experience and for the strengthening and intersection of resistance. Breaking the isolation of the struggles and the individualism that is imposed on us is a priority if we want to have a decent life. Therefore, young people from different towns and cities have united in the Open Gap process, a call to deepen the crack open by the feminist and LGBTI movements against machismo and patriarchy, articulating an anti-fascist and anti-racist response to those who sow hatred, xenophobia and homophobia. Because youth have always played a fundamental role in social transformations, and we are demonstrating this again from the feminist movement.

This week millions of women will take to the streets around the world with the same goal: to end patriarchy. Millions of women with the same color, purple. Millions of women who know we are aware that if we strike together, we hit harder. And that, if we coordinate and organize, the 8M will not be the end of anything but a springboard from which to jump with more force. Radical, supportive, rebellious, diverse, united and disobedient: because we are the pack, we go together to strike, compañeras.

Readings: Intersectional Black Activists

8 March 2018, by **Alice Ragland**

When 1930s New Deal legislation expanded protections for workers, domestic laborers and farmworkers were completely omitted. Since the vast majority of African Americans were employed in these fields at the time, this was an intentional and racist exclusion.

Fed up with their exclusion from workers' protections, domestic labor organizers formed unions and lobbied for the Fair Labor Standards Act, including the federal minimum wage, to be extended to household workers.

The women of the domestic workers' movement also wanted to be able to go to work without being sexually assaulted by the white men in the homes they worked for, and without being forced to do degrading, backbreaking labor for inadequate compensation. They wanted to be treated as professionals, not as "mammies."

In order to meet these goals, the domestic labor activists recruited and organized household workers in public spaces such as bus stops while they waited to be transported to the homes in which they worked.

The household workers' movement faced exclusion from the mainstream labor movement, which deemed them unorganizable. While the white, male factory worker was the archetypal worker represented by the U.S. labor movement, racism and sexism caused domestic labor to be devalued and delegitimized by the mainstream labor movement and by elected officials.

Because more than 80% of working Black women worked in domestic service up until the mid-20th century, Black women were largely excluded from labor organizing. Because of this, the household workers' movement had to fight for their rights on their own.

The movement helped to bring respect

and professionalism to the domestic workers' profession. In addition to improving the public perception about domestic workers, their creative organizing tactics have been used as a model for organizing other workers who have been excluded from workers' protections, including service sector, temp workers, and part-time employees. The household workers' organizing methods have had a major impact in the current landscape of labor organizing.

Read: Household Workers Unite: The Untold Story of African American Women Who Built a Movement by Premilla Nadasen. Also of interest: Tera Hunter's *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War*.

Callie House and Reparations

Callie House fought to secure reparations for former slaves during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. House believed that African Americans had a right to pensions for centuries of unpaid, involuntary labor. She knew that former slaves, who were left with nothing after emancipation and thus faced extreme poverty, would not have such a difficult time surviving if they received a monthly pension.

As assistant secretary of the Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty and Pension Association, House led the movement for reparations and asserted to the Federal Government that it was the right of former slaves to be granted compensation for their forced labor and the legacy of poverty it left for African Americans.

The U.S. federal government, particularly the Post Office, attempted to suppress the pension movement by denying the Ex-Slave Association the

use of the mail — the principal way for the association to communicate with its members and to conduct financial transactions.

The government also sent Pension Bureau inspectors to spy on Ex-Slave association meetings, accused the association of fraud, sent letters asking former slaves to report anyone who told them that the pension bill had been passed, and threatened to fine or jail anyone who attempted to make these claims.

The government continued to make false claims against the association, enact harassment policies against it, and deny it the use of the mails. Callie House retaliated against these attacks by writing replies to the letters she received from the Post Office Department decrying the government for the wrongs that it committed against Black people.

She did not back down from their assaults, and eventually was jailed for having been convicted of fraud in the government's attempt to end the pension movement once and for all. Though her imprisonment did quell the association's legislative activities, calls for reparations did not end.

Callie House's fight for ex-slave pensions caused a ripple effect for future demands for reparations. Following her legacy, other movements and activists have called for compensation for the descendants of slaves.

The Black Nationalist movement of the 1920s, the Nation of Islam, Audley "Queen Mother" Moore, the Republic of New Africa, the African American Reparations League, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Whitney Young, and others have made public calls for various forms of reparations.

The debate about reparations has been reenergized by Ta'Nehisi

Coates's "A Case for Reparations," which appeared in *The Atlantic* in June 2014.¹ Callie House's activism spearheaded the calls for reparations that still resonate today.

Read: *My Face Is Black Is True: Callie House and the Struggle for Ex-Slave Reparations* by Mary Frances Berry

Sojourner Truth: "Ain't I A Woman?"

Sojourner Truth was a renowned abolitionist whose fight for freedom did not cease after emancipation in 1865. Truth's intersecting identities as a Black person, former slave and a woman meant that her freedom was denied in many ways after the end of slavery.

