



IV519 - April 2018

“A mass movement the country never has seen before”

30 April 2018, by Hovhannes Gevorkian

PA: How did the movement start? Is it the first time that people demonstrate against the government?

The movement started at 13th of April when the first actions of civil disobedience began. Prior to that, opposition leader Nikol Paschinyan made a protest walk through Armenia. Back in the capital, Yerevan, the opposition began with protests against the election of former President Serj Sargsyan as Prime Minister scheduled in a parliamentary vote on 17th April. It was the youth who started to block the streets with peaceful means as they didn't want the election to take place. Students tried to occupy the university but the police forces were too strong. With the help of massive police force, the protesting masses couldn't prevent the vote in the parliament but the protests grew bigger and bigger, nevertheless.

Armenia is a country that has always had big economic problems together with a corrupt political class, and also has a history of protest. In 2008, people protested against the fraudulent election of Serj Sargsyan as President. At its peak, over 150,000 demonstrated in Yerevan. Back then, the struggles were much more violent and on the 1st of March of that year the repressive forces (including Russian special forces) shot at the

protestors with live ammunition. At these events – in Armenia simply referred as “1st March” – ten people died.

Another interesting movement was the largely youth protest against the hike of electricity prices in 2015. At that time, people also blocked and occupied streets and places. This protest was peaceful but showed once again the dissatisfaction with the government and the ruling Armenian Republican Party (ARP).

What are the social forces driving the movement?

Clearly the youth, but also women, who take a large part in the protest, although unfortunately with weaker representation. The students are very active and a bastion of the movement. It's my generation, born after the collapse of the USSR and only knowing the bourgeois republic. It's the generation who has no prospects in the country, the generation who is leaving the country whether to study or to work in other countries.

But we also have to take into account that, due to the hatred against the oligarchs, other parts of the population are taking part. It's a mass movement the country never has seen before.

There are liberal political forces in the movement, what is their real influence?

The dramatic meeting between Serj Sargsyan and Nikola Paschinyan after which the former resigned. Note Paschinyan's shirt, his bandaged hand, the cap and the rucksack. Courtesy to Hybridtechcar.com.

They have a big influence, as the charismatic leader of the movement is Nikol Paschinyan, who is himself a liberal. You may have heard his name for the first time in the recent days but he's not an unknown political figure in Armenia. Basically, he is a pupil of former and first President Levon Ter-Petrosyan, who ruled the country from 1991 to 1998. Ter-Petrosyan was responsible for all the privatisations of industry and the rapid rise of the oligarchs. He himself had to step down because of mass protests in 1998, as he was willing to negotiate with Azerbaijan over a possible Armenian retreat from Nagorno-Karabakh.

In 2008 it was once again Ter-Petrosyan who challenged Serj Sargsyan in the presidential elections. After the 1st of March and the imposition of the state of emergency (with a ban of strikes, demonstrations, media censorship and much more) Ter-Petrosyan was put under house

arrest. Through all that, Nikol Paschinyan was his protege. In 2008 he had a much more militant agenda: "We will fight until the end!". Nikol and the other leaders of the opposition had to hide until they turned themselves to the police in June 2009. Nikol was then accused of murder and mass disorder. He would spend the next two years in prison.

Since then, he has learned a lot. Over are the days of the serious politician Nikol Paschinyan, who was just dressed just like others politicians. Nowadays you see him as an activist, marching all the day with a megaphone through the streets. His political agenda remained nearly the same, as he is a liberal and a MP for the liberal coalition "Yelk". It's a formation of petty bourgeois businessmen but Nikol is able to represent himself as an activist just like the students.

Because it's a democratic movement, his demands are for free and fair elections, and his rejection of Serj and his party, he is very popular. He's always addressing the people and tries to present himself as transparent and anti-corrupt. In this regard he is very open and always calls for open talks. That's also the reason why we saw public talks with him and Serj or President Armen Sargsyan.

What is the situation of the working class and of the youth in Armenia today?

Both live under terrible conditions. The official unemployment rate is 20 per cent; jobs are rare. There is no prospect for the youth because the economy in Armenia is very bad. There are many poor people in Armenia who are suffering, as industry was almost completely destroyed in the 90s. Armenia as a former Soviet Republic had a working class which was well organized and had trade unions. The trade unions

still exist but they are very weak and the working class is fragmented.

Nevertheless we have also seen during the political protests strikes at the IT-company Synopsys and the big shopping mall Dalma. In both cases, the workers went on strike and joined the street blockades. The students are well organized and also went on strike. Interestingly Nikol called on the 25th of April for a nationwide labour and student strike, which then didn't take place because the interim government announced that new elections will be held on 1st of May.

So the prime minister resigned but the movement continues. What are the prospects for it?

The people know that the problem wasn't just Serj. He himself had a scandalous luxurious life and it was clear that the people hated him. But they also know that he and his party represent the oligarchs. The movement continues and the slogans go on from #RejectSerj to #RejectHHK (Armenian abbreviation for ARP). In very poor semi-colonies like Armenia the democratic movement always has social demands because people not only want to have free elections but also work, higher rents, bread. Earlier this year we saw something similar in our neighbor country Iran.

Now everybody is preparing for the Parliamentary elections. It's possible that other bourgeois parties like Tsarukyan (founded and led by oligarch Gagik Tsarukyan) will support Paschinyan. He himself announced that he and Yelk will take part in the elections. That's also the reason why now the mobilizations and acts of civil disobedience have stopped. They will now go to the other cities and do their election campaign. Paschinyan has a chance to win but it's not sure. He is very popular at the moment.

It will be very interesting to see how the elections will go, whether there will be corruption and fraud or not. It seems likely because the whole state apparatus is under the control of the ARP. This party functions also like a mafia body, which is also determined to use criminal methods in order to secure their rule.

Do you want to add something?

I think the mass protests in Armenia with the victory over Serj Sargsyan open a new chapter in the Near and Middle East. In recent years we saw mass protests in Kurdistan, Iran and now in Armenia. In a region that's very explosive and fragile, the Armenian "Velvet Revolution" (as it is called by Paschinyan and his supporters) showed that victory is possible. We haven't seen that since the Arab Spring with the overthrow of Ben Ali and Husni Mubarak in Tunisia and Egypt. Since then we also saw that the overthrow of one ruler is not enough and the masses in Armenia will have the same experience.

I do not consider the recent events in Armenia as a revolution because the old capitalist class is still exploiting the country and the working class. There is also no revolutionary party in Armenia "â€" but experiences like this help us to build revolutionary organizations. Victories like this enhance the class consciousness of the protestors. The youth, who made this victory possible, will remember their strength. Other oppressed and exploited masses like the Kurdish people, the Iranian working class but also the sisters and brothers of the Azerbaijani and Georgian working classes will learn from the mass protests. They will, together with the Armenian masses, see that total victory is only possible on an international level.

[LeftEast](#)

30 April 2018, by robm

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The shared legacies of Martin Luther King and Ambedkar

29 April 2018, by Monobina Gupta

These conversations were taking place at a time when Dalits across India were taking to the streets, protesting the recent Supreme Court mandated changes to The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. [1] [2] Like King, Ambedkar mobilised his community against untouchability and the structures of caste apartheid. The coalescence of such events – looking back at the legacy of King in the US and witnessing militant Dalit protests at home – could not but bring to mind the shared predicament of two communities separated by geography.

Five decades after the civil rights movement and more than six decades after India adopted the constitution framed by Ambedkar, racial and caste discrimination as well as inequality run deep in the fabrics of both countries. Discrimination along caste and racial lines have been and still are structured by social, political and cultural institutions. Like King, Ambedkar-led movements against untouchability fought for Dalit representation in parliament, drew up a constitution which, he hoped, would ensure equal rights to all Indians, regardless of caste or religion. Yet, in both cases, much work remains to be done.

At the same time, there can be little doubt that splintered in more ways than one, Black and Dalit movements have come to strongly assert their presence in public and political spheres. They are channelling their energies through different

organisations. The Black Lives Matter movement, one might argue, has its Indian counterpart in the Bhim Army, among other such groups. The Dalit community is, much like the African American community, innovating with new kinds of resistance. And as resistance becomes more diverse and less centralised, the powers that be are pressing down harder.

Highlighting this caste/race analogy, Rajesh Sampath, an assistant professor at the Brandeis University writes: “Although some progress was made in the 20th century that allowed greater inclusivity and equity – particularly in higher education – many issues remain despite constitutional bans on caste discrimination.” [3] He stresses that “in America, cultural and political segregation of the public space continues to occur despite anti-segregation laws,” drawing attention to statistics revealing that as of June, out of 467 Americans who were killed by the police across the country since the beginning of 2015, 136 had been African Americans.

Now consider the National Crime Records Bureau’s latest data on crimes against Dalits. Between 2006 and 2016, the crime rate against Dalits rose more than eight times (746%). [4] In 2006, there were 2.4 crimes per 100,000 Dalits. That figure shot up to 20.3 in 2016. The angry reaction of the community to the Supreme Court’s March 20 judgment – mandating a preliminary inquiry by a probe officer, deputy superintendent

of police to authenticate a complaint of casteist slur or abuse against a public servant – needs to be assessed in this context.

At least nine people were killed in the recent protests in the aftermath of the judgment. The apex court held the view that the misuse of the Atrocity Act necessitates legislative safeguards. But the question remains: is misuse not a part and parcel of every Act and its implementation?

Meanwhile, attacks on the Dalit community continue. In Gujarat, a 21-year-old Dalit youth was killed by Kshatriya men for owning and riding a horse in the village. [5] Close on the heels of that horrific incident, a nearly 5000-strong mob in Rajasthan set the houses of a sitting and former legislator in Rajasthan on fire. [6] In the midst of such violence came the prime minister’s facile statement. Addressing a gathering on April 4, Modi boasted that “no government has, perhaps, given respect to Babasaheb the way our government has. [7] Instead of dragging him into politics, we should all try to walk on the path he has shown us ...”

Modi seemed to be unaware of the irony that he himself was “dragging” the Dalit leader into politics. He was using Ambedkar’s name to engage in petty brinkmanship vis-à-vis his political adversaries. Ambedkar is today as much an electoral pawn for the BJP as he is for the entire political class. There is, however, also an added irony to the BJP’s narrative. The

party going all out to woo Dalits and appropriate Ambedkar is the very same party that cut its teeth in Savarna/Hindutva politics and embraced it as its ideological mission. The BJP, it may be argued, is as unnatural a champion of Dalits as industrialists are of the working class.

The fundamental contradiction in the two ideologies becomes glaring when one considers Ambedkar's categorical denunciation of the *Manusmriti* and the Sangh *parivar's* spirited defence of this Hindu text. Does Narendra Modi, a self-declared follower of Ambedkar, endorse this fundamental tenet of Ambedkarite political thought? The ideological fountainhead of the BJP, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), clearly does not.

In an article in this space, political analyst Alankar quoted RSS ideologue

V.D. Savarkar who said: "*Manusmriti* is that scripture which is most worship-able after Vedas for our Hindu nation and which from ancient times has become the basis of our culture-customs, thought and practice." [8] Savarkar explained that India's rules and practices are rooted in this text. "Today *Manusmriti* is Hindu law," he declared. In saying this, Savarkar hit the nail on the head. Regrettably, the *Manusmriti* does continue to be Hindu law – the reason why Dalits can't own or ride a horse, they can't access common drinking water sources, or enter Hindu temples, or marry outside their caste, or break bread with upper castes, or take a wedding procession through upper caste *mohallas*. The list of taboos sanctioned scripture is far too long to cite in full.

Like race relations in the US, caste relations in India are on a boil. The

ruling BJP invokes Ambedkar and cynically uses his name to maximise electoral power in much the same way that MLK's legacy feeds American politicians' ideas of how far the country has supposedly progressed.

In India, such manipulation did yield rich dividends in 2014 general elections. But since then, Dalit protests have grown louder. The prime minister's latest political prescription to his party's legislators, urging them to spend two nights in Dalit villages to "restore faith" is unlikely to pacify anyone. [9] When our nations celebrate anniversaries taming the memories of radical movements, we might want to forget the fanfare and keep an eye on the ground for what is actually happening. What is actually changing and what isn't.

[The wire](#)

No to Assad, No to all imperialism and solidarity with the Syrian popular classes!

28 April 2018, by **Joseph Daher**

The bombings of the three western powers reportedly targeted three sites in Damascus and Homs, where the Syrian regime was accused of developing, fabricating and stockpiling chemical weapons.

These strikes caused no casualties and most of the installations were evacuated a few days before the attack, thanks to warnings from Russia. The United States, the United Kingdom and France said that the strikes were not aimed at paralyzing the Syrian regime's defences or provoking a "regime change". They were aimed solely at trying to dissuade Bashar al-Assad from using chemical weapons. The three allies said the operation was only a "one time shot". Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov also declared that before the US strikes against Syrian targets, Russia had told US authorities which

parts of Syria represented "red lines" for Moscow, and that US military action had not cross over these lines.

This was in many ways a "remake" of the Washington bombing operation a year before against a Syrian base (emptied a few hours earlier) in April 2017 following chemical attacks by the Assad regime against the locality of Khan Cheikhoun, in northwestern Syria.

Although the US and Russian speeches were more virulent the days following the Western strikes, US President Donald Trump invited his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to the United States on a phone call on Friday, April 20, and said he would be happy to see Putin at the White House.

These strikes did not change the

overall balance of power on the ground. The Damascus regime still controls a little over half of Syrian territory and over 80% of the population, and has continued its offensives and bombing on various areas beyond its control. The night after the Western bombings, the Syrian regime's air force led raids on the Idlib and Hama regions, under the control of various groups of the armed opposition. Syrian military operations and airstrikes continued in various areas since then, including targeting massively notably Yarmouk camp occupied by Islamic state, but in which between 300 to 1000 civilians still remain. Since April 19, 5,000 of the estimated 6,000 civilians left in Yarmouk when the offensive against IS began have fled to the nearby village of Yalda, according to the United Nations. While they are no longer under fire, they are also in dire

need, as Chris Gunness, spokesman for UNRWA, said many of the new arrivals to Yalda are “begging for medicine and are sleeping in the streets”.

In other words, the Assad regime and its allies can continue the massacres against civilian populations with “conventional weapons”.

Doubts about chemical weapons?

Following the Western bombing, a team of experts from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) were prevented until April 21, two weeks after the alleged attacks, to enter the city of Duma to investigate because of restrictions imposed by the Syrian and Russian authorities, while several doctors claimed to have been pressured by the Syrian regime, which threatened them with reprisals if they revealed anything to the press or the inspectors and forced them to get rid of all samples taken.

As a reminder, in November 2017, one month after a fact-finding mission led by the OPCW and the UN Security Council, which had concluded that Damascus had committed a sarin attack on Khan Sheikhoun, in north-west of Syria, which had killed at least 83 people, Russia had blocked the renewal of the investigators’ mandate which had just ended.

Since 2014, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has reportedly investigated 70 cases of gas attacks in Syria, out of a total of 370 reports, almost all of them by the Syrian regime with some exceptions from the jihadist group of the Islamic State.

Some expressed doubts about the regime’s use of chemical weapons, because of its current military superiority, and that there was therefore no point in using it. This is to say the least a quite weak argument: Israel is militarily superior to the Palestinians, but that does not prevent it from using white phosphorus. And what about the United States, which has confirmed

that it fired white phosphorus shells in IS-controlled areas in Mosul, Iraq, and possibly in Raqqa, Syria? The main purpose of using chemical weapons is to spread terror among local populations in Syria and elsewhere.

No to all imperial and regional powers!

The military intervention of the Western powers only sought to serve their internal and external national political interests of these ruling elites. The United States, the United Kingdom and France do not care about Syrian civilians or other popular classes in the region. Their previous military interventions in different parts of the world and support for dictatorships in the region testify to the lack of considerations regarding civilians and human rights violations. In the recent past, for example, the invasion and the American and British occupation of Iraq in 2003 caused the death of millions of people. These same states did not welcome massively Syrian refugees and other nationalities, on the contrary, very often pursuing racist and security policies against them. The Mediterranean Sea was transformed in a big cemetery by the European Unions with thousands of people dying trying to reach European countries by sea.

More generally, we must denounce all the foreign interventions that oppose the aspirations of democratic changes in Syria, whether in the form of support for the regime (Russia, Iran, Hezbollah) by participating in its violent and deadly war against the Syrian civilians or claiming to be “friends of the Syrian people” (Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey), but supporting the most reactionary forces of the opposition, particularly Islamic fundamentalist movements that oppose the original objectives of the popular uprising started in March 2011.

Just as we must denounce the multiple military interventions in Syria of for example the Turkish led invasion of Afrin and violation of human rights in

these areas, especially against Kurdish civilian population, the US led International coalition bombing civilians in Syria and Iraq, the Russian bombing of Idlib and and other areas targeting civilians.

Similarly we should oppose Assad’s military operations leading to much suffering, destructions and forced displacement of civilians.

This does not mean that we don’t oppose similarly the reactionary organisations such as Hay’at Tahrir Sham, Islamic state and other Islamic fundamentalist movements present in some areas outside of regime controlled areas and committing as well Human Rights violations against civilians.

To choose one type of imperialism or authoritarianism over another is to guarantee the stability of the capitalist system and the exploitation and oppression of peoples.

Some say that we do not condemn Russia and Iran in Syria because they are invited by the Assad regime, unlike the United States for example. Let’s be clear about the illegality, from the point of view of international law, of the presence of US forces in Syria to fight IS (and not the Syrian regime) is a reality. But the legality of the presence of Russian (or Iranian) troops - invited by the Assad regime - does not make them more legitimate. For if we accept this logic, the intervention of the Armed Forces of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council in Bahrain should be regarded as legal in order to quell the popular revolt, since it was conducted at the invitation of the Manama’s regime.