After the Civil War, Truth continued to deliver speeches advocating for African-American rights in general and Black women's rights in particular. Her address at the 1867 American Equal Rights Association Convention highlights her continued struggle for equality and for black women to be considered at all in debates about rights.

The 1867 AERA convention included much deliberation about rights for white women and Black men, but Black women were effectively excluded from the conversation. To point this out, Truth said toward the beginning of her speech, "There is a great stir about colored men getting their rights, but not a word about colored women..." [78]

She went on to discuss the fact that Black women are paid much less for

performing the same jobs as men even though they work just as hard. Truth advocated equal pay for equal work long before modern debates about it brought the issue into the national spotlight.

Sojourner Truth also argued for universal suffrage without property qualifications, knowing that poor people, particularly former slaves, would not qualify to vote if property requirements were upheld. She used her platform as an orator and activist to struggle for Black women's freedom, which she knew was a necessary precondition for everyone else to be free.

Read: *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* by Sojourner Truth. Also of interest: *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* by Nell Irvin Painter

[Against the Current](#)

For International Women's Day: Honoring the Fighters

8 March 2018, by [Against the Current](#) Editors

Ahed Tamimi: The young Palestinian turned 17 in an Israeli prison, awaiting a March 11 trial date for slapping an IDF soldier "who had struck her first and invaded her home" hours after he or another IDF soldier shot her cousin in the face with a rubber bullet, at close range. Her cousin was very severely injured, though he has survived, after nearly dying. Two of her cousins have been shot to death; her brother's arm has been broken by IDF soldiers; her mother, who's in a different prison, has been shot in the leg; and her father has been repeatedly imprisoned. (On a previous occasion, Ahed intervened to prevent the arrest of her brother by biting the hand of the soldier who tried to snatch him.)

The Tamimi family and other people of Nabi Saleh, her village, continue to protest nonviolently every Friday,

against a vast new settlement's theft of their farmlands and fresh water supply. A slap in the face of a soldier who is armed to the teeth, by a young Palestinian woman armed only with her courage in defending her family, is hardly a serious act of violence. The soldier was uninjured. It is, in fact, a right under international law of every person whose land is unlawfully occupied and who seeks to end the occupation to rise violently against the occupier's military forces.

Ahed will likely be sentenced to a prison term. The conviction rate under Israeli military law exceeds 99%. Petition signatures of support for Ahed by now exceed 1,000,000 [79]. This is a case that demands solidarity and action, for Ahed and for hundreds of Palestinian children incarcerated under the Israeli occupation!

Asma Jahangir: a leading Pakistani rights activist, died of a heart attack in early February. She was the founding chairwoman of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, trustee of the International Crisis Group and served as the United Nations rapporteur on human rights and extrajudicial killings.

Asma's political activism goes back to the late 1960s, when she participated in a women's march to the residence of the governor of Punjab. Placed under house arrest and imprisoned under several military dictatorships, she was part of the successful lawyers' movement to restore democracy in 2007.

As a lawyer and activist, Asma Jahangir championed the rights of religious minorities "who are charged under the country's

blasphemy laws “and women and men killed in the name of “honor.” She defended land rights of peasants, opposed debt slavery, and most recently supported prisoner of conscience Baba Jan, who is serving life imprisonment for organizing people displaced after a landslide. Let the fight for justice grow!

Heather Heyer: The 32-year-old marcher against the white-supremacist mobilization in Charlottesville, Virginia, was mowed down August 12, 2017 by a neonazi motorist driving his car into the crowd. This was the occasion of which Donald Trump obscenely opined that “there were very good people on both sides.” Her close friend Marissa Blair said that Heather “spoke for people even if they didn’t want to speak for themselves.” The resistance to white supremacy must now speak for her!

Berta Cáceres: Leader of the Lenca indigenous community in Honduras, a winner of the Goldman Environmental Prize for environmental activism and a founder of the National Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH), she was gunned down at her home in La Esperanza by agents linked to the Desarrollos Energetica (DESA) hydroelectric dam company. A coup regime took power in 2009, returning the country to the rule of drug gangs and death squads (see Victoria Cervantes’ discussion of the recently stolen election and U.S. complicity, [here](#)). Two years before her March 2, 2016 assassination, Cáceres had singled out Hillary Clinton for her responsibility in the events of the coup [80]. Truly, the hands of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump are now joined together “dripping with the blood of Berta Cáceres and hundreds

of indigenous and political activists murdered since the coup and in the events of the recently stolen election!