Selective anti-imperialism can’t be basis to develop a political discourse and practice against all forms of interventions and all international and regional powers, but on the opposite it weakens it, especially when it is used to develop in order to deny or obscure the crimes of a dictatorship.

Again as progressive, we can’t ignore the need to support peoples struggling for their liberation and emancipation, even if they are a minority, while opposing all foreign imperialist and regional forces and authoritarian

groups.

Faced with the crimes of the Assad regime that continue on a daily basis

in the silence and the complicity of the international and regional powers that are focused on dividing Syria in regions of influence... we must show our solidarity with the Syrian popular

classes!

Source: *Syria Freedom Forever* 27 April 2018.

In solidarity with Pashtuns

27 April 2018, by **Farooq Tariq**

On 22nd April, over 10,000 packed the historic Mochi Darwaza (Cobbler's Gate) ground in Lahore to listen to leaders of Pashtun Tahafuz (Protection) Movement and Lahore Left Front. The meeting took place despite all efforts of the district management to stop it. They rejected two application of PTM and LLF for permission to hold the rally on "security" grounds.

A night before the public meeting, 10 leaders of PTM and Awami Workers Party were arrested from a hotel where they were staying. After massive spontaneous demonstrations and mass social media campaign in various part of the country, the leaders were released in few hours.

Those arrested included Ali Wazir, a main leader of PTM and a member of Pakistani Marxist's, The Struggle group, Nisar Shah chairmen Jammu Kashmir Awami Workers Party, Fanoos Gujjar, president of Awami Workers Party and Ismat Shah Jahan, the president of Women Democratic Front.

The 27 year old main leader of PTM, Manzoor Pashteen, went on Facebook live watched by over 200,000 within minutes, declared a nationwide protest the next day in protest and holding of the public rally as planned.

Maryam Nawaz Sharif, of PMLN, daughter of the deposed Prime Minister used twitter to condemn the arrests and demanded an immediate release. Bilawal Bhutto, son of Benazir Bhutto, also was among those demanding the release of the arrested leaders.

Ironically, it was the PMLN government in Punjab whose district government was taking all these actions. We knew very well that the Punjab bureaucracy was forced by intelligence agencies not to let this public meeting take place in Lahore.

I had to spend the night in underground as they were hunting me everywhere. The main leader of the Struggle was picked up and threatened he would be treated as a state criminal if he kept supporting and hosting the PTM leaders.

The intelligence agencies made sure that no campaign posters or leaflets were distributed among the public. They raided a press where the leaflets were printed and took away 20,000 printed leaflets advertising the event, after beating and threatening the press workers. No flexes were allowed to be put on any roads and those fixed already were removed immediately.

The commercial media had a total blackout of news of holding the public meeting. Only English *Daily Dawn* printed the news of the arrests of the leaders on the day of the public meeting.

We had made it clear: come what may, we will hold the rally. "If the religious fanatics are allowed to block the roads for weeks in the main capital city Islamabad and no legal action taken against them, why the Left and PTM is not allowed a public meeting at a ground where no traffic is blocked? It is our democratic right of free assembly and we shall not let anybody to take away this right!" I declared in a press release as convener of Lahore Left Front, a united front body

recently formed by the Left groups of Lahore. No mainstream corporate newspapers or electronic media printed this press release.

In the background of such intimidation, threats and arrests, in the morning of 22nd April, the day when public was held saw a dirtiest trick used to spoil the whole event. An underground gutter pipe was diverted to the Mochi Darwaza ground by intelligence agencies and the stinking sewerage water filled the avenue of the public meeting.

We had planned that we will spread some mats and carpets on the ground and people can sit on it, but that was not possible in these circumstances. The PTM activists who arrived early morning at the ground found an alarming situation but we were determined to hold the rally. PTM activists diverted the running water successfully to another gutter pipe after they made a water path in emergency. Dozens of comrades started using all sort of methods to dry up the ground and by 12pm they were successful to a large extent.

We had to arrange the chairs in emergency at an exorbitant cost.

Why all this?

The PTM is the fastest growing mass civic right movement started by Pashtun youth in the last few decades. It has taken over the hearts and minds of Pashtun youth who are victims of state and religious terrorism for over 17 years after 9/11. The PTM started as a small organization in 2014 by Manzoor Pashteen, a local student

leader for clearing the mines from tribal areas. Many had been killed by these land mines.

After killing of Nageeb Ullah Mahsud, a young social media activist, in Karachi early this year by police in an 'encounter' after they declared him a religious terrorist, a massive campaign against police action was started in all parts of Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

Manzoor Pashteen and Ali Wazir were the leaders of this movement. Ali Wazir, is a Marxist who had lost 17 members of his family killed by Taliban in Wana in the FATA region and all his property destroyed by the fanatics. Still he refused to bow down and kept his struggle against religious fundamentalists and other forces of oppression going on with courage and mass support.

The PTM leaders have addressed thousands in various parts of Pakistan during the last two months

Their demands are very simple and genuine. Bring back the missing persons. Compensate those who have suffered heavy losses due to the destructions of their homes and shops. Compensate the traders whose shops were emptied after they were forced to leave their trade during military operations. If there is charge against any one, present them to the court within 24 hours for trial instead of extra judicial killings and abductions. They also demand the state to break all links with fanatics. They said that there are no "good or bad" Taliban they are all the same "religious terrorists. A thesis that we have been promoting for years in all our articles and booklets.

These demands were challenging the way military operations were conducted against religious terrorists and on several occasions, hundreds of thousands had to leave their homes. Mass internal migration had made the lives of many thousands Pashtuns a hell for years.

In this background, the Lahore Left Front decided in their first meeting in end of March that they will hold a Pashtun Solidarity March in Lahore on 22nd April. On 8th April, PTM leader Manzoor Pashteen, speaking to thousands in Peshawar, announced that we will hold a public meeting in Lahore. After consultation, LLF decided that PTM would hold the rally and LLF will be hosting it and put in every effort to make it a success.

A day before the public meeting, the intelligence agencies promoted a local group to hold rally against our rally. There were around 300 on motorbikes moving around the whole city without any permission of the district management, in fact they were facilitated to go on by state actors, declaring us as traitors and threatening us for dire consequences.

The entry of the voiceless

The PTM Mochi Gate, Lahore meeting was a massive success. Thousands of Pashtun workers in Lahore who are subject to racial discriminations and subject to all sort of negative comments poured into the ground. This rally became voice of the voiceless. They did not need chairs to sit-in, as is the case in most public meetings of the elite's parties political meetings. They did not need the food normally provided by the organizers, a normal practice by the parties of the rich. They did not need any transport from different parts of the city to come to the venue. They came on their own.

It was a tremendous act of unity and solidarity among the Punjabi and Pashtun workers.

The emotions were running high. There were a great response by the audience to the speeches. Freedom was the main slogans, a freedom from hunger and state and non-state actors violence.

The main civil rights organizations in Lahore had declared the complete support for this event and they were all there. The Women Action Forum, the Joint Action Committee for Peoples Rights, the Anjuman Mazarin Punjab, all came in solidarity with Pashtuns.

The daughters of revolutionary poets Habib Jalib, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Tahira Habib and Salima Hashmi, sister of late Asma Jehanghir, Hina Jilani and daughter of Asma Jehanghir, Munizae Jahangir, all were there with their friends and colleagues.

When I spoke, as convenor of the Lahore Left Front, about the plight of Pashtun workers in Lahore, I got the tremendous applause. However, it was Ali Wazir and Manzoor Pashtun who got the maximum applause and standing ovations from the audience.

Manzoor Pashteen, probably the most popular youth leader Pakistan in the last few decades, declared to hold a rally in Swat on 29th April and on 12th May at Karachi. "Now there is some one here to take care of you, your will not be treated as orphans anymore" he declared. Withdraw the police reports registered against students who supported this public meeting, withdraw the rustication of Pashtun students. Reinstate Dr. Ammar Ali Jan who had lost his job as professor at University of Punjab because of his vociferous support for the PTM's struggle and their demands.

This was the first public event organised by the Lahore Left Front and it was a tremendous success. After this rally the LLF has now become known to some extent to the working class of Lahore, that cannot be ignored in politics and the progressive workers and youth have finally found a platform for their struggles that is genuine, revolutionary and trustworthy. It was able to lend the necessary timely logistic and political support to the most growing mass civil rights campaign of Pakistan.

24th April 2008

Finland's Red Women

26 April 2018, by **Kristen R. Ghodsee**

In his recent New Year's address, Finnish president Sauli Niinistö shocked many by discussing the still festering wounds of the 1918 Finnish Civil War. [10] One hundred years ago, a red lantern was lit in the tower of the Helsinki Workers' House late in the evening on January 26, signaling the beginning of brutal hostilities between Finland's socialist Reds and its nationalist Whites. [11]

Having just celebrated the centenary of their independence from Russia, Niinistö reminded Finns that "in the early days of independence we were not 'together,' but very badly apart. This cannot simply be swept away. We must have the courage to be honest about history, because only honesty creates a foundation for trust."

Until recently, part of the "swept away" history of the Civil War were the stories of the Women's Red Guards, and the brutal rapes and summary executions that followed their capture and internment in Finland's concentration camps.

In the summer of 2016, I was a visiting scholar at the University of Helsinki, and a colleague agreed to show me around her hometown of Tampere, or "Red Tampere," as it is often called. The site of the worst urban warfare ever fought in the Nordic countries, the Battle of Tampere was the bloodiest of the Civil War. In a city museum, I stumbled on a photograph of the old City Hall, the last fortress of the Reds. According to the placard beneath the photo, it had been defended by a company of Red Women's Guards.

Curious, I consulted my English guide to the exhibit and learned that, "Although women operated mostly in nursing and supply in the Red Guard, in the spring of 1918, two armed female companies were created comprising around three hundred women. The youngest female Red

Guard soldiers were fifteen-year-old girls."

Finland has a long history of leftist women's activism, and in 1906, female socialists fought to make Finland the first country to grant universal suffrage, allowing women both to vote and stand for elected office. Twelve years later, factory workers in Finland's industrial south as well as maids and other servants volunteered to serve in all-female paramilitary units in solidarity with the Red cause. At the start, they performed traditional support roles, but later graduated to guard duty and eventually to combat at the front.

What motivated these women to take up arms? To this day, this remains an incendiary question among many ordinary Finns whose grandparents or great-grandparents fought in the Civil War. According to historian Tauno Saarela, Finland experienced a period of "enforced silence" following the end of hostilities in 1918. The ultranationalist Whites who ruled the country in the 1920s and 1930s demonized the Reds, painting them as barbaric, unpatriotic stooges of Russian Bolshevism. In official discourse, the Whites fought a "War for Freedom" to maintain Finland's independence even though Lenin had officially recognized that independence at the end of 1917. [12]

The first account of the Civil War written from the perspective of the Reds appeared in 1960 as a novel: Väinö Linna's *The Uprising*, the second part of his Under a Northern Star trilogy. Linna's book ushered in a new era of Finnish historiography, but it wasn't until the end of the twentieth century when scholars finally turned their attention to the role of the women who fought as Red Guards. And outside of Finland, few feminists or women's activists have ever heard about this fascinating moment in European history.

Many of the Finnish women who joined the Red Guards were modern, urban dwellers who believed that only socialism would lead to women's full economic and political emancipation. Most of them were young and idealistic, frustrated by ongoing exploitation. Fifteen-years-old sounds young to modern ears, but child labor was common. As waged laborers, they were subject to constant sexual harassment from their employers, and enjoyed few legal protections from abuse.

The women and girls who joined the Red Guards cut their hair short and wore men's trousers, challenging traditional notions of bourgeois femininity. Photos of these women capture the confident, unsmiling faces of those willing to fight for a better world. One of my favorite images shows two members of the Turku Women's Guard, twenty-year-old Helena Aalto and twenty-eight-year-old Elli Vuokko. They stand in loose men's uniforms, their short hair shoved up under casket caps. Helena rests her left arm on Elli's right shoulder, and both hold long rifles. They look calm and determined.

Descriptions of Red Women's Guards in White newspapers from the time were filled with violent vitriol. Accused of being prostitutes and "wolf bitches," women like Helena and Elli faced a Finnish society unwilling to accept challenges to established gender roles. Middle-class Finnish society feared their fierce independence. Even sympathetic Red comrades questioned their political commitment and the value of their military contribution. As in so many leftist movements throughout history, revolutionary men easily accepted their female comrades as cooks and nurses, but squirmed when women asked for full equality on the battlefield.

Though the Whites executed and

starved tens of thousands of Reds after the war, they were particularly ruthless with the Women's Guards. White soldiers raped and mutilated them before shooting them dead. Their bodies were stripped naked or twisted into obscene positions. Helena and Elli were among those lost in May 1918.

A 2016 study by a young historian, Marjo Liukkonen, uncovered evidence revealing that the Whites executed far more women and children in the infamous Hennala concentration camp than previously believed. Until recently, Finns learned that women and children captured by the Whites in the final months of the Civil War had been sent home before the mass internment of Reds in Hennala. By digging through the archives and reading the memoirs of Hennala survivors, Liukkosen argues that more than one hundred women were executed before they could be registered at the camp. Similarly, the bodies of murdered children, some of them infants, were taken away and buried outside of the camp to hide that they had ever been interned.

The total number of women who

served as members of the Red Guard is still unknown, although most historians estimate that about 2,000 were active combatants out of a total force of between 90,000 to 100,000. Thousands more Finnish women supported the Red Guards in noncombat roles, many of them wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters of men at the front.

In a country where ordinary people still feel uncomfortable discussing the Civil War, it's hard to measure the legacy of these fallen Women's Guards on the development of women's rights. But there is no doubt that Finnish women, and particularly Finnish women of the Left, forced social change at a pace unparalleled in other Western democracies.

During the Cold War, Finland's Communist Party (SKP) enjoyed parliamentary success as part of a coalition with the Democratic League of the People of Finland (SKDL), and their most prominent politician from 1944 to 1971 was a woman, Hertta Kuusinen, who served as general secretary of the SKDL from 1952 to 1958 and vice-chairperson from 1958

to 1970. She was a member of the central committee of the Communist Party for three decades from 1944 until she retired from politics in 1974. Kuusinen would later go on to serve as vice-president for the Women's International Democratic Federation, an international leftist organization that advocated for women's rights across the globe.

Today, Finland is one of the most gender equal nations, with women reaching all of the highest positions in government. In 1990, Finland's Elisabeth Rehn became the first female minister of defense in the world. Ten years later, Finns elected their first woman president, Tarja Halonen. In 2003, Anneli Jäätteenmäki became the first female prime minister. By 2015, women held 41.5 percent of seats in the Finnish parliament.

The Finnish Revolution fell short, buried in a brutal counteroffensive supported by German reinforcements. [13] But the legacy of the Left in that country lives on and the sacrifices of countless women like Helena and Elli were perhaps not completely in vain. [14] [15]

Behind the social protests of January 2018

25 April 2018, by **Fathi Chamkhi**

An unending economic crisis

Tunisia continues to experience the longest economic crisis of its contemporary history. The poor results accumulated year after year are the consequence of an economic system distorted by thirty years of neoliberal capitalist politics in the context of a redeployment of an aggressive neo-colonial character.

Meanwhile, the popular classes are forced to pay a high price for the maintenance of an economy whose essential objective is to procure

maximum profits to foreign capital operating in Tunisia. Foreign capital controls a third of enterprises in the industrial and services sectors: in total 1,538 enterprises, while 950 others are held in partnership with local capital. Around 62% of these 2,488 enterprises enjoy offshore status, which offers them benefits and favours comparable to those offered in tax havens.

Foreign capital is responsible for half of Tunisia's exports. Of course, the country only receives crumbs from the very profitable activities of foreign capital, while paying the social, economic and environmental cost of these activities.

To allow this capitalist system of domination and exploitation to reproduce itself, from the end of the 1980s the local economy was subjected to policies of restructuring and free trade. The then regime appealed to the services of the IMF on three occasions: in 1986 then after the revolution, in 2013 and then in 2016. Meanwhile, the European Union (EU), with the support of the dictator Ben Ali, included Tunisia in the Mediterranean free trade area. Currently, the EU is attempting to "enlarge and deepen" free trade. [16]

The reproduction of this neo-colonial capitalist relationship requires the Tunisian state to continue to mobilise

the necessary funds in foreign currency to allow foreign capital to operate and make big profits in the country. This state has become obsessed with obtaining more euros and dollars and everything is permissible to achieve this: exporting still more primary products, selling off public enterprises to the benefit of foreign interests, subcontracting cheap tourism to European operators, encouraging Tunisians, notably those best professionally qualified, to emigrate.

Nothing currently indicates in the slightest reversal of this trend. On the contrary, the main economic indicators continue to slide. The crisis of public finances is currently one of the most serious aspects of the crisis. The government finds it increasingly difficult, despite a significant fall in social expenditure, to mobilise the funds necessary to finance its budget. A massive recourse to indebtedness has kept the state coffers afloat until now and hidden the gravity of the crisis. In 2010, borrowing was at 17% of the state budget, while by 2017 it was 30%. [17]

The crisis of public finances is in turn fed by the debt crisis, but recourse to foreign borrowing also has its limits. The state is finding it increasingly difficult to mobilise the funds necessary to meet the growing budget deficit from its own resources. It is paying the price for its erroneous choices in the area of tax policy, foreign debt, the repayment of the debt contracted by the dictatorship, public investment, the fight against corruption and so on.