Erica Garner: The daughter of Eric Garner, she devoted her life to winning justice for her father who was murdered gasping “I Can’t Breathe” on the street in an illegal New York police chokehold. She died December 30, 2017, four months after her second child was born, of an asthma-induced heart attack. However, as the Reverend Al Sharpton eloquently stated, “her heart was attacked that day” when the police killed her father. She had suffered ever since, struggling to channel her grief and rage into becoming an effective activist fighter “a role she had never sought or prepared for. In memory of Erica Garner, it’s the responsibility of us all to end racist

[Against the Current](#)

Education strikes are women’s strikes

8 March 2018, by **Sara R. Farris**

Two of the most significant labour disputes of 2018 might still be taking place on March 8, the day on which the [International Women’s Strike steering group in the USA](#) called for all women to stop work - including and especially the socially reproductive work they do for free - and to take over the streets.

The first is the strike in the UK against the proposal by Universities UK (UUK - the employers association in UK higher education) to move from the current system of defined benefit pensions to a system of defined contributions under which retirement incomes will depend only on returns from money invested in the stock market. The reform will affect almost 200,000 university staff and it will mean that lecturers will be around £10,000 per year worse off once they retire. A strike against the proposal began on February 22nd and has already gone on for six days at the time of writing. Now in its third week,

the strike will continue [until Thursday March 8](#) and then resume the following week, until March 16th - unless negotiations change this scenario.

The second is the strike by [public schools teachers in West Virginia](#) , in the USA, for a pay rise and against the mounting costs associated with the state’s PEIA (Public Employees Insurance Agency), which would more than double the monthly premium teachers have to pay for their health insurance. The strike began on the same day as the strike in the UK - i.e., February 22nd - and in spite of offers of a modest salary increase, teachers are still refusing to resume work until their demands are fully met.

Both strikes involve workers in the education sector, and both are concerned with classical union demands: for better wages and better living standards. At a first glance, these two strikes might not seem to

have much to do with women as such directly, involving, as they do, people of different genders and demands that are non-straightforwardly gendered. In both cases, however, gender justice and social reproduction are heavily implicated.

Under [the UUK plans](#) , lecturers and senior lecturers ending their careers at around £48,000 and £58,000 per year respectively, will be the worst off, receiving in the end only around £10,000 per year in pension (a 40% drop as compared to the current scheme). It is worth noting that the majority of lecturers and senior lecturers in the UK are female, in a sector in which [men still occupy over 75% of professorial positions](#) . Furthermore, as scholars of elderly care know all too well, cuts to pension and the prolonging of the retirement age affect women in particular. Retired women across the world receive [lower benefits](#) than men. In the EU alone, “[the poverty rate among](#)

elderly women is 37 per cent higher than among men". Furthermore, women tend to have more career breaks - due to maternity leave and periods of part-time work due to them disproportionally taking on childcare tasks - and to live longer than men on average, thus requiring care for more years in their old age. Women can thus expect to feel the harsh impact of draconian pension reforms in a world in which gender pay gaps and the unequal sexual division of labour affect them in particular.

The teachers' strike in West Virginia needs also to be looked at from the perspective of gender, not only because the large majority of public school teachers are women, but because the grievances to which they are giving voice and the demands they are putting forward have a particular gender inflection. High costs of health insurance tend to impact especially upon low-income women, particularly when they are mothers. The expense associated with pre- and post-natal care does in fact give little choice to poor mothers but to discontinue healthcare use, which can have detrimental effects on their wellbeing. Public school teachers, furthermore, are increasingly required to carry out tasks for which they are not trained, nor paid for, such as providing emotional support for children and listening to families' wants and needs. It is not by chance that they are effectively called upon to perform this type of "emotional" labour. The fact that they are mostly women doing work that heavily involves affectivity and caring carries with it the assumption that educational labour can be seen as an extension of the unpaid reproductive work women do at home, and thus, aspects of it do not need to be paid. And knowing all too well the reproductive implications of their work, West Virginia teachers packed lunch boxes and organised meals through churches and communities before they went on

strike, to make sure children from the poorest families could still have food guaranteed during the schools' closure.

To be sure, these strikes are occurring in two very different national contexts - the UK and the USA - and yet, they have a common feature and a common cause: on the one hand, both universities and public schools have been sites of the so-called feminization of labour, which means that the poor labour conditions once reserved for typically women's jobs now apply to those labour sectors as a whole (in terms of wage stagnation, growth of part-time, precarious contracts, and so forth). On the other hand, the higher and public education sectors in both countries have been subjected to a brutal neoliberal assault brought about by the corporate reconfiguration of schools and universities as factories churning out the future, low-pay, precarious laborers in the making.

Once again, both processes - the feminization of labour and the neoliberal restructuring of education - are profoundly gendered not only because they affect women in particular (who are the majority of junior university staff in the UK and the majority of public school teachers in the USA) along the lines I briefly traced above, but also because they speak of the crisis of social reproduction.