Given the gravity of the crisis and the recent developments such as the fact that the EU has confirmed Tunisia's classification on the black list for laundering of money and financing of terrorism and, since last January, the blockade by the jobless of nearly all production of phosphate, an important source of foreign currency for the state, the some 10 billion dinars of new borrowing envisaged in the 2018 finance law, or 30% of the budget, becomes fairly hypothetical. It isn't enough to control a rather chaotic situation. It is expected that, under the pressure of the crisis of public finance, the current government or

any future one will be tempted, especially under IMF pressure, to try to take more antisocial measures which will aggravate the situation further.

A general review of the economic situation and the macroeconomic indicators only confirms the gravity of the situation. In addition to the state budget running at a record deficit of 7%, the trade deficit was at a historic high of 15,592 million dinars in 2017, against 8,297 million in 2010. [18] It should also be noted that this deficit is equal to all the state's external short-term commitments. These short-term credits have themselves doubled in volume since 2010.

The current balance of external payments was 10% of GDP in 2017. The level of foreign currency reserves is currently equivalent to 84 days importation. Inflation is at 6.9%, but this rate is deemed well below the reality by the UGTT trade union federation. Finally, the rate of growth realised in 2017 was 2.1%, a seemingly positive result which should be tempered by the fact that 2017 saw a spectacular leap in short, medium and long term external indebtedness.

A deep social crisis

The social consequences in Tunisia of this neo-colonial capitalist redeployment have been dramatic. The official overall unemployment rate is currently at 15.3%. [19] In the front line of the social crisis are university graduates seeking their first job. Only a third of them have found stable work, the rest condemned to a perpetual round of unemployment and precarious work. Women are worst off with respect to this, with the rate of unemployment being 19% for men and 41% for women.

At the regional level there is a significant imbalance between the coastal areas and the interior of the country, with the latter experiencing insupportable levels of unemployment and under-employment. The "middle class" is increasingly drawn into the maelstrom of the crisis.

As for those with jobs, working conditions continue to worsen and

their purchasing power is melting away in the face of rampant inflation. Those with a stable job, whether in the public or private sector, have been able to limit in part the negative effects of inflation. Thanks to a high rate of unionisation and above all the solidness and combativity of a series of union structures, they have generally succeeded in imposing wage rises. This is not true for precarious workers and the unemployed who have seen their living conditions worsen considerably.

The worsening of the social and economic situation increasingly pushes workers and enterprises towards informal, indeed subterranean activities, the significance of which varies according to the sources. But all locate its weight as being well above 50% of total economic activity. This is one of the fundamental manifestations of the impasse the country has been in since the late 1980s.

We should distinguish between the "informal sector" and the "parallel sector":

- The "informal sector" has undergone a considerable growth during the economic crisis which began in 2009. It is above all a sector of refuge for workers excluded from the so called formal, or modern, sector. A large part of the economic activities involved are "survival strategies" adopted by the most deprived who are left with no other possibilities by the capitalist system. [20]

- The "parallel sector" has a more pejorative connotation, meaning the sphere where all forms of illegal or criminal activities are pursued. This sector is increasingly taking on the form of a social scourge. It is an entire layer of local economic activities outside the law which avoid the tax system and are damaging to the public finances. They also damage the so called structured sector, notably by competing with it through selling products most of which are imported illegally.

The corruption generated by this parallel economy has spread to all interstices of the state apparatus, the economic sphere and society in

general. Corruption, which has always existed in Tunisia, has increasingly taken on phenomenal proportions. The regime of Ben Ali and associated families had certainly profited from corruption, not only to fill their pockets, but above all as a political means to assure domination. This cancer has in recent years reached the phase of metastases! This poses economic and political problems which weigh heavily on any attempt at social change of a progressive character.

A political crisis}}}

The decay and then the fall of Bourguiba's regime in 1987 proved the inability of the local bourgeoisie to fulfil the historic tasks of a national social and economic programme. Worse still, this same bourgeoisie had capitulated to the imperialist powers under the regime of Ben Ali, content to play the role of relay to neo-colonial economic interests.

The revolutionary insurrection of late 2010 and early 2011 put an end to the anti-democratic regime of Ben Ali. It was the expression of a profound national and social sentiment, a rejection of this political and economic submission to foreign powers.

The political parties and successive governments over the past seven years have been generally content to take up where the last government of the "ancien regime" left off. This orientation, contrary to the popular aspirations expressed by the revolution, is the main cause of the aggravation of the crisis and the general worsening of the situation of the country.

The current government led by Youssef Chahed, in place since August 2016, is a "national unity" coalition led by the two biggest

parties emerging from the last elections in 2014, Nidaa Tounes and the Islamist party, Ennahdha, and is the umpteenth attempt to halt Tunisia's descent into the inferno. Chahed inaugurated his term of office recognising the gravity of the crisis, while affirming that the only remedy was to continue the same policies, accelerating the cadences of structural reforms. After a first chaotic year, Chahed decided to take the bull by the horns and programmed a battery of anti-social measures through the 2018 finance law which increased the rate of VAT as well as taxes and customs duties on various products and services. A new spike in prices followed, affecting fuels among other categories. The inflation rate rose from 3.8% in August 2016 to 6.9% currently!

Among the new measures was the introduction of a new tax of 1% on income, the so-called "social participation of solidarity". Meanwhile, new measures reduced state subsidies to certain basic food products. With these measures, Chahed knew he was taking a big risk! Not only because of their unpopularity, but also because of the breadth of the criticisms from all quarters of his government and its very disappointing record. These critiques came not only from the opposition, but also from inside the ruling coalition, indeed from Nidaa Tounes, Chahed's own party.

That is why the government has been careful to space out the application of its measures throughout the year underway, to reduce the risks of a new social explosion. It has also made many efforts at communication to attempt to justify them. Chahed and his ministers often refer to the negative balance sheet they have inherited from previous governments, they also invoke the sacrifices needed to exit from the crisis and revive the economy.

Tunisians are told in the face of the spectacular degradation of their living conditions that their sacrifices will soon be at an end and that 2018 will be the last year of the crisis, with growth resuming in 2019.

But it is all in vain! The gravity and persistence of the economic crisis, the breadth of the social disaster and above all the long list of broken promises have tried the patience of Tunisians and led to feelings of bitterness and anger. The social protests of the week of January 8 are strong proof of a government which has lost direction, increasing abandoned by its political allies, and unable to deal with the country's dramatic situation.

The government's days are undoubtedly numbered. Among the few remaining loyal to Chahed are the Islamist party Ennahdha and, unlikely as it may sound, the leadership of the very powerful trade union federation the UGTT, whose general secretary has simply said that Tunisia has had too many changes of government.

The social and economic situation in Tunisia is serious. To confront the multiple and continued social aggressions from a decadent capitalist regime, the Tunisian popular classes have experienced everything, or almost: from resignation to political oppression to revolutionary insurrection, from democratic elections to manipulation by retrograde and counter-revolutionary forces.

But far from weakening the determination and combativity of the popular classes, these experiences have been beneficial at the level of political education and awareness of their interests as dominated and exploited classes. Nothing indicates today that they will stop half way, and the coming weeks and months are rich with positive promise.

The meaning of the Italian right's victory

24 April 2018, by **Sinistra Anticapitalista**

Though no new government has been formed yet, the threat of the right on the rise was clear from the March elections. In this statement issued after the election and translated into English by Antonello Zecca, the socialist group Sinistra Anticapitalista explains the social dynamics that led to the result and discusses the tasks ahead for the left.

The outcome of the March 4 general elections is disheartening and clearly shows how alarming Italy's political and social situation has become. It shows the unfavorable balance of forces between the classes after so many years of austerity policies and repeated setbacks and divisions among the working class and social movements.

1. The Democratic Party (DP) and its Secretary General Matteo Renzi suffered a bad defeat after having implemented neoliberal policies, chiefly against workers' rights and the public education system. The reactionary policies against migrants implemented by incumbent Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni and Interior Minister Marco Minniti with the goal of winning support from rightward-moving voters not only didn't prevent other parties like the right-wing League, which has made racism and xenophobia its trademark, from attracting votes, but it contributed to the division and weakening of the working class, whose suffering has been blamed on migrants.

The DP's defeat dragged down every individual and party that was associated with it, now or in the past. Pier Luigi Bersani, Massimo D'Alema and Pietro Grasso—all leaders of the Democratic and Progressive Movement (DPM), a split to the left from the DP—couldn't possibly be perceived as an alternative to the DP after having supported its policies for so many years. Neither could the Italian Left, a right-wing split from the

Party of Communist Refoundation (PCR) play a positive role after governing with the DP in many municipal and local councils and participating in Free and Equal, an electoral coalition in partnership with the DPM. The future may not have anything in store for this political force, which would be undeserved in any event.

As happened with the Romano Prodi government [the center-left government named after its prime minister, in which the PCR participated from 2006 to 2008], the distrust of and revulsion for a party like the DP, which still calls itself and is still considered to be left wing, had negative consequences for all the forces that define themselves similarly. The rebuilding of a genuine left alternative, which was started in this round of elections with the formation of the Power to the People election list, will take some time.

2. The Five Star Movement (5SM) won a landslide victory that went beyond expectations. The anger, frustration and desire for an alternative to the mainstream parties among voters found an outlet in the party of Beppe Grillo [the Italian comedian and founder of 5SM] and Luigi Di Maio [the current party leader]. Although the 5SM has had a hard time governing in major local councils such as Rome and Milan, it was perceived by a great number of people, particularly in the South, and among various social layers as the best way to achieve rapid political change. This was all the more so because 5SM's contradictory and ill-defined political stances appeal to very different layers of society. The 5SM was and will be a decisive player in what takes place next, with an essential role in managing Italian capitalism.

The advances of the 5SM notwithstanding, voter turnout remained low, close to the level of

2013. More than a quarter of eligible voters didn't find anybody to vote for. Prominent among those who didn't cast a ballot is a large number of the exploited and the marginalized.

3. What is more shocking is the double-digit increase in national support for a reactionary and xenophobic party like the League, whose leader is Matteo Salvini. The poisoning of significant layers of the working class by this demagogue, with his hatred toward migrants, represents a decomposition of solidarity and of collective democratic action that is a serious threat for the future. Within the center-right coalition, Forza Italia was surpassed by the League, with the result that former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi may be eclipsed. It is important to note the success of another nationalist and reactionary party, Brothers of Italy, to recognize how deep the shift to the gone in public opinion and political conventional wisdom.

Importantly, the right-wing coalition fell short of reaching the 40 percent threshold, which would allow it to form a government on its own, but its success shows it will be key political force in the current political circumstances and its success is evidence of the abject failure of previous center-left governments. It should also be noted that Casa Pound and Forza Nuova (New Force), the two main neo-fascist political movements in Italy, both unfortunately managed to escape electoral irrelevance and get new nationwide audiences.

The outcome of these elections sets up an contradictory institutional situation since none of the three coalitions/parties reached an absolute majority, and none seems inclined to participate in any sort of grand coalition. This could lead to an unusual assortment of alliances between heterogeneous and weakened

forces, which could be difficult for the ruling class to handle. Also, a political crisis could force new general elections. The situation makes it obvious that the only antidote to a further shift to the right is working class self-activity, which is now more urgent than ever.

4. This election setback for the working-class movement and the disintegration of a working class electoral alternative must be attributed to the leadership of the largest unions, who have subscribed to austerity policies managed by the center-left political leadership and have opposed workers fighting back against them, even when conditions were ripe for it and there was a strong demand from workers. Union leaders are that much more to blame having signed concession agreements in collective bargaining, which bosses have used to take back what they were forced to agree to when the working class movement was stronger. An agreement with the employers and their association (the General Confederation of Italian Industry) at end of February, for example, will act as a straitjacket on workers.

The leaders of CGIL, CISL and UIL—the three main Italian trade union organizations—want to preserve their apparatuses and their political role by negotiating concessions in the name of what's best for workers. We are facing a twin disaster: on the one hand, the victory of the right in the election, and on the other, the full-

fledged class collaboration on the part of major trade union organizations. We can't build a left that challenges neoliberalism—and, still less so, that challenges capitalism—if we don't start from the social struggle and trade union organizing on the basis of the immediate demands of the working class. This is why we think it's necessary to build a united front involving all unionists at the grassroots and the left opposition within CGIL [the most left wing among largest trade union organizations], which will face the challenge of sending its message at the union's conference this year.

5. The electoral outcome of the left-wing Potere al Popolo (Power to the People, PtP) wasn't what would have been hoped for under the current political circumstances. But it should not be underestimated. It is a good starting point since the coalition had faced major hurdles. The rebuilding of a strong pole on the left will have to be achieved by resisting the scatter of political organizations and social movements, but this has just begun with the last three months' hard political work before the election. Positively, this involved the activation of new layers of the left and the reactivation of old layers. If we hope to begin the process of building social resistance and mass movements, this appears to be a meaningful way to do so.

The PtP's showing was not strong

enough to win it representation in parliament—though there were some breakthroughs in local elections—but it is still a good foundation to start from, all the more so given that we are in a political conjuncture that has already swept away diverse forces that called themselves to left wing. It is up to those who support the PtP to progress from election campaigning to daily activity with the aim of rebuilding mobilizations to fight the attacks that the ruling class demands of the government in the interests of the capitalist system and the neoliberal framework of the European Union.

Sinistra Anticapitalista has also been building the PtP from the onset with common activity to support its candidates and its political message. A heartfelt thanks to all the comrades who were engaged in that difficult task and who, despite the complex situation, helped to achieve some political and organizational breakthroughs that will be surely be helpful in the future. Sinistra Anticapitalista renews its commitment to consolidating the convergence and unity actions of the forces that gave founded PTP, with the goal of making it larger and developing political debates, so that it will be up to the task of being one of main political actors in the new period that March 4 certainly opened up.

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Why are Shenzhen police regulating labour relations in the food delivery business?

23 April 2018, by China Labour Bulletin

The municipal traffic police announced a package of stringent regulations earlier this month targeted at food delivery bike riders who disregard traffic lights, drive in the wrong lane or go in the wrong direction, and use vehicles that are

not up to standard.

The new regulations stipulate that food delivery workers who commit three consecutive traffic violations will lose their jobs. The new three-step system penalises workers

progressively: a first offence is punished with a one week suspension, a second violation results in a one month suspension, and the third violation means that the employer can dismiss the worker, who then becomes unemployable by any food delivery

platform for a whole year.

The Shenzhen traffic police claim to have already suspended 1,280 food delivery workers for a week, or about ten percent of the city's total, according to the *Guangzhou Daily*.

The regulations also target the offender's employer and colleagues. First time offenders have to go through traffic safety training. If they fail to do so within 15 days, all employees at the offender's delivery platform branch will be slapped with a three-day suspension. Colleagues of a delivery worker involved in a severe or fatal accident will be suspended from work and subject to training: Suspensions vary from one to five days depending on the level of responsibility of the worker and severity of the accident.

In addition, the food delivery company is liable in cases where one of its employees is implicated in a serious accident: After three consecutive traffic violations, the company is put on a list circulated city-wide, and if there is a serious accident, the traffic police will summon company executives.

Food delivery is a highly competitive, fast developing industry. It has also created one of the most dangerous jobs in China. [21] Delivery workers often have to work hectic long days to complete as many orders as possible just to earn a decent salary, often at the expense of their own safety and of

everyone sharing the roads.

Since the Lunar New Year, there have been a staggering 36,000 accidents in Shenzhen involving electric bikes, of which more than 11,000 were linked to food deliveries, according to official statistics. Between 22 February to 13 March there were ten fatal accidents caused by bikes or tricycles in the city, more than in the same period last year.

Critics of the new regulations question the legitimacy of collectively punishing delivery workers. "To hold all workers at a delivery branch collectively accountable for one individual's breach of law may work as a deterrent, but at the same time it sounds awfully similar to the old "collective punishment" (??) system and raises questions of legal legitimacy," Wang Yongjie of the Beijing Zeyong Law Office noted in a Beijing News commentary.

Wang argued that there should be a more balanced approach to the liability of the employee, the branch and the food ordering platform to avoid overstepping the traffic police's authority. However, supporters of more severe punishment hope that the regulations will have a deterrent effect and force the fast-moving food delivery sector to "slow down".

The real question however should be why are the police no longer content with just issuing fines and are instead attempting to regulate labour

relations in the food delivery business?

The job of ensuring a safe working environment as well as decent pay and conditions should be done by China's official union, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU). The union is obviously aware of the structural issues affecting not only the food delivery business but a range of increasingly informal logistic operations like express deliveries and freight transport, occupations primarily filled by rural migrant workers.

The ACFTU has continually emphasised increasing migrant workers' membership but so far the only initiative to establish a food delivery workers' union was in Shanghai last year. [22] There is clearly a need for a similar effort in Shenzhen but at the moment the municipal trade union federation appears to be content to let the police take the lead.

Imposing stringent traffic rules on food delivery workers will not solve the fundamental problems in the industry. The Shenzhen trade union needs to be much more proactive and accept that it has a key role to play in making sure that food delivery workers can do their job safely and without endangering themselves and others in the rush to complete orders.

[China Labour Bulletin](#)
23/03/2018

Jacobin editor: 'No one can say what will happen next'

22 April 2018, by **Alex Bainbridge, Bhaskar Sunkara**

Sunkara visited Australia as a featured speaker at the annual Marxism conference in Melbourne over Easter. *Green Left Weekly's* Alex Bainbridge spoke to him about US politics under President Donald Trump and prospects for socialists.

Can you tell us a bit about politics in the US under Trump?

I think there's been a kind of a breakdown, like in a lot of places, of the traditional, dominant centre-left and centre-right politics "or at least

what's passed for centre-left politics in the United States.

People are looking for alternatives. They're fed up and don't want to support the establishments of either major party. This breakdown led to the

very surprising, unprecedented support for the social democratic campaign of Bernie Sanders [in the 2016 Democrat primaries].

But on the right, it also led to support for Donald Trump, who was opposed bitterly by every part of the Republican Party establishment. They've now had to reconcile themselves to him, obviously, but they fought him tooth and nail during the Republican primaries.

So the real question is, what's going to go forward? Can we revive a kind of left populist option? Trump only has support from, maybe, 35-40% of the population. Or will the establishment get back control of the situation over the next two-to-four years?

This is still undetermined. No one can tell you what's going to happen next in US politics.

Can you tell us about your organisation, the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)?

I've been a DSA member for 10, 11 years. We more or less came out of a anti-establishment left tradition. Many of the founders originally came from Trotskyist backgrounds.

But the actual politics of the group in the 1980s and '90s was a broad-based democratic socialism. So they tended to relate to the left wing of social democratic parties abroad, with some sympathy for the Italian Communist Party.

As it's grown in recent years, we've been able to radicalise it a bit more, so it relates a little more closely with existing far-left groups around the world. But it's a broad tent, with everyone from left social democrats to revolutionary socialists.

Can you tell us how you came to found *Jacobin* magazine and what its aims are?

I founded *Jacobin* [in 2011] when I was an undergraduate. I had been in the DSA for a few years, I had a set of politics and a group of people around me. But the left was so weak, we were having a hard time breaking through organisationally, so we decided to try to propagandise around our ideas.

If you're in a small group, you have to recognise that a lot of what you're going to do is just propaganda and education "even if you have aspirations of doing more.

Part of our idea was to win arguments among a left that was increasingly, especially in the student movement, very anarchistic, to win over people to a more traditional Marxist politics again. [We wanted to] try to make that politics fresh and vibrant, so it just didn't seem like the old, stale and kitschy.

But we also try to win over a new mass constituency around these politics. I think a lot of people who self-identified as left-liberals or as liberals in the US in fact were quite a bit more radical than that. They just never had a language to express it in a country without a longstanding, deep socialist tradition "or rather with a forgotten socialist tradition.

That was the idea and today we have a circulation of about 40,000. We have an online readership that's much higher than that. So it's been a success.

And I do think we've helped pave the way for some of the transformations we're seeing with the growth in the DSA from an organisation when I joined of 5000-6000 people to now around 35,000 people.

Have *Jacobin* and DSA always been linked?

We're not linked officially. [At *Jacobin*] we're independent, we work and collaborate with people in [revolutionary socialist groups such as] the International Socialist Organisation, the US Socialist Alternative and Solidarity.

So we relate to a broad spectrum on the left. Our idea is to create tendencies and ideas across organisational boundaries, and not just be tied up with one organisation. The left is so small that even an organisation the size of the DSA can't be the be-all-and-end-all.

I don't think DSA has the answers, I do think it can be a broad big tent.

With *Jacobin*, we are in favour of a lot

more orthodoxy [on the left]. Not just for the sake of orthodoxy, but because we thought [these ideas were right] around things like the primacy of class, and the need for parties and organisation.

We know we're very far away from a mass party, but we know that if we want to change the world, we have to actually take power. This was kind of an era where the idea of "change the world without taking power" was still very prevalent.

I think we have seen a swing where now the mainstream left is in the mentality of "let's just win elections", so it's maybe been an overcorrection. But our stance is always that if you want to make radical change, you need a party, you need a role for trade union work and all these things that seem very unglamorous, but I think are the foundation for every single victory we've ever had for the past 120 years.

The DSA has experienced significant growth. Could you discuss the context?

Within the DSA, a lot of people who weren't politicised before have suddenly leaped into socialist politics. So people are still getting their footing, trying to understand the arguments and some of the history better.

And it is difficult without a deep tradition. So one of our main tasks is political education, not just perceiving the organisation as a way to do action. Not to say action isn't important, but we don't want people just thrown into socialist politics for two years and burning themselves out.

I wanted to ask about the Bernie Sanders experience and his *Our Revolution* group, and socialists running in Democratic primaries, despite the fact it is a pro-corporate party.

In New York City, for instance, we ran two different races. They both got around 30%. One was as an independent against a Democrat in the general election, one was against an incumbent Democrat but in a Democratic primary.

So socialists have run in different ways. And Socialist Alternative had very successful runs, they won a council position in Seattle with Kshama Sawant. There's been multiple socialist campaigns in Minneapolis that have been quite successful.

So there have been those breakthroughs, but that's a little bit different to what [Sanders'] Our Revolution is trying to do in the Democratic Party.

There is a tradition of running for office to talk about socialism, to have an excuse to knock on someone's door and bring up issues like [the need for a] \$15 minimum wage and other issues. And that's why I would relate to elections.

But then there's the approach of Our Revolution, which is really "We need to get the bastards out" and we need to actually run for everything from dogcatcher up to mayor and governor and so on.

My particular stance is that I don't think this does particular harm. I think it would be a good thing if one batch of Democrats are replaced with people who are left wing. I don't think it's a bad thing. I think it pushes the struggle a little forward. But I do think they're going to run into some sort of structural barriers.

The dilemma is, how do you not just be aloof and hectoring, saying "oh you're just going to fail?" You want to engage with these people. But how do you differentiate a socialist politics from this broader "Berniecrat" politics?

I kind of want one foot in with the Berniecrats and its left wing, but I also want to maintain a distinct vision of what a working-class, radical politics looks like.

Is there anything else you want to say?

I think in general, things are not maybe as bleak as they might seem in the US. If you look, for example, at

what a lot of young people think about immigration, if you look at the general direction things are moving in at a social and cultural level, I think it's somewhat favourable to the left.

And even on policy issues, our key policy platform, the thing we've been working on most within the DSA, is "Medicare for All". I think there is real potential to win a socialised medical system in the United States in the next 10 years or so. And that would mean one-sixth of the largest economy in the world being turned over from private sector into something oriented towards public need.

And I think once people see a functioning system like that, they'll start to demand more of the government. I think that'll move things in a progressive and positive direction for us. I am cautiously optimistic about the next several years.

April 6

[Green Left](#)

From April to June, prolonged turbulence all the way

21 April 2018, by Léon Crémieux

The heart of the conflict is still Macron's determination to strike a fatal blow against the public rail service, in advance of the attacks organized by the deregulation coming from the European Union. The announced purpose is transforming the status of the enterprise (from an EPIC, a public, state-owned enterprise, to a public limited company), the opening up all the lines to competition and the disengagement of the SNCF from at least 9,000 km of so-called secondary lines, said to be unprofitable (more than a quarter of the network) which would become the full responsibility of the regions.

To justify his reactionary and

ultraliberal reform, Macron has for two months been taking as a pretext the large debt of the SNCF, nearly 55 billion euros, and has attributed responsibility for this debt to the railway workers and their status. The mobilization has provided the opportunity to make one thing clear. This debt has nothing to do with the status of railway workers, but is the result of the large-scale investments imposed by the state since the 1980s for the infrastructure of the TGV (High Speed Train) network. Instead of the state taking responsibility for these investments, as is the case with the road network, it was the SNCF that had to do so. Moreover, the government will be obliged in any

case to pay off a significant portion of this debt.

Even moderate unions like the CFDT and the UNSA are part of this strong strike movement, proof of the great determination of the railway workers to refuse this reform, of the serious consequences it would have for both SNCF personnel and passengers and of the refusal of negotiation by a government that had until then been sure of being able to strike a blow without encountering a serious reaction. What is at stake is obviously political for Macron, who wants to be able to notch up a total victory, in the style of Thatcher, against the most organized sector of the trade union

movement, which has been at the heart of all the main strikes of the last two decades.

There are also important things at stake with regard to the social movement, because, over and above the confrontation with the personnel of the SNCF concerning their status, which protects them from precariousness, the proposed reform is symbolic of the world that Macron and the capitalists, whose political representative he is, want to build. To liquidate the public sector of rail transport is to liquidate one of the main common goods available to the working classes. The French rail network has already been damaged by previous governments, which liquidated thousands of kilometres of lines. The goal with this reform and with privatization is to achieve the same result as in rail freight. Open to competition since 2003, fifteen years later rail freight only represents 10 per cent of freight traffic, with an explosive growth of road freight. Macron's path is obvious, with the closing of thousands of kilometres of lines, a transfer to buses and the use of private cars, as well as an increase in fares. All this to the detriment of the working classes, rural areas and outlying municipalities around major cities. With an automatic growth of air pollution, since 95 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions come from road transport.

Paradoxically, as noted by the very liberal Boston Consulting Group in 2015 in a comparative study of European railways, the French rail system was on the podium, ranked third behind the Swiss and Swedish railways (three public service networks...) according to three criteria: intensity of use, security and quality of services. Also taken into account were punctuality and the quality/price ratio. The very criteria that lead British passengers to demand renationalization of the rail system.

French passengers have also been able to test directly the consequences of changes in the status of public companies, such as Gaz de France and Electricité de France, which have been broken up and partially privatized since 2005: a 30 per cent

increase in electricity bills and an 80 per cent increase for gas bills. Similarly for La Poste: out of a total of 14,000 local post offices, 5,000 have been closed down since 2005, once again a radical attack on a public utility of primary use.

Around the SNCF battle, what is at stake is the existence, defence and improvement of basic public services, to be managed not as units of commercial profitability but according to the social needs of the working classes.

What is at stake in the coming weeks remains to bring about a change in the social climate, opening up a crisis that brings the Macron government to its knees

Since March 22nd, alongside the railway workers, other sectors have begun to move: March 22nd and April 3rd were the first dates of convergence: March 22nd, which was a strike day of seven federations of the Civil Service; April 3rd, the first day of the SNCF strike. That day the CGT federations of energy and rubbish collectors also launched a strike call for "a national public service".

These dates of convergence were not organized by the trade union confederations because recent days have not changed the trade union landscape. The most moderate confederal leaderships, the CGC and the CFTC are absent from the movement; the CFDT refuses any globalization of strikes, as does Force Ouvrière.

At the national level only the FSU and Solidaires joined the CGT for another day of cross-sectoral strikes on April 19th. But parallel to this, in many cities, April 14th, for example in Marseille and Rouen, will be the occasion for demonstrations by different sectors with the support of several political organizations, around the railway workers and the defence of public services. Many collectives are being created in towns and cities. Similarly, in a sign of growing popular support, the launching by intellectuals on the internet of a "kitty" of support for railway workers had collected by Wednesday, April 11th more than 700,000 euros; the four railway unions

have created an inter-union structure to manage this fund.

So what we are seeing is the building of a social and political mobilization, a mobilization that unifies and broadens from below, not without difficulty.

The union and sectoral divisions make convergences hard to achieve. In the coming days and weeks, the path will be strewn with various dates of union mobilizations: besides May 1st, on May 15th there will be a day of struggle by the "white tide" of hospital workers, on May 22nd a new one-day of strike of the seven Civil Service unions, on June 14th, an inter-union demonstration by pensioners.

Apart from this list, several important phenomena have to be taken into account

Air France personnel have been taking successive strike days since the end of February in parallel with the movement at the SNCF. This is an emblematic strike for wages, with the demand for a six per cent general wage increase. As with many large companies, Air France management has for several years sought to reduce the wage bill, by the suppression of jobs and the blocking of wages: zero per cent increase for six years, while inflation has been six per cent; the loss of 10,000 jobs between 2010 and 2016, and a cut in the wage bill of 600 million euros, which represents a decrease of 11.5 per cent... During this same period, the airline business grew by eight per cent, and the salaries of the thirteen top managers of the Air France group increased by 29 per cent (507,692 euros on average). These wage demands are part of many other strikes that receive less attention from the media. To prevent the consolidation of a climate of strikes in transport, the government has undoubtedly asked the Air France management to negotiate... But for the moment, it has no serious proposal to put on the table.

The most important phenomenon is the generalization of a strike movement and of blockading in universities. In the week of April 8th-15th, 30 universities (almost one in two) were blockaded or occupied. The question of selection for entry into university with the ORE (Student Success Orientation) project is at the heart of the movement. Once again, faced with the lack of resources and of access to university, the choice is simply to remove this access: 87,000 students did not find a place in 2016 (25 per cent of new entrants). With the project, this elimination will be individualized and the first affected will be young people from working-class areas, excluded from long courses. The movement has developed in recent weeks. It received support from an appeal by 400 university professors against this class-based reform. To avoid, there too, the extension of the social protest to university and school students, the first salvo came from far-right groups who tried unsuccessfully to attack several occupations. Taking as a pretext the violence of these strike-breakers, the Minister of the Interior, the former Socialist Gerard Collomb, launched the CRS riot police against occupations, seeking to extinguish the extension of the movement with very violent interventions, many arrests and students charge with violence against the police... In many cities, the junction took place between students and railway workers and other sectors in struggle.

Finally, the last point of crystallization is that of Notre Dame des Landes. After having preferred to get rid of a useless project to build a new airport, which had led to a very broad mobilization against it, the government did not want to give the image of too many concessions against

the zadistes [23]. So, while the administration of the department was negotiating with the protagonists of the ZAD on the future of occupations and farms, Gerard Collomb wanted to conduct a spectacular police operation right in the middle of the social movement. This week, between the 8th and 13th April, 2,500 gendarmes attacked the zadistes very violently. The goal was to "restore order", to show the police face of this government, just as in the universities. Even if the government wanted to prevent the violence from causing the death of a zadiste (as was the case with the death of Rémy Fraisse at the site of the Sivens dam project in 2014), the extreme violence used left many people injured. Instead of isolating the most combative sectors of the zadistes, the police violence welded the movement as a whole, especially after the destruction by the CRS of the "sheepfold of a hundred names", a collective farm that had been operating for five years on the site.

To sum up, Macron is cultivating his right flank. He is seeing his popularity on the left seep away, among an electorate that saw in him just a prolongation of Hollande's social liberalism, and elected him as a barrier against Marine Le Pen. In a sign of the times, what remains of the Socialist Party is now positioned in opposition to Macron, disavowing his principal political decisions. Similarly, former President Hollande is seeking to have a new and virtuous image by taking all possible distance from his former protégé.

Macron is therefore seeking to clearly restabilize himself as a right-wing president, seeking to regain popularity in rural and conservative areas. He made a point this week of flattering

the Catholic episcopate, saying that he wants to repair the damaged link between the Church and the State. In the wake of this, he has announced the reduction from 400 to 200 euros of the hunting licence and the extension of hunting periods.

What is at stake in the days to come remains the same. To develop the struggles and for the political climate to change in favour of the railway workers and the strikes. This is the work that tens of thousands of activists do every day. Nothing is won, but nothing is lost and this convergence will come essentially from below, through militant determination, by building bridges between sectors on strike and their supporters, between students, railway workers, Post Office workers, hospital workers... Even the magistrates are mobilizing at present against the reform projects of Macron.

For the movement to develop, all initiatives are good. Thus, after the approach launched on the left by Olivier Besancenot and the resulting unitary appeal, François Ruffin, an MP from France Insoumise, has launched a call for a national event, to "hold a party for Macron" on May 5th for the first anniversary of his presidency.

In any case, it is urgent to make emerge an anti-capitalist political pole that puts forward not only the centralization of struggles, the march towards the general strike that is necessary, but also defends a social project that opposes Macron and his world, a project of solidarity, redistribution of wealth, common goods, public goods, managed and conceived in the interest of the working classes.

April 13th, 2018

The courage of the #GreatReturnMarch

20 April 2018, by Fourth International Bureau

For the state of Israel, the #GreatReturnMarch is truly the 'return of the repressed', a jarring reminder that millions of Palestinians will not die out, disappear or be ignored. Only this can make the wholly disproportionate and criminal nature of the Israeli response comprehensible: shooting down and in dozens of cases killing human beings guilty above all of coming within a few hundred meters of a borderline. The world's passivity in the face of this crime shows how widely shared complicity in it is.

The Fourth International joins international public opinion in condemning:

- the Israeli governing class, the obvious primary culprit - not only the right-wing and extreme-right-wing parties that make up the current government, but also the so-called 'centre-left opposition', notably the Labour Party/Zionist Union, which has joined in justifying the use of live ammunition against defenceless demonstrators

- the US governing class, including not only the Trump Administration but also the great majority of Democratic Party politicians - with a few honourable exceptions like Bernie Sanders - who continue to constitute an unshakeable military and financial base of support for the Zionist state

- the governments and political establishments of the European Union, which are ineffectually backing U.N. Secretary-General Guterres' call for an investigation in the confident knowledge that the US Security

Council veto will protect them from any consequences, and are meanwhile continuing their military and scientific cooperation with Israel and their free trade agreement with it that make Europe the main bulwark of the Israeli economy and of Israel's regional supremacy

- almost all the Arab region's governments - notably Egypt, Israel's unflagging partner in the strangulation of Gaza, and the Saudi kingdom, which is now moving closer week by week to an open alliance with Israel and open abandonment of the Palestinian people

- the Palestinian Authority, which has unforgivably continued its 'security cooperation' with Israel in the face of each new atrocity, and has taken the initiative in a series of assaults on the people of Gaza, enlisting Israel as a willing accomplice

- so many other governments and political and economic actors around the world, which have responded to Israel's crimes with verbal denunciations without lifting a finger to help the Palestinians in practice.

In the face of the complicity and passivity of the world's rulers, the Palestinians of Gaza and the rest of the Palestinian people have no one to turn to except solidarity and social movements. These movements, at least, must not let the Palestinians down. The courage of the marchers must elicit a qualitative escalation in international solidarity and mobilization. If not now, when?

Boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) campaigns remain a key

component of the resistance. While BDS campaigns have not yet taken a major toll on the Israeli economy, they have made rapid enough progress to make Israel and its international allies view BDS as one of the most serious threats they face. As the uselessness of the U.N. and of the 'international community' generally in reining in Israel becomes steadily clearer, political, civil society and labour movement institutions must be forced to take their responsibility for cutting the economic and social lifelines of the Zionist juggernaut.