Universities and schools are socially reproductive agencies by default: they train and guarantee the supply of the future labour force for capitalists. But while capital accumulation cannot do without social reproduction, capitalists do not want to bear its costs. That is why, in a context in which states are following the neoliberal dictates of privatisation and cutting on public expenditures, households (and especially women within them) still do a large part of socially reproductive work for free; that is why commodified

care jobs (nannies, domestic workers, nurses) are under-paid and socially devalued. That is also why universities and schools' staff are under constant attack.

Against this background, the ever more likely temporal coincidence of these two strikes on March 8 acquires even more significance. Since 2017 women all over the world have chosen to mark March 8 not as a day of historical "celebration", but as a day of struggle. In Poland, Argentina, Italy, UK, USA and many other countries, on this day women have decided to withdraw their labour (be it the waged labour they do for a living, or the emotional and material free labour they do to reproduce their families) to protest against gender oppression in its many forms and to show what it would mean for society at large if women stopped working. Labour rights and full social provisioning are among the main demands of the movement, for we recognize all too well that inequalities and the dismantling of the welfare state have a disproportionate impact on women. On the other hand, university lecturers and public school teachers have an interest in linking their struggles with the IWS' demands for gender, labour and social justice. To acknowledge that the attack against their pensions and their wages is an attack on women is not to disavow the ways in which it affect others, but to emphasise that the neoliberal capitalism's attempt to abash the socially reproductive labour of lecturers and teachers goes hand in hand with its deprecation for those activities that do not bring ready-made profit. Women have been historically at the centre of these activities that capitalism demeans. That is why, the struggle for gender justice has always been and remains today crucial for the struggle for labour and social justice in general.

[Verso](#)

A New Wave of Water Privatisation in Indonesia

7 March 2018, by **Irfan Zamzami**

And most of the time, as clearly seen from official documents such as the government's 2017 (PPP) book: Public Private Partnerships, Infrastructure Projects Plan in Indonesia [81] and the president's regulation, the government sees privatisation as the silver-bullet solution.

As a result, 2017 has seen a new wave of water privatisation in Indonesia. The following are some of the major water privatisation projects being promoted by the government:

? Pasuruan, East Java. Umbulan Drinking Water Supply System (SPAM) in Pasuruan is the government's flagship water "megaproject", which heavily promotes private sector involvement. The project is worth IDR 4.51 trillion (US\$341.38 million) and is mainly implemented through Public-Private Partnerships. The water facility is officially opened since 20 July 2017. The impact of this water privatisation will include five densely populated municipalities as well as industrial centers (Surabaya, Pasuruan, Sidoarjo, Mojokerto and Gresik) because the new water facility supplies clean water to various municipal water utilities. The project has already sparked public resistance. Civil society organisations have protested against the project and called upon local legislators.

? Semarang, Central Java. A drinking water facility, also under the SPAM development project, is ready to be built in the western part of Semarang, a town of 1.5 million people. The project will cost IDR 1.1 trillion (US\$83.26 million) and the government has appointed a private company to implement the plan. The project is claimed to be the solution for improving water supply to reduce rapid land subsidence. The concession

was given despite the existence of a capable public water utility.

? Bekasi, West Java. The government of Bekasi (population of 2.6 million) is working together with a water consultancy firm to accelerate a drinking water facility project in the city. Even though at the moment the project is still at an early stage, there is a high possibility that the water supply system project will be awarded to the private firm.

? Batam Island, Riau. Water services in Batam (population of 944,000) are already operated under a privatised system. However, BP Batam, the local authority, is preparing two drinking water supply system projects. While the current private water company's business contract will end in 2020, from its statements in the media, it can be inferred that BP Batam will involve other parties from the private sector.

? Bandar Lampung, Lampung. The government is organising an auction for private companies bidding for Bandar Lampung's water supply system (population of 881,000). The project is worth IDR 1.40 trillion (US\$105.97 million). So far, there are five consortiums shortlisted. The successful candidate will be announced by the end of 2018. According to the government's PPP roadmap, the concession of Bandar Lampung's water supply system will be arranged as a 25-year contract.

? South Bali. The Ministry of Public Works has stated a commitment to build water infrastructure in South Bali by inviting private companies. At the moment, the government is making adjustments to the local institutions in order to render regulations amenable to water privatisation. The Governor of Bali has welcomed the ministry's plan.

? Other drinking water supply system projects that will be offered as PPPs are: Pondok Gede (US\$25 million), Pekanbaru (US\$35.5 million), and the raw water facility in Banten (US\$17 million).

Most projects are designated officially under the umbrella of Umbulan Drinking Water Supply System (SPAM). The concept of SPAM actually covers the whole process of drinking water supply, from raw water collection all the way to drinking water distribution to users while the most of recent projects are linked to raw water treatment. According to the annulled water resources law, SPAM projects should be implemented by state-owned companies. However, the law only loosely prioritises state-owned companies, and is quick in mentioning that the government is also allowed to involve the private sector. The central government, apparently, has strong preference for the latter.

In addition, the trend demonstrates how the government is sidestepping privatisation of water utilities by providing a room for the private sector in the water treatment process. This is the upstream process during which drinking water is produced. The downstream portion of water services, that is distribution and operation, falls under the domain of water utilities that are still managed and owned publicly.

This could be problematic for public water utilities that are already self-sufficient. The public water utility PDAM Surabaya for instance, which has exceptionally good performance, will instead be burdened with dependency on for-profit companies' water supply. As can be seen in Jakarta, the government and public water utility can hardly hold the

private companies accountable for their rates policy and performance. [82]

The earliest wave of water privatisation in Indonesia took place in Jakarta in 1997. Two private companies managed to take over the operation of water services in Jakarta. The privatisation has been failing miserably, leaving half of the population without access to proper piped-water services. Other problems are mounting, such as skyrocketing tariffs and financial losses to the public budget.

The public keeps striving to end water privatisation. One of the strongest efforts is through legal action. The

residents and civil society organisations filed a citizen lawsuit in 2012 against water privatisation. In 2015, the residents won and the privatisation contract agreements were annulled by the court. The ruling, unfortunately, was challenged by the defendants, including the private water operators and the central government.

This has effectively deterred the city administration from taking over water services, as the contract agreements that give private operators an exclusive right to deliver water services are still effective. It is very likely that the private operators are buying time through legal tactics in order to maintain privatised water

services until contract expiry. And globally, maintaining the first wave of water privatisation is key to pave the way for the next ones.

In October 2017 the Supreme Court ordered termination of water privatisation and restoration of public management to ensure human right to water. While it needs to be seen how this decision is implemented and if privatisation in Jakarta were to be stopped entirely the ruling could help raising critical attention to privatisation projects beyond Jakarta and could curb the spread of water privatisation in other areas of Indonesia.

22 December 2017

Historic meeting between CIG and trade union and workers' organisations

6 March 2018

It amounts to a taking of position which is not limited to elections and it is not really an electoral campaign, but a political alternative faced with the deep (and hopefully terminal) crisis of the Mexican political regime.

The decomposition and crisis of the current political regime has no precedent and is the culmination of six years marked by illegitimacy since the "Yo soy 132" movement, with the campaign for the Ayotzinapa 43 and the persistent cries of "Fuera Peña" and "Fue el Estado". [83] The crisis is reflected in the crisis of legitimacy of the political-electoral system, its institutions and all the legal political parties, as well as in the absence of legitimacy of the institutions of justice. The crisis is expressed on the political-electoral terrain because of the lack of credibility and discrediting of all the political parties.

The opportunism and the scandalous agreements made by all the parties to try to maintain control of the state apparatus are revealing. It is not by

chance that they all seek alliances and coalitions among themselves to try to save the functioning of the system. The greatest example is the candidacy of José Antonio Meade for the PRI, representative of the neoliberal oligarchy whose merit is to have served equally governments of the PRI and the PAN. But the other parties also make alliances with various sectors of the ruling class that are divided by conflicting interests and lack of a compass, allowing them to assure the continuation of capitalist domination, especially with the arrival of Trump as US President.

That is why the CIG proposal for the independent candidacy of Marichuy, although it seeks legal registration by gathering the required signatures, is an anti-system campaign against the electoral setup itself. That's why Marichuy says "I do not look for votes, I want everything". The slander by followers of AMLO who argue that Marichuy will take away votes from the Morena party does not understand that our campaign does not seek votes

to arrive in government (and make the demagogic promise that if they vote for us, everything is solved) but seeks to end the political system and its current crisis and decomposition. [84]

The campaign to obtain a million signatures for the registration of Marichuy as an independent candidate also takes place in the context of that crisis. Because of the discredit of the current parties, they themselves approved the creation of the legal status of "independent candidacy" to try to re-legitimize the electoral process, but at the same time putting conditions which were impossible to fulfil from a truly independent alternative such as Marichuy (who cannot count on the support of various sectors of certain parties like El Bronco, Margarita Zavala or Raúl Piter). From the beginning Marichuy has denounced the classist, anti-democratic, racist and misogynist character of the procedure for the registration of her candidacy.

It should not be forgotten that

Marichuy's candidacy goes beyond an electoral campaign. We have collected the signatures while denouncing the undemocratic character of the system. But the struggle that the candidacy of Marichuy represents should, we think, continue with signatures or without signatures, with registration or without registration. Because it is a campaign to fight against the political system as a whole. It must be maintained, even without registration, so as to offer an alternative to the crisis of the regime, but outside the regime and not to strengthen it - that is what the CIG potentially represents. Morena's campaign, on the other hand, seeks to re-legitimize the electoral political system, generating illusions about the possibilities of a change of government only by voting in July. The campaign of Marichuy and the CIG (and all the forces that support it) must continue to denounce the undemocratic nature of the system, especially in the face of the imminent electoral fraud that will be carried out to impose the candidate of

the PRI.