The Gaza marchers have now given BDS campaigners additional, powerful arguments for the indissolubility of the campaign's three central demands, as formulated in Palestinian civil society's call in 2005: not only an end to Israel's occupation of the 1967 territories, but also fully equal rights for Palestinians, Jews and others in every part of historic Palestine, and the right of Palestinian refugees to return to the homes they were driven from 70 years ago. These demands are also, as the Fourth International has consistently maintained, central components of a just solution to the question of Palestine. The protests by Israeli Jews against the Israeli army's killings in the Gaza Strip, however small, are important in keeping hope alive for a just solution, founded on equality and solidarity, in which the three central demands of the BDS campaign have been achieved. The Palestinians of Gaza have now made clear, at the cost of their lives, that the Palestinian struggle cannot and will not end until every one of these demands has been won.

Fighting for Climate Justice

19 April 2018, by **Phil Hearse**

Climate-related catastrophe is now not just an additional hazard for the world's poor, but a central factor in their oppression and poverty [24]. And this will eventually lead to a cascade of millions of climate change refugees,

a process already starting.

This is not universally recognised. One much-visited socialist website recently published an insightful article on how the poor had been left to bear the

brunt of the flooding in Houston, which however failed to mention the words 'climate change' or 'global warming'. [25]

The UN report and events worldwide

this year point to a number of increasingly self-evident conclusions, although these are not accepted by the climate change deniers on the political right:

â€¢ The number and extent of weather-related catastrophes is increasing steeply, as is the number of people affected – see the astonishing figures below. Obviously this is because of global warming, causing rising sea levels and more severe storms.

â€¢ Climate-related catastrophes disproportionately hit the poor, both between countries and within countries. Similar scale events give rise to markedly worse outcomes in poorer countries.

â€¢ While the greatest number of deaths in poor countries comes from flooding and storms, in more advanced countries more people are killed by wildfires and heatwaves.

â€¢ The part of the world most affected by storms and flooding is Asia. This is where the level of rainfall is greatest, but also where there are vast concentrations of people in very exposed locations with little in the way of infrastructure and rescue services to defend them. However the number of communities hit by flooding and storms in Africa and Latin America is also increasing. (In the last three years there has been massive flooding in Uganda and Malawi, while In South America, for example, 560,000 people were affected by floods on average each year between 1995 and 2004. By the following decade (2005-2014) that number had risen to 2.2 million people, nearly a four-fold increase. In the first eight months of 2015, another 820,000 people were affected by floods in the region).

The UN's *Human Cost of Weather Related Disasters*, which covers the period 1995-2015, shows that in total, 6,457 weather-related disasters were recorded worldwide this period; these events claimed an astonishing 606,000 lives, an average of some 30,000 each year, with an additional 4.1 billion people injured, left homeless or in need of emergency assistance.

In other words, a significant majority

of the world's population have suffered severe negative consequences as a result of weather-related disasters. Of the 606,000 deaths, 202,000 are put down to storms and a further 157,000 directly to flooding.

Weather disasters intensify and prolong already existing poverty, especially by destroying crops and making agricultural production more difficult or impossible. Repeated flooding is making some highly populated areas uninhabitable.

In rural India, the report explains, children in households exposed to recurrent flooding have been found to be more stunted and underweight than those living in non-flooded villages. Children exposed to floods in their first year of life also suffered the highest levels of chronic malnutrition due to lost agricultural production and interrupted food supplies.

A report from West Bengal on the recent India/Bangladesh flooding shows how the poor in the less-developed countries fails to cope with climate catastrophe. Aditi Roy Ghatak says:

"Comparisons are largely redundant against such overwhelming tragedy, but the discrepancy between the number of lives lost here and in the US is telling. The developing world remains profoundly exposed in the face extreme weather; extreme weather that is predicted to become ever more frequent as climate change advances. In the coincidence of these two disasters, we have the starkest articulation thus far of the UN climate science panel's prediction that climate change will be disproportionately suffered by the poor world.

"This happens for many reasons, but at its heart it is about poverty and governance. India's National Disaster Management Authority's budgeted expenditure in 2016-17 was \$100m. In the US, a country with one quarter the population of India, the Federal Emergency Management Agency budget for 2016 was \$15.5bn. In South Asia, storms regularly kill dozens of people. When a big flood comes people die in their thousands." [26]

The article explains how the local water management infrastructure is hopelessly inadequate, but that the response of the local and national state is hopeless. A local teacher explained:

"There were very few rescue boats; there was no water nor water tankers; there was little evidence of disaster management teams that one hears about. Only non-government organisations came with food, medicines and other relief material."

Uninhabitable

Repeated flooding is making some poorer area uninhabitable. Nowhere is this more true than in Bangladesh. According to Gardiner Harris:

"River deltas around the globe are particularly vulnerable to the effects of rising seas, and wealthier cities like London, Venice and New Orleans also face uncertain futures. But it is the poorest countries with the biggest populations that will be hit hardest, and none more so than Bangladesh, one of the most densely populated nations in the world. In the Ganges Delta, made up of 230 major rivers and streams, 160 million people live in a place one-fifth the size of France and as flat as chapati, the bread served at almost every meal."

Parts of Bangladesh are already uninhabitable and it is too late to reverse this trend.

"Though Bangladesh has contributed little to industrial air pollution, other kinds of environmental degradation have left it especially vulnerable.

"Bangladesh relies almost entirely on groundwater for drinking supplies because the rivers are so polluted. The resultant pumping causes the land to settle. So as sea levels are rising, Bangladesh's cities are sinking, increasing the risks of flooding. Poorly constructed seawalls compound the problem.

"The country's climate scientists and politicians have come to agree that by 2050, rising sea levels will inundate some 17 percent of the land and displace about 18 million people...

"Bangladeshis have already started to move away from the lowest-lying villages in the river deltas of the Bay of Bengal, scientists in Bangladesh say. People move for many reasons, and urbanization is increasing across South Asia, but rising tides are a big factor. Dr. Rahman's research group has made a rough estimate from small surveys that as many as 1.5 million of the five million slum inhabitants in Dhaka, the capital, moved from villages near the Bay of Bengal."

Further, "Rising seas are increasingly intruding into rivers, turning fresh water brackish. Even routine flooding then leaves behind salt deposits that can render land barren." [27]

The crisis in the Ganges Delta will have major social effects. It is estimated that 1.5 million of the 5 million inhabitants of the slums of Bangladeshi capital Dacca have fled from the delta. It is also projected that if rising sea levels continue as expected, 50 million Bangladeshis will leave the country by 2050. In other words they will become climate change refugees.

Soaring temperatures and wildfires

Nearly all tourists to the Mediterranean holiday centres like Spain, Portugal, Italy and the South of France report that temperatures make staying outside impossible for much of the day. The whole Med has seen temperatures above 40 degrees this year, and this has been accompanied by widespread wildfires.

This year (2017) has seen particularly disastrous fires in Portugal, where 70 people were killed by a giant fire in the centre of the country in June. In fact in the more advanced countries

there are many more deaths from wild fires than from floods.

Chris Harris reports (5) that wildfires trebled in 2017:

"The number of forest fires in the EU has nearly trebled so far this year, according to figures obtained by Euronews, affecting an area close to twice the size of Luxembourg. There have been 1,068 blazes in 2017 - a huge increase on the 404 the bloc saw annually on average over the previous eight years. [28]

"Experts have blamed climate change for the rise, saying it has extended the traditional wildfire season and increased the frequency of blazes. They have warned Europe's forest fires will rage more often in the future and engulf new areas."

Europe is far from the only area to see a major extension of wildfires. At the time of writing (September 2017) a state of emergency has been declared in Los Angeles and a plume of smoke from wildfires hangs over much of California. High temperatures are responsible and local journalist Patrick May reported:

"Triple-digit temperatures barrelled through the Bay Area this weekend with an unseasonable gusto, tying or breaking records from Santa Rosa to Livermore, leaving just San Francisco and the coast as relatively balmy oases from the heat searing the rest of the region on Sunday....After Santa Rosa suffered on Saturday through a historically high 102 degrees, besting the previous record of 100 hit back in 1988, and spots in the Tri-Valley seeing highs of 105, Sunday saw Santa Rosa hit 100, falling just short of a 2008 high of 101, while Livermore hit 107, just shy of a 1944 high of 109."

Of course the poor are usually the victims of climate change in advanced countries as well. This was amply illustrated by the 2005 Katrina

hurricane that swamped New Orleans. The same holds true of hurricane Harvey in Houston and surrounding areas. As Wen Stephenson put it:

"Decades of neglect, inequality, and disenfranchisement" to say nothing of heedless development and a lack of flood planning tantamount to criminal negligence"mean that Houstonians of all backgrounds, but especially the poorest and most vulnerable communities, primarily communities of colour, have been left utterly undefended."

This leads to a clear conclusion for strategy. We have to fight for a realistic international strategy to limit climate change, but also we need to fight for climate change victims and refugees, and of course to prevent millions more becoming victims and refugees.

As Wen Stephenson says:

"Just as Houston's catastrophe mustn't be viewed in isolation, as merely another extreme weather event, it's time to acknowledge that our climate reality has shifted"and that it's time for the climate fight to shift with it. I mean the shift from a world in which we struggle to prevent climate catastrophe to the world we live in now, the one where we're actually forced to live, or struggle to live, through it"the poor and marginalized struggling hardest of all. As the climate emergency converges with our national political emergency, nothing illustrates this shift more clearly, in this country, than Houston. The fights for equality and for democracy, so immediate and pressing in these dark times, are not separate from the fight for climate justice"because we'll never have the latter without the former."

5 September 2017

[Left Unity](#)

Polands legislated antisemitism

18 April 2018, by Stefan Zgliczynski

In 2006, the Sejm, Poland's lower house of parliament, passed a law which stated: "Whoever publicly accuses the Polish Nation of participation in, or responsibility for, communist or Nazi crimes is punishable by imprisonment of up to three years."

That, however, was during the nationalist Law and Justice Party's first two-year reign, when the party did not control the Constitutional Tribunal, Poland's highest court. As a result, the law did not go into effect. Twelve years later, at the initiative of the Deputy Minister of Justice, the law was reintroduced in parliament and passed the Sejm in amended form on January 26, 2018 – the eve of International Holocaust Remembrance Day. [29] It then passed in the Senate, the upper house of parliament, on February 1 at two o'clock in the morning, without amendments. Several days later it was signed by President Andrzej Duda of the Law and Justice Party (PiS).

The law's passage was covered as a major story by most of the world's major media outlets. All reported the same thing: Poland denies the Holocaust. But to understand the alarm this episode caused in Israel, the US, Russia, Germany and other countries, let us take a look at this controversial law and the heightened state of tension between Poland and its foreign partners that has suddenly become apparent after years of going unnoticed.

Articles 55a and b of the revised "Law on the Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation" now states: "Whoever publicly and, contrary to fact, ascribes responsibility or shared responsibility to the Polish Nation for Nazi crimes committed by the Third Reich (...) is subject to punishment by fine or imprisonment for up to 3 years." And what's more: "This law applies to both Polish citizens and foreigners in the event of infraction, regardless of the regulations in force in the place where

the offense is committed."

Legislative monstrosities like these, written in a hurry and voted through parliament in the dead of night, are a specialty of the PiS. That they are strange, absurd, and imprecise is not just a result of the haste in which they are written and the lack of any prior consultation or discussion. This law, which contradicts both the constitution and common sense, was designed deliberately. Its purpose is to give PiS chairman Jarosław Kaczyński – who exercises total power in Poland, even though formally he's just an ordinary member of parliament – and his acolytes the ability to prosecute any case they deem necessary at a given moment. Given PiS control of the courts, article 55 can even be enforced retroactively as an ex post facto law.

This legislation allows them to indulge racists, homophobes, and antisemites on the one hand and, on the other, to prosecute "communists," foreigners, historians, publishers, and witnesses to the Holocaust.

History Repeats Itself

The roots of the law should be sought in the year 2000, when a book by a Polish historian and long-time US resident, Jan T. Gross, came out in Poland: *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*. Gross describes how in July 1941, in the Wehrmacht-occupied Polish town of Jedwabne, Poles tortured, murdered, and finally burned their Jewish neighbors in a barn.

Gross's book caused shock waves in Poland and led to one of the longest and most explosive debates since the fall of really existing socialism in 1989. The facts were indisputable: without any help from the Germans, only their encouragement and approval, Poles in Jedwabne murdered at least several hundred defenseless Jews, including women, children, and

the elderly, tormenting them in an unimaginable way. Their motives – cited by both perpetrators and witnesses – were revenge for alleged collaboration with the USSR (the territory of Jedwabne had been occupied by Soviet forces from September 1939 to June 1941) and an excuse to rob and to rid themselves of competition.

Over the course of the discussion provoked by Gross's book, new facts began to emerge – memoirs, accounts, documents (previously silenced, hidden, or forgotten) – that completely undermined the existing understanding of Poland's history during World War II.

It turned out that Poles, represented in previous historical accounts – whether by communists in the 1945-1989 period, or by right-wing liberals, nationalists, and neoliberal post-communists since 1990 – as only victims of either German or Soviet terror, were in fact complicit in the Nazi Holocaust. In the book *My z Jedwabnego* (We from Jedwabne), published in 2004, Anna Bikont presented a brilliant reconstruction of the events on the territory near Jedwabne following German occupation in July 1941. She showed that there were in fact many towns where Poles, without the participation of Germans, only their permission, murdered their Jewish neighbors. Descriptions of the pogroms included elaborate torture, rape, mutilation, and ended with burning their victims alive. It was so shocking that it caused a large segment of public opinion, together with right-wing historians and journalists, to simply deny these facts as impossible and unbelievable.

It also turned out that remembering seventy-year-old crimes is dangerous: one of the families that had hidden Jews in Jedwabne was forced to emigrate abroad after the publication of Gross's book, while the town mayor who participated in opening the cemetery for the victims – along with then-president Aleksander Kwasniewski, who also apologized to

Jews for these crimes on behalf of Poles” was dismissed. Witnesses and authors of the accounts have received frequent death threats and in some cases there have even been assassination attempts.

From the dozens of memoirs and diaries of Jewish victims and survivors, as well as historical studies that have been published in Poland over the last twenty years, it has become clear that Jews in hiding were more afraid of Poles than of Germans. Germans could not recognize Polish Jews, while Poles picked them out unerringly. Some Poles, of course, helped or tried to help Jews in hiding, but they did so in opposition to the majority. This majority was infected with the prewar, pan-European virus of antisemitism and saw the Jews as their mortal enemies.

Researchers from the Polish Center for Holocaust Research estimate the number of Jews murdered directly by Poles or denounced by them to be in the tens of thousands. Some estimates even speak of 100,000 victims. The perpetrators of these murders and denunciations were: Polish policemen, Polish employees of the German construction service, members of the volunteer fire brigades, peasants, and city dwellers. Jews were also killed by partisan units of all political stripes: the extreme right-wing National Armed Forces (NSZ), the majority Home Army (AK), and the Peasant Battalions (BCh). Even some troops of the communist People’s Guard (later renamed the People’s Army) committed some murders, although for the most part Jews who were in the ranks of the People’s Guards or under their protection survived.

It follows that during World War II Poles killed more of their fellow citizens than the German occupiers did during the 1939 invasion of Poland, the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, or in response to other underground and partisan activities. These facts are so dangerous for Polish nationalists, who celebrate the image of Poland as an innocent victim, that they have resorted to a statutory ban on their dissemination. [30]

On February 11, 2018, Polish prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki said,

“Poland’s sovereign authorities did not expel Jews, did not do, actually, what the sovereign authorities in all other European countries did.” It is therefore worth reminding the Prime Minister of several facts that may shatter his unblemished image of Poland.

For example, during the Polish-Soviet War in mid-August 1920, the Polish authorities in Jabłonna, near Warsaw, interned about 17,000 Polish soldiers and officers of Jewish origin because, as Jews, they were automatically identified with communism and the Bolsheviks. Among them there were many volunteers, including Alfred Tarski, who later became one of the most famous logicians of all time.

When, at the end of October 1938, the Germans deported several thousand Jews of Polish citizenship to Poland (including, among others, Marcel Reich-Ranicki, who later became a famous German literary critic), Polish border guards refused to let them enter the country and the deportees were forced to camp on the border for several months in terrible conditions, under the open sky. Some of them were later allowed to return to Germany. The direct pretext for the German deportation was the decision of the Polish authorities to withdraw citizenship to all Poles living abroad” which mainly harmed Jews.

On January 10, 1939” only a few months before the outbreak of World War II” the Polish government officially declared a plan to expel Polish Jews to Africa. A special commission was even sent by the government to Madagascar to investigate the possibility of resettling Polish Jews on the island. The Prime Minister, Felicjan Sądowski, in response to an inquiry from 116 Polish deputies, said that the Polish government was diligently seeking territories for the emigration of Polish Jews and considering other related matters, such as “funding for the implementation of the emigration program, regulation of issues of the transfer and liquidation of property and capital.”

Punishment for Speaking the Truth

According to Polish law, I could be sentenced to three years in prison for what I have written here. The Polish president, prime minister, minister of foreign affairs, and other officials from the ruling Law and Justice Party falsely insist that the law poses no threat to academic research or artistic activity. They claim this law is only aimed at those who “contrary to fact, ascribe responsibility or shared responsibility to the Polish nation for Nazi crimes committed by the Third Reich.” Who will evaluate what is a “fact”? Polish courts have now been subordinated to the Minister of Justice and the General Prosecutor and staffed with his people. Moreover, no one knows what exactly is meant by the (capitalized) “Polish Nation,” particularly as Polish uses the same word for both “nation” and “people” (naród).

The passage of this law has had the opposite effect from that intended: today the entire world is talking about Polish antisemitism. Polish nationalists (supported by at least half the voters) cannot stand the fact that their Catholic grandparents denounced and murdered Jews during the war and so they have passed a law to seal the lips of Holocaust victims who accuse Poles of complicity in their Gehenna. It is a slap in the face for victims of Nazi genocide and evidence that today’s Poland is returning to the grim antisemitic tradition of the 1930s. It also bears a resemblance to what happened in Poland in 1968-69, when the communist party instigated an antisemitic campaign and several thousand Jews, most of whom had miraculously survived the Holocaust, were forced to flee the country.

Today, of course, Poland is a different country. But the attitude of the right-wing politicians currently in charge is probably related to their belief that we will go on for years living in a Poland cut to their measure: a Poland of obscurantist clericalism, chauvinism, and utter hypocrisy. The support of nearly half the population gives them

reassurance. This Poland is very similar to the one from the late 1930s – officially antisemitic, quarreling with its neighbors, directing a policy of colonization against its minorities, imperialistic towards its weaker neighbors (Lithuania, the partition of Czechoslovakia with Hitler).

The spread of an anti-immigrant and antisemitic atmosphere, which had gone unnoticed for years, has now resulted in racist incidents occurring on the streets of Polish cities on a near-daily basis and thousands marching under the slogans of “White

Europe” and “Jews to Israel.” Finally, on November 18, 2015, an effigy of an orthodox Jew was burned on the market square in Wrocław. Or consider, for that matter, a recent demonstration of Polish nationalists in front of the presidential palace under the slogan, “Take off the kippah, sign the bill” (i.e., the law discussed in this article, which the president ultimately signed). All this is the result of the deliberate policies of the current government.

The political trend in Poland, like that in Turkey, Israel, Russia, Hungary,

and many other countries, is clear and easy to predict. There is no need for a dictatorial system to implement statutes threatening citizens with prison for exercising freedom of speech. In Turkey, one can be sent to prison for public use of the Kurdish language or talking about the Armenian genocide. Now today, in Poland, the memory of Poles’ complicity in the Holocaust is subject to punishment. What only recently seemed impossible in the country of Auschwitz and Treblinka – the legal denial of antisemitism on the part of Polish society – has become reality.

Reframing the riots

17 April 2018, by **Devaka Gunawardena**

Many advocates in liberal civil society attempt to get to the root cause by arguing that Sinhala Buddhists have a sense of entitlement and ownership of Sri Lanka. This argument was a framing device, for example, during a recent panel discussion on Al-Jazeera on the impact of the riots.

Progressives may sympathise with the attempt to push back against the idea that the recent riots are a symmetrical conflict involving extremists “on both sides”. The danger, however, is that the assumption of an unchanging Sinhala Buddhist mentality may fall back into many of the same kinds of culturalist arguments that were ineffectively promoted during the civil war to explain animus toward Tamils. Progressives may yet again be unknowingly ceding ground to Sinhala nationalists, accepting their ethno-religious framing of conflict.

The history of Sinhala nationalism

Instead, placing more of an emphasis on discontinuity and rupture in the history of Sinhala nationalism may enable progressives to creatively

rethink solutions to collective problems, especially by paying attention to the shifts in nationalist ideology. For example, the recent violence has brought back references to the riots of 1915 as an example of one long continuous campaign to target Muslims. It is crucial, however, to acknowledge the changing historical context.

In her book ‘Nobodies to Somebodies,’ historian Kumari Jayawardena implied that the riots of 1915 were an example of upwardly mobile members of castes, such as the *karava*, coming into conflict with the colonial state; their growing assertiveness involving leadership for attacks on other groups. In an earlier article, she also pointed to the role of the urban working class on the southwestern coast, and the fact that anti-minority sentiment arose primarily out of fears of economic competition with migrants, rather than direct opposition to religious symbols, such as attacks on mosques.

The current situation, however, is different, insofar as the class composition of people involved in the recent riots appears to be the underemployed, petty shop owners, and others composing the mob. Many

of these people may have been impacted by the decades-long process of market liberalisation and the rising cost of living in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, in terms of the class situation alone, we can begin to identify different groups within the Sinhala community that were involved in the most recent phase of rioting.

More abstractly, there appear to be four components of the ideological justification for the scope and generalisation of the recent attacks: 1) claims that Muslims will outnumber the Sinhala due to faster population growth, in addition to sterilisation conspiracies, 2) unfair economic competition, 3) the incompatibility of Muslim cultural practices with those of the general population (particularly the treatment of women), and 4) dubious allegiances to the nation-state.

In each case, these same tropes have been applied to Tamils, Christians, and other groups at other times. As Tisaranee Gunasekara noted in a recent article, for example, arguments expressing fear of population increase have been made against Tamils in the past; similarly, claims about economic competition; paranoia about forced conversions that undermine Buddhism

has targeted Christians; and, of course, many still imply that Tamils are not loyal, instead representing the “Eelam vote”.

Thus, in addition to focusing on targets, we must try and identify the mechanisms which have been used to ideologically justify claims against Muslims, insofar as they have been applied to other groups as well. Moreover, this perspective undercuts, for example, the more recent Sinhala nationalist argument that “we never really had a cultural problem with Tamils.”

Alternatives to nationalism

Analysing these issues goes back to the premise of this article, the question of whether the riots are an example of an ingrained Sinhala Buddhist mentality, or in fact reflect a history of ideological and political reconfiguration.

If we look at it from the latter perspective, we can start to think of ways to redefine the question of inter-ethnic and, more recently, inter-communal harmony away from the fatalist assumption that the Sri Lankan state inherently prioritises Sinhala Buddhists over others. Instead, we could envision citizenship as a right that must be asserted against structures of power both within communities—to take into consideration, for example, Muslim progressives’ concerns about issues such as gender—and on a national scale.

Could there be other ways of generating responses to the riots that speak to the impulses, fears, and

anxieties behind the issues outlined above? Could we ask instead: why are Sinhala, Muslim, and Tamil families experiencing economic dislocation; why are people forced to migrate for work; why are religious institutions the dominant mode of organising cultural life, as opposed to alternatives, such as trade unions; and why does the state severely repress popular protest, except in the case of racist mobs?

In different ways, many progressives have tried to speak to these questions by re-framing conflict beyond narrowly ethnicised terms, while still recognising the damage that has historically been inflicted upon Tamil and Muslim communities. The idea that militarisation inevitably affects all communities, for example, was central to earlier critiques during the war. In thinking about the ways in which the current debate is being framed, these perspectives urgently need to be highlighted and reasserted; before the ethno-religious framing and its liberal counter-response takes over, leading us back into an organising dead-end. In addition, we need analysis of ways in which more recent trends provoke anti-Muslim attacks: from Trumpism and the electoral success of far-right populists around the world, to the failure in Sri Lanka to create a progressive constituency for egalitarian change, both in constitutional and economic terms, during the current transition period.

Generating support

The connections between these questions need to be identified. The danger though is that in the rush to condemn the rioting, progressive responses might reproduce

inadequacies that have previously undermined liberal civil society—and before that, the labour and left movement’s attempts to push back against racism. The responses to the attacks on Muslims must be swift. At the same time, it behoves us to avoid relying on arguments that assume Sinhala nationalism is an ahistorical phenomenon, or are otherwise ineffective in generating mass support for anti-racist action.

Perhaps most relevant to the question of progressive strategy is that the flip side of many of these arguments—that rioting will create “another LTTE” in the Muslim community—is fundamentally flawed. There are other ways of looking at potential conflict. For example, ghettoisation and its counterpart, civil rights struggle.

The resistance of a Muslim community under siege may not necessarily be expressed in the form of territorial separatism. The spectre of Salafist terrorism dominates the global imagination, but in the case of Sri Lanka, Muslim responses could involve demands for inclusion and egalitarianism. This process depends on debates that are happening within the community, and whether those concerns are incorporated into a wider progressive campaign.

The first challenge is to reframe the debate about the recent riots, even while Kandy smoulders. Failure to do so will only encourage those who look forward to more violence. They know that condemnation in the press cannot stop them while they hold the initiative on the ground.

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Erdoğan and His Opponents

16 April 2018, by Guney Işıkara, Alp Kayserilioğlu, &

Max Zirngast

The power of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan appears limitless. It seems the Turkish president will rule forever.

The events since last April's referendum supposedly confirm this gloomy outlook. The vote delivered Erdoğan and his party, the AKP, a crucial victory, ushering in constitutional changes that established an overtly dictatorial system. Purges and repression followed.

Yet a closer look reveals that Erdoğan's would-be dictatorship is anything but stable. All the social contradictions that have simmered under the surface, frustrating the AKP's attempts to consolidate its political dominance, were manifest again during the referendum. And they haven't vanished in the months since.

After the Referendum

Despite the use of state terror and blatant fraud, Erdoğan only managed to win 51 percent "yes" votes in the referendum. No longer able to create mass consent by "soft," democratic means, he resorted to repression, corruption, and support for jihadist and other ultra-reactionary groups. The crackdown has further antagonized Erdoğan's opponents in the state and society — they are eagerly awaiting his fall.

Erdoğan's aim is to polarize society, barbarizing political discourse to stoke far-right elements while shoring up his right-wing base. He's installed some of his most militant and fanatic supporters in media and business posts previously occupied by Gülenists (followers of the exiled cleric and former Erdoğan ally Fethullah Gülen, who Erdogan has accused of fomenting the failed July 2016 coup).

But his plan isn't foolproof. On the one hand, Erdoğan's aggressive actions could boost the AKP's right-wing

support in both the state and the broader society. On the other hand, there is still a significant share of the AKP voter base that is disillusioned, if not flatly opposed to the authoritarian discourse their party has adopted. Erdoğan is therefore on a tightrope: he must always consider the proper balance between his mass base and the radicalized militant elements, both of which he needs to stay in power.

Repression

Since the coup attempt in July 2016 — which was quickly put down but which Erdoğan has used as a pretext to consolidate power — more than 150,000 people have been sacked, around 132,000 people have been detained, more than 5,800 academics have lost their jobs, almost 200 media outlets have been shut down, and over 300 journalists have been arrested. Anybody with the potential to foment critical or oppositional activity is at risk of being arrested on the flimsiest of charges and invariably labeled an operative of "FETÄ—" (Fethullah Terror Organization) or the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party, a militant Kurdish liberation group).

The latest statutory decree, issued in December, grants immunity to civilians who engage or have engaged in (violent) actions to thwart coup attempts. Although government officials have stated that only the night of July 15, 2016 and the following day are covered by the law, its scope is left open to any social event that is regarded as a coup attempt or terroristic. It is clearly a preemptive measure designed to address potential uprisings or civil conflicts, providing pro-government groups and militia with a legal shield.

The repression and consolidation of power extends from the street level — demonstration bans, the replacement of Kurdish signs with Turkish, etc. — to the commanding heights of political life. The heads of the country's highest courts are

bowing before Erdoğan or at least supporting him politically. But this alone is not enough. The submission of the judiciary and the state to the president has to be structural and legal rather than personal. So slightly less than half of the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors have been replaced. Five of the board's newly elected members were nominated by the AKP, and the other two by its fascist ally, the MHP (Nationalist Movement Party). Similarly, according to one member of parliament, 90 percent of the 1,341 open posts in judge's and prosecutor's offices were filled with people with a direct or indirect relationship to the AKP's local organizations. All high-level state bureaucrats are now being chosen (if not appointed) by the president.

In the educational arena, the system is being imprinted with a more conservative Islamic tint. Last summer, the ministry of education removed all passages about evolution from schoolbooks and added sections on jihad as well as the struggle against FETÄ—, the PKK, and the coup attempt. Mixed dorms at the high school and college levels have been disbanded.

Erdoğan is also establishing more control over the intelligence agency and military, concerned that the army — traditionally an opponent of political Islam in Turkey — isn't sufficiently faithful to him. Internal surveys taken after the coup attempt indicate that the Islamist faction is indeed weak in the army's higher ranks. And while there is some support for Erdoğan himself, the share of those who voted "no" in the referendum is exceptionally high.

Hence the relative autonomy of the Intelligence Agency and military is set to be abolished or minimized through their gradual subjection to the president. The most important step in this regard was taken last August. The Intelligence Agency is now directly tied to the presidency and granted the power to investigate within the military and dismiss any of its staff

members. Standards have been lowered for military promotions. The military judiciary system has been completely eliminated. The legal procedures within the army have been handed over to civilian courts and prosecutors.

Finally, for the first time in history, the president and government had a greater say than the army in the Supreme Military Council (YA?) that took place in August. The YA? makes all the promotion decisions in the army. New cadres were appointed to all supreme commander positions, partially in conflict with seniority rankings.

Meanwhile, ultranationalist elements, who had been purged from the army and partially imprisoned by Gülenist cadres, are returning to fill the gaps left by the Gülenists after the coup attempt. To what extent all these developments will lead to the establishment of Erdoğanists within the army or rather restore the typical nationalist pro-NATO bloc – as well as how they will affect the army's combat strength – remain an open question. But what is clear is that Erdoğan has established much more power over the state and society.

The Myth of Material Fatigue and the “Röhm Syndrome”

Every process that seeks to replace constitutional politics with the direct exercise of power faces two basic problems: on the one hand, many cadres – either unwilling to risk their own heads, or insufficiently loyal or authoritarian – drop out of the project; on the other hand, challengers sprout up, imagining themselves to be the “better” fascist. Let's call the second phenomenon “Röhm Syndrome.” [31]

These two processes are very much in play in Turkey, and both are at once products of, and catalysts for, the AKP's hegemonic crisis.

The Myth of Material Fatigue

In time, it became clear that Erdoğan was more troubled by the referendum results than it initially appeared. It was necessary, he argued, to draw lessons from the mistakes made in the referendum. To underscore his argument, he conjured up the idea of material fatigue. [32] During the fifteen-year reign of the AKP, Erdoğan said, a certain weariness had crept into the party cadres. Whatever their successes in the past, many were no longer reliable. This was not empty talk: many cadres were forced out, and some AKP mayors of important cities were compelled to resign.

But the idea of a material fatigue is both a myth – the measures were aimed at bringing in younger cadres completely loyal to Erdoğan, not necessarily more competent ones – and an attempt to hide deeper structural problems. [33]

The referendum was won by fraud, and only narrowly; social resistance is continuing despite all the repression. The upshot is that the political and economic costs of the fascization process are increasing and international isolation is advancing. [34] This has stoked insecurity and irritation among the AKP cadres and their party intellectuals. And replacing veteran cadres with younger ones will do nothing to change that. On the contrary: eliminating even mildly dissident voices from the AKP will deepen the crisis.

There is serious upheaval within the Islamic camp, broadly defined. Those occasionally advocating for a “softer” approach within the AKP have been either purged or driven out of the party and the state. Heavyweights such as AKP co-founder and former president Abdullah Gül as well as former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu are leading figures of this front. [35] They criticize the coalition with the MHP and favor improving relations with the West, continuing serious talks with the European Union, and overall advancing a more “liberal” politics.

Looking outside this camp, reactionary and fundamentalist journalists and religious intellectuals are upset that Erdoğan isn't “Islamic” enough. His alliance with the non-Islamic state bureaucracy has made them increasingly uncomfortable, and those who stand by him have to perform strange twists and turns to legitimize many of his political moves (relations to Israel, Syria, etc.).

It is not only the AKP camp and Islamic circles where there is unease and dissatisfaction. The same goes for their de facto coalition partner, the MHP, led by Devlet Bahçeli. The MHP entered into a partnership with the AKP with the hope of landing leading posts in the state bureaucracy, the military, and police forces. The cost was tying themselves completely to Erdoğan, which upset the more nationalist party base. Former leading MHP cadre Meral Akşener has since founded a new formation, İYİ Parti (Good Party), and many party members (especially younger ones) are defecting to Akşener or other political associations.

The “Röhm Syndrome”

Among the fragile alliances that Erdoğan is entertaining in order to secure his own position, there are several groups that are potential “Röhm” factions. The first of these comes from inside the AKP: the Islamist faction.

This may seem surprising, given Erdoğan's own conservative religious politics. But his recent pragmatic turn, which is aimed at reducing Turkey's international isolation, creating better relations with Israel and ending military and other aid to jihadist groups in Syria was not well received by the Islamists. Ever since Ahmet Davutoğlu's removal as prime minister, this conflict has been simmering, and often erupted into public view. Representatives from the different camps attack each other in the media and accuse each other of being supporters of “FETİH.” But for now, this faction has been successfully marginalized.

Another candidate is the ultranationalist, fascistic Vatan Partisi (VP). They rival the MHP in their nationalism and hatred of everything Kurdish (and compete with the MHP for ultranationalist supporters), but are staunchly secular. [36] While the VP does not have a large base, their cadres are well placed within the various state apparatuses. It was they who led the effort to reestablish and normalize relations with Russia and Syria. Yet they are far from a strategic ally of the AKP. Rather than simply supporting Erdoğan, they are eyeing power themselves. Whenever they see an opening, they will quickly change course and start to attack Erdoğan and the AKP.

A third faction might arise from the state bureaucracy. Many politicians and high-ranking state officials who were deeply involved in the “dirty war” against the Kurdish people in the 1990s are again in influential positions. It is assumed that there is a wide network in place that ranges from right-wing politicians and high-ranking state officials to organized crime.

Here it is necessary to highlight one phenomenon very common in fascization processes: supporters of the leader view themselves as “little leaders.” It is precisely this dynamic that makes right-wing and fascistic political movements attractive to some. Many of the “little leaders” in Turkey start to behave with ever more self-assurance. And it is they who are closest to Erdoğan and his most fanatic supporters.