And the CIG represents an anti-capitalist option in the midst of the crisis. It proposes that its spokesperson as an independent candidate, saying that it is not looking for votes and faced with the coming fraud, it is shaping and strengthening an Indigenous Council of Government throughout the country. The Workers' Meeting in the SME on January 24 has the challenge of finding and creating the ways to emulate the CIG, moving towards the formation also of a Council of Government of the working class and the people. It is the historical importance of this meeting to lay the foundations for an alliance between the indigenous peoples represented by the CIG and the unions and workers' organizations that include militant trade unions like the SME and those grouped in the NCT (Nueva Central de Trabajadores), but also from other sectors and movements in struggle such as the

ANUEE (Asamblea Nacional de Usuarios de Energía Eléctrica - National Assembly of Users of Electric Power) and organizations such as the OPT (Organización Política del Pueblo y los Trabajadores - Workers' and Peoples' Political Organization). [85] The worker, peasant and indigenous alliance in the perspective of an alliance between the Indigenous Council of Government and a future Workers' Council of Government Council will necessarily be reflected in the combination of the demands of the indigenous peoples' struggle that oppose the capitalist devastation of their communities and peoples and the demands of workers in struggle against neoliberal structural reforms, violence and militarization of the country, femicide and the other plagues of the current phase of capitalism. This programmatic enrichment can be made at this Meeting where experiences are shared on each side.

January 24, 2018

US support for repression and fraud

4 March 2018, by Victoria Cervantes

The anti-dictatorship movement and organizations declared a civic insurrection, vowing that Honduras would be ungovernable. Hernandez's authority will not be recognized by the citizenry.

Not surprisingly, the fraudulent election and subsequent repression were ignored by the U.S. government. The Trump Administration congratulated Hernandez for his "election victory," confirming Washington's support for the dictatorship. Hernandez is especially close to the Southern Command of the U.S. Military, to Donald Trump's White House Chief of Staff General John F. Kelly, and to far rightwing forces in the United States and Latin America.

Former State Department official Otto

Reich, is a vocal supporter and advisor to JOH. He is part of the Cuban rightwing migration, and stands accused across the Americas of being a CIA operative because of involvement in coups and counter-insurgency operations including the 2002 coup in Venezuela and the 2009 coup in Honduras.

Just days before the election Reich was quoted on the front pages of the Honduran mainstream media warning about sinister Venezuelans trying to get into Honduras to destabilize the country during the elections.

Hernandez, who first came to power in a fraud-plagued post-coup election in 2013, started out as unpopular and became increasingly despised. He consolidated his power over all government entities and led changes

in Honduran law aimed at criminalizing opponents and social justice movements. Meanwhile he continued to support impunity for cases of high-ranking corruption and human rights violations.

JOH ramped up neoliberal privatization and destruction of public services and benefits especially in public education and health. His National Party (PN) was involved in blatant corruption including theft of \$330 million from the national health system. He stands accused of having ties to narcotics cartels whose murderous recruitment tactics have forced thousands of young people to flee the country for their lives.

The Opposition Alliance (aka Alliance Against Dictatorship) "including left, center-left and center-right (anti-

corruption) forces â€” ran Salvador Nasralla as their candidate. They challenged Hernandez's reelection, which, according to the Honduran Constitution, was illegal.
Illegal and Stolen Election

By election night, the deep and wide rejection of the JOH regime was apparent when the Alliance candidate took a five percent lead that one national election official admitted was "statistically irreversible."

This occurred despite the large number of PN activists paid by the party to intimidate, threaten and bribe voters, and in the face of the intimidating militarization of resistance neighborhoods on election day. Activists for the Alliance said that in order to officially win the election by 5%, their real margin must be at least 50% or even 60%.

There were reports of irregularities and "dead people voting for JOH" at polls all around the country, as well as reports that more ballot boxes arrived at the Tegucigalpa counting center than were supposed to exist. But before any official announcement was made, the computer system suddenly "crashed" and vote counting stopped.

People reacted quickly to the screeching halt in reporting the results. Mass protests began at the military-controlled vote counting center on November 28 and spread out across the country. These first protests were met with ferocious repression, with teargas used as an offensive weapon. Large numbers of military as well as riot police and regular police mobilized, even bringing out armored vehicles (tanquetes).

People continued their defiance by expanding the protests: blocking streets with burning tires in the cities and small towns, while campesinos set up blockades on the Panamerican Highway. The strength of the movement against dictatorship at the polls was reaffirmed in the streets, as the effects of the years of organizing and discontent in the barrios and villages since the 2009 coup became obvious.