To summarize, the liberal-conservative and “soft” wing have largely defected from the party, and many experienced cadres have been driven away for different reasons (“inefficiency,” “material fatigue,” etc.). At the same time, the alliance running the country alongside Erdoğan is quite fragile and all the various allies are dealing with internal contradictions and problems of their own.

Two of the issues making Erdoğan sweat: isolation in foreign affairs and the dissatisfaction of big capital.

Isolation in Foreign Affairs

The EU states, particularly Germany, have been rather restrained in their criticism of Turkey. The reason is simple: 80 percent of foreign direct investment in Turkey comes from Europe. Thus, while the AKP government and particularly Erdoğan have become objects of scorn in many parts of Europe and have lost the trust of most EU governments, the involvement and interests of big capital have prevented a stronger posture. But for how long?

Turkey’s relationship with the US, meanwhile, is worse than it has been in awhile. After two members of its consular staff were arrested on suspicion of links to the 2016 coup attempt, the US suspended visa services in Turkey, and the latter responded in kind. [37] While both countries have since resumed full visa services, their relationship remains frosty.

Another reason for the increasing iciness between the two countries is a New York court case against Reza Zarrab, a Turkish-Iranian businessman who had extremely close ties to the AKP before his 2016 arrest in the US. The main charge against Zarrab is that he engaged in trade with Iran in a scheme to avoid US sanctions and, more importantly, that he was assisted by the Turkish government in bypassing the sanctions. [38]

Both the AKP media and Erdoğan view the Zarrab case as a political operation against Turkey, and not without reason: It is not improbable that the US government is using the Zarrab case to hit its Turkish counterpart. The US and the West have long been signaling to Turkey that it is overestimating its geopolitical role and power. Although it seems that the consequences for now will be confined to monetary fines to the involved banks, the whole affair should be read as a further warning to the Turkish government.

Regarding the Middle East, the lay of the land is as follows: there has been a rapprochement with Iran that has not

(yet) brought a united struggle against ISIS. Militias close to Iran are substantially more effective than those close to Turkey, which is why Turkey has frequently complained about the “aggressive Persian nationalism” in the region. Turkey did march into Northern Syria in 2016, but it was only able to slow the advance of the Kurdish movement, which had won significant political autonomy there. [39] [40] The military fiasco revealed the desperate state of the Turkish army. And the political and economic costs of the invasion will increase over time.

Turkey’s attempts to halt the Kurdish movement have been repeatedly frustrated. For many months government officials tried to convince the US to undertake the Raqqa operation against ISIS without the YPG and YPJ, Kurdish militias that are close to the PKK. But from the perspective of the US, EU, Russia, and Iran, Turkey was too unstable and insubordinate to rely on. Raqqa was subsequently liberated by a force dominated by the YPG/J. Now, though, Turkey is threatening to march on the Kurdish cantons of Afrin and Manbij in North Syria, which the US and Russia have long prevented. [41] It has already begun shelling Afrin.

But this has been the anomaly. For many months, there has been frustration in some quarters at the AKP’s inability to get its way with regard to the Kurds. Last fall, Abdülkadir Selvi, an intellectual very close to the AKP, said that Turkey had “lost its charisma” because the government persistently threatened the Kurdish Regional Government in Northern Iraq over its independence referendum, but could not change anything about the outcome. This kind of rhetoric has a clear political purpose. Blustering about the “dark forces acting against Turkey” wins the consent of right-wing cadres and grassroots activists. In addition, preventing an independent Kurdistan from forming in northern Iraq “regardless of how close it would be politically to the AKP, as in the case of the more conservative Barzani leadership” is a means to block intensified national consciousness among Kurds living in Turkey. [42] And of course, the whole right-wing

camp spews fire and brimstone when it comes to the independence referendum.

Yet the problem here is the same one as with fascization in general: if it becomes clear that the aggressive posture is inconsequential phrase-mongering, the more legitimacy dwindles, which is founded upon that aggressive stance.

Panic-Stricken Capital

This isolationism and adventurism, combined with internal instability, has made the economy very fragile. The collapsing tourism industry and declining capital inflows are just part of the problem. [43]

The post-Trump shock to the global economy and the Fed's reversal of its quantitative-easing policy sent a significant flow of hot money into Turkey. However, these investments are very responsive to instability. When the US Federal Reserve definitively ends its loose monetary policy, Turkey will struggle to access foreign exchange markets.

At the end of 2016, the Turkish Statistical Institute (TİİK) significantly modified its data collection and calculation methods. As a result, growth rates suddenly increased, and Turkey could almost claim the highest savings rate in the world. The institute did not reveal how it changed its methodology, but critics have noted important inconsistencies.

Neither the manipulated growth rates nor the pro-government media's euphoria tricked or impressed big capital. Last September, the chair of Turkey's largest industrial association, the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TUSIAD), declared that the nation had already reached the limits of consumption- and construction-based growth and demanded an immediate government response.

A substantial part of the Turkish economy stays afloat thanks to credit expansion and business-friendly incentives, including a profit

guarantee for major construction projects, tax exemptions, debt-restructuring agreements, and so forth. These measures have sharply increased the budget deficit, requiring adjustments to the debt ceiling. [44]

The Turkish lira was the worst performing currency against the dollar in 2017. Apart from pushing the inflation rate even higher, the lira's depreciation will wreak havoc on the private sector, which crucially depends on imports for production. Industrial investment is falling, and construction investment continues to make up a substantial share of all investment. [45] The productive sectors have dire expectations, and the interest rate remains too high.

Erdoğan is furious that big capital has demanded an end to the state of emergency. Speaking to business leaders back in July, he made himself very clear: Are there any economic problems related to the state of emergency? [46] We will use the state of emergency to intervene in workplaces that pose a strike threat. It is that simple.

And in fact, big capital has been profiting from Erdoğan's rule. The stock market (100) index last year had a real growth rate of 27 percent. Big corporations, like Sabancı Holding and Ziraat Bank, increased their profits by around 20 percent, while the largest of all, Koç, increased its take by 50 percent in the first half of 2017. [47] [48] [49]

But the economy's overall performance and prospects for growth remain uncertain. Permanent political instability and aggressive foreign policy cause stagnation in foreign direct investment and adversely affect trade. A reversal in foreign capital flows or a series of defaults could tip the balance and doom the economy. Turkish capital worries that a sharpening of the AKP's hegemonic crisis may bring on a convulsion that could threaten the entire system. Its European partners want a constitutionally secured, stable order that allows capital to accumulate smoothly. Erdoğan guarantees high profits, but he does so in a tenuous and crisis-prone manner.

These fears explain why TİİK and smaller business associations have been complaining: they urgently want a return to democracy, a normalization of social dialogue, closer relations with the European Union, pro-foreign capital policies, and the modernization and consolidation of the country's customs union with the EU.

The State of the Opposition

Pressure from below is the main motor of the hegemonic crisis. A fascistic leadership that cannot crush internal opposition loses its legitimacy — controlling the country grants it one of its main sources of credibility. Thus, the price of failure constantly rises. Right now, it doesn't seem like the AKP can establish complete control over Turkey.

The CHP and the Left

Last summer, the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), staged a "Justice March" and a "Justice Congress" that drew at least one million people. Ever since, many have spoken of the party and its leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, in terms of its "resistance." But this perception of Kılıçdaroğlu is flawed and misleading. The CHP not only forms just one pole of the various movements against the Erdoğan's rule — it seeks to channel people's anger in ways that do not threaten the system. The CHP takes an extremely passive stance, and, barring any changes, it will not be able to take power, at least not by itself.

The new phase of resistance began immediately after the government announced the results of the referendum. The many questionable and obviously fraudulent incidents during the vote motivated thousands to take the streets and declare the referendum illegitimate. [50] These protests were mainly concentrated in western Turkey's big cities, first and foremost Istanbul. But the decision to continue the demonstrations for over a

week helped solidify the perception that the results were fraudulent. Indeed, the AKP and its propagandists never managed to establish a counter-narrative, and its base has not been effectively mobilized since. Even the anniversary of the July 15 coup attempt was celebrated in an uninspiring “if well-attended” fashion.

While some left groups had belittled the “No” movement leading up to the referendum and the subsequent protests, arguing that “we cannot defeat fascism in elections,” the CHP participated in the movement in the hopes of getting a recount and because their own basis forced them to be more active. When the party leadership distanced itself from the street protests, parts of the youth wing called for “courageous steps.” They, alongside representatives of the liberal and social-democratic left wing, criticized the CHP’s leadership and accused the party of bearing some responsibility for the dire situation. In response, former leader and staunch nationalist-statist politician Deniz Baykal and K?l?çdaro?lu announced the party’s new strategic goal: taking the presidency in 2019. In other words, they did not oppose the new constitution as long as they can control it.

In addition to the party base calling for a stronger stance against Erdo?an, big capital was also worked to strengthen his opponents. When K?l?çdaro?lu marched from Ankara to Istanbul, he had Turkish big business’s open support. But as the protest continued, space opened for resistance from many groups. A genuine popular dynamic unfolded, and Erdo?an, who first dismissed the march as futile, found it increasingly worrying.

The CHP and K?l?çdaro?lu tried to present themselves as serious challengers in touch with popular social dynamics. Yet since they never wanted to radicalize these struggles, they quickly returned to trying to domesticate them.

The Left took two dominant approaches to this new political environment. [51]

One faction, traditionally more republican-oriented groups, more or less accepted the CHP as the main pole of the resistance and worked alongside it, failing to recognize that the CHP still aims to control the protests’ autonomous potential. The other camp simply dismissed the dynamic altogether, seeing it as within the purview of the CHP and intent on steering clear of any influences from the party.

Both failed to respond in a politically astute way. The Left’s task is to further the dynamics of democratic revolution and strengthen the social formations against both the established order and the CHP. This requires an independent stance that also engages with the people and popular dynamics on the ground “eschewing both ultra-radical declarations and actions that simply tail the bourgeoisie.

There is another pole of bourgeois opposition to Erdo?an: Meral Ak?ener’s aforementioned party. Upon the party’s founding last October, the international media “from Foreign Policy and the Financial Times to Time” quickly hailed Ak?ener as Erdo?an’s only true challenger. [52] [53] [54] Ak?ener frames herself as a strong woman who can win over nationalist, some religious, and economically liberal voters alike. She emphasizes her opposition to Erdo?an and her support for the rule of law.

But her political past and present profile demonstrate that she is not a bright new face for a more just and democratic Turkey.

In the 1990s, when she briefly served as interior minister, she allied with some of the most ruthless factions of the state during the dirty war against the Kurds. She is a staunch nationalist, as is the ?Y? Party’s personnel. (“?Y?” is the symbol of the Kay?, a Turkic tribe from the eleventh century that plays an important role in Turkish nationalist mythology.) While Ak?ener expresses her opposition to the presidential system, she’s also made it clear that she wants to become president in 2019.

The CHP and Ak?ener’s new party

represent, respectively, the leftish- and right-liberal wings of capital. They may incorporate or ally with parts of the AKP or the Islamic camp that are fed up with Erdo?an. Big capital clearly supports these attempts. But none of these actors wants to strengthen popular movements or build a democratic alternative to Erdo?an and the established system.

Crisis of the Despotic State

Whether or not the plans of big capital and its representatives will come to fruition remains to be seen. The situation is too unstable to make predictions.

But the despotic state is in a deep, structural crisis. Despite ruling for fifteen-plus years, the AKP has not been able to reorganize the state in the way in which it would like to. The sharpening hegemonic crisis following the attempted coup produced chaos within and among the state apparatuses. While the army’s internal unity is disintegrating and former AKP opponents from the far right are settling within the state in an unstable alliance, countless FETÄ- procedures increase distrust and uncertainty. The AKP’s leadership is tenuous. Capital is concerned about internal chaos, but, more importantly, about international isolation, the economy’s dire state, and the fact that around half the population will not consent to AKP rule. As a result, it’s trying to circumvent conflicts in Turkey as well as frictions with international powers in hopes of solving them in its own favor. K?l?çdaro?lu and Ak?ener both enjoy certain levels of mass support and will happily volunteer as alternatives to Erdo?an.

Meanwhile, the social struggle has by no means died out. The dynamics the AKP intended to suppress through the state of emergency haven’t been quashed. Though strikes are now de facto illegal, workers are winning battles for improved working conditions and higher wages “as the struggles of ?i?ecam, Petkim, and Zonguldak workers over the past year indicate over the past year. [55] [56] On the other hand, the fasts of Nuriye

Gülmen and Semih Âzakça represent just the tip of the ongoing struggle among the left-wing, public-sector workers fired after the coup.

The People's Democratic Party (HDP) is keeping its head up as well. Massive arrests of its MPs and grassroots activists have significantly weakened the party's organizational power, and the planned two-month-long series of demonstrations across the country was not a great success. [57]

However, things look different in Kurdish regions. Tens of thousands of people in the HDP stronghold Diyarbakır still participate in rallies. The inability of the state to defeat the PKK in Turkey and the advances made by PKK-affiliated forces in North Syria, combined with the state's ineffective adventurism in Syria and Iraq, constitute one of the ruling bloc's greatest weaknesses. And there are more democratic resistance movements still, including the powerful feminist movement. It fought back against a planned abortion ban a couple of years ago and now focuses on promoting women's self-determination and bodily integrity as well as stopping violence against women. [58]

The Alevi community continues to

battle religious discrimination, particularly the growing Sunni influence in religion classes. They have been at the forefront of the fight against the new curriculum mentioned above. The desire for a democratic alternative manifested in the "No" committees before the referendum and the protests in response to the electoral fraud are very much in the tradition of the Gezi Uprising. [59]

These mass struggles and their demand for democratization should constitute the revolutionary left's starting point â€" not procedural changes or presidential elections. These broader movements are built from the bottom up, using grassroots committees, forums, and workers' groups, in which the people can develop their autonomy from capital and the state. The revolutionary Turkish left must actively intervene in these struggles in order to work toward a democratic republic, a demand that goes beyond rejecting Erdoğan and the presidential system and instead attacks the despotic state tradition itself.

It was not the masses' reactionary character or their stupidity that made them choose the AKP. It was (and remains) mostly the promise of

economic growth and outrage at the military regime, the liberalization of culture concerning acceptance of Islam, and the feeling of exclusion. Even internal AKP studies indicate that a substantial part of its base disapproves of the party's defamation of all opposition forces as terrorist as well as the extent of corruption, favoritism, and factionalism within the party.

It was clear that the AKP, an advocate for and militant representative of neoliberalism, would never defend the interests of working classes. The more AKP-organized neoliberalism draws the nation into conflicts and crises, the more the alliance at the party's base becomes fragile.

Ultimately, the struggle between today's dominant actors and the so-far diffuse democratic resistance will determine the character of the republic that will emerge, the position of workers and the oppressed within it, and whether leftists can further radicalize these struggles.

It is a new year. The resistance cannot wait until 2019.

19 January 2018

[Jacobin](#)

The Saudi predicament

15 April 2018, by **Gilbert Achcar**

What makes the Middle East distinctive is oil, not Islam. The hydrocarbon wealth of the Arab-Iranian Gulf led the British empire to create or consolidate, on the Arab side, states that were artificial to various degrees, and to establish or shore up the contemporary world's most archaic monarchies; it exploited and revived the remnants of tribalism, made clan groups â€"royal families' and set up patrimonial absolutist powers which the British hoped they would dominate until the oil ran out. The oil wealth made the US act the same way as the British towards the

Saudi kingdom, its de facto oldest protectorate in the region. The â€"leader of the free world' has supported the least democratic, most misogynist, most fundamentalist country on the planet, the only one to have the Quran and the Sunna (deeds and sayings of the Prophet) instead of a constitution.

What distinguishes the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council - Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar - is that their workforces are mostly foreign. In most of them,

foreigners are even a majority of the population: in the UAE and Qatar, they are almost 90%. The exceptional autonomy of the state thanks to the oil and gas rent has ensured these archaic systems endure, grafted onto modern state institutions and capitalist economies. The more concentrated power is, the more the state has been able to ignore a socioeconomic rationale in which the interests of a capitalist class or a layer of bureaucracy act as a constraint. The smaller the ruling elite is, while oil allows it to treat the state as its private property, the less it heeds

structural constraints, and the greater is its freedom to manoeuvre. It can make sudden decisions that appear erratic and capricious. Large state machines change course slowly; but states in which power is highly concentrated can veer abruptly.

Iran and Iraq are the only Gulf countries to have avoided the region's prevailing sociopolitical structure: they both have ancient urban civilisations, larger populations and more developed societies, and are the only countries to have overthrown their monarchies. In Iraq, this led to the 'republican' patrimonial regime of the Baath Party, rigidly ruled by a family (that of Saddam Hussein) with the same flaws as absolute monarchies, until its overthrow in 2003 following the US-led invasion.

In Iran, the fall of the shah led to a unique, strictly theocratic state. Unlike its Gulf neighbours, it is governed not by a family but by institutions and laws, even if the Supreme Leader enjoys exceptional power. [60] As such, it is the only state in the region that acts according to a coherent, easily recognisable strategy: the Revolutionary Guards' expansionism. Subsequent worsening regional tension helps to further legitimate their power. [61]

No winner in Iran-Iraq war

The founding of the Islamic Republic in 1979 determined the Gulf's current geopolitical framework. The Iranian revolution greatly alarmed its Arab neighbours, especially as the US was then at its lowest ebb post-Vietnam, paralysed by challenges including a revolution in Nicaragua and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Iraq's attack on Iran in 1980 provided the US and allies with a solution: they would facilitate the mutual destruction of these troublesome states. There was no winner after eight years of war between the two countries (in which nearly a million died, according to current estimates).