For its part, the government reacted

with a declaration of a State of Emergency and a curfew for 10 days. In response protests became more localized, organized in each neighborhood in both cities and villages. People banged on pots and pans, set off firecrackers, and blocked streets in front of their houses at night in defiance of the curfew.

At that point the government deployed Hernandez's special military police (Military Police for the Public Order) in smaller mobile units. They fired live ammunition at mostly young protesters â€” killing at least 14 from November 30 to December 5, according to the Honduran human rights organization Committee of the Families of the Disappeared Detainees (COFADEH).

There would be no official announcement for nearly two weeks, then Hernandez was declared the winner.

Washington Backs JOH

On November 30 the U.S. State Department published the certification of "human rights improvements" in Honduras. This is a requirement for the release of some U.S. aid.

To the Honduran people the timing seemed like a very bad joke. But it indicated that Washington was going to support the imposition of JOH, no matter how great the blatant fraud and murderous repression. This certification occurred despite the fact that the General Secretary of the Organization of American States Luis Almagro announced on December 17 that there should be new elections because the election process was too irregular and tainted to determine a winner.

Even as the death toll rose, Washington formally recognized JOH as president on December 23. By December 30 COFADEH had documented 30 executions of protesters and one disappearance; 1085 detentions; 47 house raids using tear gas and violence; and 12 attacks on journalists and independent media.

The Alliance leaders â€” including former president Manuel Zelaya (overthrown in the 2009 coup) and presidential candidate Nasralla â€” declared a national civic strike for the week of the inauguration. They were in the streets with protesters and were tear-gassed and threatened.

The strike was supported by all the important movement organizations such as the Lenca indigenous organization COPINH, the Fraternal Black Organization OFRANEH, the Platform of Social and Popular Movements in Honduras, the Convergence Against Dictatorship, and more. Along with mass protests, roadblocks and neighborhood actions they called for a boycott of banks, chain stores and fast food restaurants.

The repression and militarization increased, along with stepped-up death-squad-style activity (gunmen in civilian clothes, unmarked cars with no license plates killing or kidnapping people). In northern Honduras there were raids using 30-50 military police and regular police at the homes of regional leaders of the campesino organization, the National Center for Rural Workers (CNTC) and leaders of the Movement for Dignity and Justice (MADJ).

The Alliance also carried out an international push to isolate Hernandez and began talking about filing cases in the International Human Rights Court. Thirty-four elected Alliance congressmen and congresswomen protested inside the opening of the National Congress before inauguration day.

Resistance Continues

By the end of December COFADEH had documented 88 political prisoners and more have since been arrested. These include well-known resistance activist Edwin Espinal. There have also been further deaths at the hands of the security forces, with at least three people killed between January 27 and February 5.

The Honduran people, mass organizations, the LIBRE Party and Alliance members are continuing their protests. They have announced a campaign to free all the political prisoners.

While no one is surprised that there was election fraud, the surprise for some is the degree of repression and violence Hernandez unleashed to pull off the fraud. This shows the regime's tremendous weakness politically and has moved even more people to the side of the anti-dictator movement.

It also revealed the incredible military and police power that, largely thanks to the United States, a small country not in a declared war has at its disposal. Additionally, it showed how far the United States is still prepared to go to keep a social democratic or any independent government out of power in Latin America.

The Honduran people are debating their strategies; recent declarations from the Alianza groups call for the continuation of a civic insurrection and a rejection of any dialogue with Hernandez in control of the process. An alternative inauguration for Salvador Nasralla was called for February 11th.

People have not forgotten the role then Secretary of State Hilary Clinton played in welcoming the 2009 coup. They will not forget the role the Trump administration is playing today.

Within the United States and in countries that support the dictatorship

in Honduras, the challenge is to step up our own movements and the solidarity movement to shake loose the grip of the United States on Honduras. [Honduras Solidarity Network](#) is campaigning to free Edwin Espinal and all political prisoners and for Washington to cut off all security aid to the dictatorship. You can get information on the political prisoner campaign and take action by going [here](#).

To demand support for a law introduced in Congress to cut off aid, go [here](#).

[Against the Current](#)

The Italian Left and Parliamentary Elections of March 4th

3 March 2018, by Francesco Locantore

by Francesco Locantore (activist of Sinistra Anticapitalista, member of the Potere al Popolo National Committee)

There have been three governments since the 2013 election, all headed by members of the Democratic Party (Enrico Letta until February 2014, Matteo Renzi until December 2016 and Paolo Gentiloni from 2017 up to now) and supported by a sort of grand coalition including the New Center-Right headed by Angelino Alfano (formerly allied with Silvio Berlusconi). The season of broad agreements between the PD and the centre-right was born during the preceding legislature (as of November 2011) with the joint support of the technocratic government led by Mario Monti.

Over last six years the Democratic Party has managed all austerity policies and cuts to public services in Italy, resulting in an increase in social inequality and poverty, job insecurity and massive unemployment, the latter of which, despite the relative economic recovery, remains at much higher levels than that relative to the

period before the 2008 crisis.

In recent years, structural reforms have been carried out that have eradicated the main achievements of the labor movement in past decades of struggle. The Fornero pension reform will increase the age of retirement to 70 years. The so called Jobs Act removed the right for workers to see unjust individual layoffs withdrawn by ordinary court, which was guaranteed under the Workers' Rights Bill passed in 1970. The reform called "Good School" let school managers hold overwhelming sway over teaching staff, by means of merit assessments and the fact that they rather than education boards directly hire teachers. By giving school institutions the right to compel students to work some hours a week for particular companies so that once an agreement is in place, school becomes the place where free labor is provided to the latter and young people are shaped into helpless and flexible labor power for the needs of market and business profits as it were a law of nature.

Today there are 10 million poor people

in Italy; 7.5 million people who are unemployed or underemployed; 10 million who gave up healthcare because of lack of proper funding and the resulting poor service. In 2017, the richest 20% of the Italian population held over 66% of national net wealth, while another 60% held just 14.8%. A slice of the hyper-privileged few (1% of whom are the big bourgeoisie) have wealth 240 times higher than that held by the whole poorest 20% of the population. The income of the poorest 10% of Italians has declined by 28% in the last decade, while almost half of the income increase recorded in the same period was grabbed by just 20% of the population.

The disrupted social fabric and the weakness of the labor movement at this time which were also the result of the backing of the major Italian union, namely the CGIL, for the austerity policies carried out by the "friendly" DP governments, have led to the re-emergence of xenophobic and racist sentiments among large parts of the population, and some breakthrough of Far right and even openly fascist

political forces. The debate of the electoral campaign is dominated by issues of public security and the fight against immigration, where the three main political forces (the center-right coalition, the Five Star Movement and the DP) are holding the ground with political proposals based on 'law and order' and anti-immigrant prejudice. In this regard, the DP has the lion's share thanks to the job of Minister Minniti, whose law curtailed civil rights for refugees and gave extraordinary powers for mayors to prevent the "undesirable" ones (homeless people, immigrants, etc.) access to city centres. He even tried to ban the antifascist demonstration on February 18th, which, however, regularly took place in the town of Macerata thanks to the resolve of the antifascists!

Two coalitions will run for office to the left of the DP: Liberi e Uguali and Potere al Popolo .

After the attack on democratic rights and liberties by Renzi's Democratic Party, with an attempt to reform the constitution (including the proposal to end the Senate as a legislative chamber and reduce the numbers of MPs), which was eventually rejected by the vote in the referendum of December 4th 2016, a fraction of this party decided to break away and founded the Democratic and Progressive Movement, which then merged with Sinistra Italiana in the coalition called Liberi e Uguali, led by

the former president of the Senate Pietro Grasso. The leaders of the DPM (Pierluigi Bersani and Massimo D'Alema in the first place), however, are jointly and severally responsible for the policy of war and austerity carried out by the DP and its predecessors over the last twenty years. The MPs of the DPM supported the Gentiloni government until almost the end of legislature, and the coalition Liberi e Uguali is preemptively making itself available for any alliance with Renzi's DP.

Potere al Popolo was initially born from a call by a Naples grassroots organization, called Clash City Workers, leader of a network of grassroots organizations and political structures in several Italian cities, which was immediately met with a positive response from Sinistra Anticapitalista, Rifondazione Comunista, the Eurostop network and the Italian Communist Party. This coalition immediately brought about a reactivation of many political and social activists, pulled together by the desire to build a radical alternative to the center-left and the DP. The political programme and the electoral list were discussed in two national assemblies, whose turnout was about one thousand people each, and in over one hundred local assemblies throughout the country.

The electoral program of Potere al Popolo was made up not only by the demands coming out of the assemblies, which were in turn the

expression of a number of different struggles all over the country, but also of the experiences of last years of struggle against the Jobs Act and the Fornero law, the "Good school" reform, the Renzi constitutional reform, the racism of the Minniti-Orlando law and against male violence against women. This political program is not revolutionary, but includes a string of radical proposals that are objectively in contradiction with capitalism and its institutions (the European Union in the first place), trying to meet the needs of the mass of workers, the exploited and the oppressed.

To name just a few: the reduction of 32-hour working time without loss of pay, the reestablishment of the sliding scale of wages, the right to retirement at 60 or after 35 years of work, the establishment of a guaranteed income for the unemployed, the making of public investments as well as jobs, the provision of one million new houses through a social housing program, an end to privatizations and the reestablishment of full public ownership of water supplies and public services, a stop to big useless and harmful infrastructure projects and participatory planning in the environmental field as an alternative to the Green economy of business, the introduction of a property tax, the nationalization of the Italian Central Bank and the creation of a public financial hub, the restructuring of public debt.