Not having obtained the cancellation of his debts to the monarchies that had backed him, Saddam Hussein

seized Kuwait in August 1990. This gave the US the chance to kill two birds with one stone by returning in force to the Gulf for the first time since 1962 (when the US base at Dhahran in the Saudi oil region was evacuated under pressure from Nasser's Egypt) and confirming US post-cold war supremacy to allies, rivals and enemies, just as the Soviet bloc was crumbling.

Iran's leaders had mixed feelings about the 1991 allied military intervention, even though it targeted its enemy, Baathist Iraq. But the US show of force reassured the Saudi royal family, which now felt protected against any Iranian incursion. The attitude towards the US war on Iraq became the litmus test of Riyadh's regional relations: the kingdom punished all those who had supported Saddam's invasion of Kuwait or opposed the US intervention. It expelled nearly a million Yemeni workers, cut off support for Yasser Arafat's PLO, and severed relations with the Muslim Brotherhood, even though it had been the Brotherhood's main supporter since its foundation in Egypt in 1928. With the US, the Saudis had opposed Gamal Abdel Nasser's Soviet-backed nationalist regime in Egypt (1954-70), which had severely repressed the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood would have lost many members by aligning with the Saudis during the first Gulf war in 1991. Riyadh's intention was to bring it into line (like the PLO) by depriving it of logistic and financial support.

The situation changed when Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani deposed his father and took power in Qatar in 1995. He was keen to play in the major league of regional politics, and decided to fund the Brotherhood, just as magnates buy football teams. He also invested heavily in setting up the satellite TV station Al Jazeera, in which the Brotherhood had a key role; it quickly established a huge audience by giving a platform to opposition movements in the Arab world - except those in Saudi Arabia and Qatar itself, where disrespect for the monarchy can lead to life imprisonment.

The emir, with these political weapons, now faced the anger of the Saudi monarchy, so he covered his

risks by diversifying and created links with all the significant forces in the region. He paid for the secret construction of a US air base at Al Udeid near Doha, and established trade with Israel, while demonstrating harmonious relations with Iran and supporting Lebanon's Hizbullah and Palestine's Hamas.

The Arab Spring erupts

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 disrupted everything across the region. It was probably the most serious failure of US imperial policy, given the high stakes. The US and its allies had to leave Iraq in 2011 without achieving any fundamental objectives, for the country was already dominated by the US's regional archenemy, Iran.

In 2011 the Arab Spring engulfed states on which US regional hegemony rested. Rival counter-revolutionary options emerged, supported by the Saudis and the Qataris - both options rooted in the reactionary bastion of the Gulf Cooperation Council. The traditionally ultraconservative Saudis supported the defence of regimes in power by crushing the uprisings - as in their intervention in Bahrain in March 2011 - or through negotiating compromises where they had good relations with the official opposition, as in Yemen.

Qatar was the principal supporter of the Arab Spring, asserting its ability to moderate it through its influence over the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood took advantage of the uprisings to gain a prominent role, with Qatari financial and media support. In Tunisia, where the Arab Spring began, Qatar assisted the popular revolt by supporting the Muslim Brotherhood's Tunisian partner, Ennahda, while the Saudis gave asylum to the deposed dictator, Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali.

The Obama administration tacked between these positions. It tolerated the repression of the uprising in Bahrain but supported compromise in Yemen. Where revolt became too powerful, it sought to co-opt it,

counting on the cooperation of the Muslim Brotherhood; this happened in Egypt, even before the Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi won the presidential election in May-June 2012. [62]

In Libya, Washington's European allies, especially the UK and France, persuaded the US to join them in bombing Muammar Gaddafi's forces. Qatar participated; the Saudis did not. The ensuing chaos in Libya dissuaded Obama from playing any further part in the collapse of another state. He refused to give the Syrian opposition the means to neutralise the Assad government's major military advantage of air power: he declined to impose a no-fly zone, as in Libya, and, critically, blocked the supply of anti-aircraft weapons to the opposition. The Assad regime was therefore confident of its air supremacy, to the point of dropping barrel bombs from helicopters, unchallenged. And Obama delegated responsibility for sponsoring the Syrian opposition to Gulf allies and Turkey.

The Saudi response

The Saudis couldn't back Assad because of his alliance with Iran but, as with Qatar, they could not countenance a democratic, secular revolution nearby. They decided to reshape the Syrian opposition in accord with their own reactionary regime; they competed with the Qatari-Turkish axis to fund armed Syrian Sunni fundamentalist groups (Salafist and jihadist). The 2011 Syrian revolution was crushed between the Assad regime (with the help of regional Shia fundamentalist militias directed from Iran and, from 2015, Russian air power and missiles) and armed fundamentalist groups backed by Turkey, Qatar and the Saudi kingdom.

Not even the rise of ISIS (Islamic State), the capture of Mosul (Iraq) and the proclamation of the caliphate, could persuade Obama, despite much encouragement, to back credible Sunni Arab armed forces in Iraq and Syria. Those who tried to convince him argued it would cut the ground from under ISIS; for the US occupation of

Iraq had only been able to end ISIS's previous incarnation, Islamic State in Iraq, by arming and funding Sunni Arab tribal militias. In this new conflict in Iraq, the US relied on predominantly Shia regular and irregular forces with varying loyalty to Iran, to the Saudis' dismay. In Syria, it relied on nationalist Kurdish forces, to Turkey's great displeasure.

Not even the rise of ISIS, the capture of Mosul and the proclamation of the caliphate, could persuade Obama, despite much encouragement, to back credible Sunni Arab armed forces in Iraq and Syria

Obama's approach was consistent with his policy of placating Iran and banking on the moderate, 'reformist' faction of the Iranian regime, a policy whose cornerstone was the nuclear deal with Iran. Obama made this agreement his priority and managed to secure it in July 2015 after negotiations with input from Russia, China, Germany and France. He pursued this course despite Iran's regional expansion; having achieved a position of control in Iraq, it became involved in Syria from 2013 through regional proxies. US indifference to this involvement frustrated Iran's main regional enemies, Israel and the Saudi kingdom.

Saudi anxiety peaked in September 2014, when the Yemeni capital Sanaa was seized by the pro-Iranian Houthis, allied to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh. [63] In this alarming context, Salman bin Abdelaziz al-Saud assumed the Saudi leadership, succeeding his half-brother who died in January 2015. King Salman, then aged 80, wanted to be succeeded by his favourite son, Mohammad Bin Salman (MBS), then not yet 30, whom he first made defence minister, then in July 2017, crown prince. [64] The king and prince opted for a robust response to Iran, intervening directly in Yemen, and presenting a single Sunni regional front through improved relations with Qatar and a softer attitude to the Muslim Brotherhood.

Intervention in

Yemen

The Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen, which began in March 2015 under MBS's direction, mobilised a coalition that included Qatar to help a 'legitimate' Yemeni government, representing a coalition that included the local Muslim Brothers. The Brotherhood is indeed a key component of the Al-Islah party, with which the new Saudi regime re-established contact after years of ostracism. However, this created tensions with Egypt, where President Abdel Fattah al-Sissi is a bitter enemy of the Brotherhood, which he crushed in his own country. Egypt and the UAE remain inflexible about this; Abu Dhabi's crown prince, the federation's strongman, Muhammad Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan (MBZ) is himself an anti-Brotherhood hardliner. [65]

Donald Trump's election as US president upset the situation. He surrounded himself with Islamophobic advisers who argued a hardline case against the Brotherhood, even recommending it be classified as a terrorist organisation; this was encouraged by the UAE, and by its ambassador to the US. They all advocated forcing Qatar to stop support for the Brotherhood.

Trump, received with pomp by the Saudis in May 2017 on his first overseas visit as president, pressured his hosts to force Qatar to sever ties with the Brotherhood and cut off its access to Al Jazeera. Not two weeks after Trump's visit, the Saudi kingdom, Bahrain and the UAE, followed by Egypt and a few servile governments, cut diplomatic ties with Qatar. The three GCC members even suspended trade and transport links with Qatar. This generated a lot of noise but ended in a fiasco that persists to this day. Qatar, thrown out of the Yemen coalition, drew on its huge financial resources to adapt, with commercial and military help from Turkey, its ally and fellow sponsor of the Brotherhood since the beginning of the Arab Spring.

The Trump administration could tolerate Assad remaining in power under Russian tutelage on condition that Russia helps push Iranian forces

and their allies out of Syria. Riyadh has followed this policy since Trump's visit. Last October King Salman was the first Saudi ruler to visit Moscow, and to judge by the accompanying high-ranking delegation, and the contracts negotiated, this was to persuade President Putin to change his stance on Iran. A month later Trump and Putin attended the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Vietnam and signed a joint declaration on Syria, supporting the international Geneva conference process and implicitly approving Assad staying until a new constitution has been adopted and elections organised.

Nothing that the Saudis have done at Trump's instigation, towards Russia, Qatar, Lebanon or Syria, has paid off

Meanwhile, the Saudis summoned the Lebanese prime minister Saad Hariri, whose family is dependent on the Saudis, and forced him to resign; oddly, his announcement was made in Riyadh on 4 November. [66] In his statement, Hariri criticised Iran and its Lebanese auxiliary, Hizbullah (he had formed a government of national

unity with Hizbullah in 2016), ending cooperation with the Shia party. (This echoed Trump's statement in Washington in July, with Hariri by his side, when the US president criticised Hizbullah, calling it 'a threat to the Lebanese state, the Lebanese people and the whole region' and equating it with ISIS and Al-Qaida.) But then, this ended in a new fiasco: Hariri was extricated from the Saudi kingdom by France's president Emmanuel Macron, and retracted his resignation. The Lebanese coalition government remains fragile, and vulnerable to crises.

New signs of tension between Moscow and Riyadh have appeared over Syria: the Saudis, after seeming to back Russian moves towards dialogue between the regime and opposition, have toughened their stance, and encouraged the Syrian opposition to boycott the Russian approach. Ultimately, Syria's fate will depend on US-Russian relations. For now, the US attitude to Russia has hardened, as shown by 'Russiagate', new sanctions, and arms supplies to Ukraine, all against the wishes of an

irritated Trump.

The Saudis, faced with unprecedented chaos in US policy, are in a difficult situation, especially as their offensive in Yemen is deadlocked and has caused a major humanitarian disaster. Their hope of turning the situation by turning Saleh ended when he was murdered by his allies in December. On top of that, an open conflict erupted between the Yemeni forces backed by the Saudi-led coalition, with some factions supported by Abu Dhabi, others by the Saudis.

Nothing that the Saudis have done at Trump's instigation, towards Qatar, Lebanon, Syria or Russia, has paid off. The US recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital has embarrassed Saudi leaders, as, to fulfil US wishes, they have been pressuring Mahmoud Abbas's Palestinian Authority to accept Israel's diktat; they had to disavow this. Trump's international isolation over Iran can only increase their bitterness; his sword dance with his Saudi hosts is now a distant memory.

[Le Monde Diplomatique](#)

A feminism to end capitalism

14 April 2018, by **Laila Facet**

The response to the call for the women's strike on 8 March 2017, as well as all the examples of women's marches around the world, kicked off a new cycle of feminist mobilizations. The first strikes and massive mobilizations that both Macri (Argentina) and Trump (USA) faced were feminist. And for some years now, the role of women have played in the Arab spring, in the mobilizations in defence of the public sector, or in peasant protests in Latin America, is no coincidence.

The neoliberal and misogynist offensive of austerity plans is encountering strong resistance from women. Women, those who assume the reproductive burdens inside and

outside the home, inside and outside the market, inside and outside of employment. The policies of repayment and debt represent a double or triple twist of the screw for us in all these spheres.

However, not all women transversally suffer the same ravages of the crisis. The women of the bourgeoisie, of the establishment, of the ruling classes or of the state apparatus are not affected by the same experiences of dispossession. Although all of us are required to play a gender role, not all of us find the same solutions, nor do we all make the same demands.

There have been many debates both within Marxism and of feminism about

the relationship between gender and class. I argue that we are a strategic sector of the class itself and therefore of anti-capitalist combat. This conception implies, on the one hand, avoiding self-centred identity politics and analyses. Both the identity of a single Woman where different oppressions are hidden (class, race, sexuality and so on); as well as a range of plural identities detached from the material conditions that lead to their emergence (and convergence!).

On the other hand, the second, symmetrical, error is a narrow and homogeneous view of class, as well as of strategy. A vision where the issues around social reproduction are always

put off as something to be resolved after the great day of the revolution, as if it would come suddenly and solve everything. This is all the more mistaken given that self-organization of reproductive work is a necessary condition to sustain a challenge to capitalism over time.

Despite the radicalism of feminism, there is a general illusion that we should aim for a return to the golden age of "welfare" This is a "golden age" that was not really such for most women but continues to function as a desirable horizon. The crisis is creating increasing gaps in reproductive functions that had previously been assumed by the state (education, health, social services and so on). And what are the neoliberal recipes to fill these gaps? That they are privatized or performed in the home! We are experiencing a clash between expectations that are not going to be realized in this phase of capitalism and a new cycle of mobilization for which there are not sufficiently developed socio-economic strategies.

In that clash we can return to the thread that Nancy Fraser has recently begun to elaborate. Fraser explains how in the final period of the second

wave of feminism, individualist neoliberalism was combined with the pressure for feminism to only take up demands for recognition. This was a politics based on the idea of what was "realistic", that subordinated demands for redistribution as well as overall criticism of the system. The recognition that was achieved was for those who could rise socially. Those who could be empowered by "female empowerment". Those who could be successful inside neoliberalism.

This is exactly right - feminism is not necessarily anti-capitalist. But today we are at the beginning of a cycle, how can we take advantage of that and avoid an individualistic outcome that only benefits a few? How can we rebuild the dialectic between recognition and redistribution? How do we reconstruct an anti-capitalist programme and a feminist self-organization strategy? Luckily, we have something on our side: the inherent contradictions of that individualistic and liberal feminism. Substantive contradictions between the defence of women's rights, the struggle against the oppressions we suffer, and not posing a perspective that transcends the system that produces such oppressions.

Many of the classic demands of feminism are still valid. However, many of them must pass through the sieve of past experiences: participation in the labour market has not led to the promised economic independence, nor to ending obligatory family service for the majority of women. Gender roles have been reproduced in jobs, the wage gap remains a structural factor and reconciliation of personal life and work has been addressed only towards women and to cheapen the female labour force. Reorganizing work remains one of the outstanding tasks. A task that is still pending after decades of neoliberalism.

Placing mutual care above private interests in a cycle of accumulation by dispossession is a key issue. Mutual care - in addition to being an affective issue - also means ensuring everything that makes life possible: food, energy, housing, health ... If, in addition, we defend a "dignified life" - as expressed by the activists of feminist economy and ecofeminism - the range is widening. In this way, the interests of "women" are not only "our" interests, but the fundamental interests of the social majority and open a field where we can build alliances with other sectors dispossessed by capitalism.

Madrid's mounting repression against Catalan movement provokes new international solidarity

13 April 2018, by **Richard Fidler**

The Spanish state's repression is now a major issue in Germany, where former Catalan president Carles Puigdemont was arrested March 25, pursuant to a Spanish judge's warrant while travelling by car from northern Europe to Belgium, where he was living in exile. His arrest provoked immediate mass protests in Catalonia.

German prosecutors are seeking to extradite Puigdemont to Spain where,

along with other jailed and exiled Catalan nationalist leaders, he faces charges of "rebellion," which carries a sentence of 30 years imprisonment.

The Spanish court has issued similar arrest warrants against other Catalan leaders now in exile in Belgium, Scotland and Switzerland. Writing in the Catalan daily Ara April 3, legal expert Javier Pérez Royo noted that each of the extradition judges,

irrespective of their country, "knows that the individual cases that they are expected to decide on are all linked by a common thread. And all of them realise that this affair has taken centre stage as far as Europe's public opinion is concerned, as a browse through the papers will easily confirm." [67]

There is "a shared link" in all of these cases, Pérez Royo added: "what constitutes a crime of rebellion in a

democratic European country well into the 21st century?"

In a manifesto concerning the Catalan prosecutions published in November in the Spanish on-line newspaper *El Diario*, more than 100 professors of criminal law from throughout Spain state that "it's seriously mistaken to consider the facts as constituting a crime of rebellion [as defined by] article 474 of the Penal Code" because... the "structural element of this crime, which is violence, is absent." [68] In fact, as many commentators point out, the violence in Catalonia in the events in question, in September and October, was exercised by the police in their widely publicized efforts to stop the Catalan people from voting in the referendum on independence.

Professor Pérez Royo argues that "all four judges know that their answer will establish a European common denominator on the subject of rebellion crimes. Even if they do it in their own individual way, together they will decide what a crime of rebellion is and what it is not; what sort of 'violence' is required for an event to be characterised as a crime of rebellion."

And he finds a Canadian angle:

"There are times when a decision by one nation's jurisdictional body becomes a reference for the others. The case of the Canadian Supreme Court's opinion on Quebec springs to mind. [69] Even though it was not a ruling "it was not prompted by a court case, but by a formal enquiry from the federal government" and, therefore, it did not set a trial precedent, this opinion has become the single most influential piece of doctrine on what the right to self-determination is "and what it is not" as well as on the conditions under which a secession referendum may be held within a democratic country."

Pérez Royo is optimistic about the outcome of the extradition cases. All of the judges, he writes, "will seek the European common denominator, something that can be objectively and reasonably justified in front of Europe's public opinion... On the subject of the crime of rebellion, all

four judges will dismiss the arrest warrant. They will not allow the Catalan politicians to be tried for rebellion in Spain because it is impossible for the European judges to make that sort of collective decision. And they know that they cannot make contradictory decisions."

However, the Catalan issue is a hot potato in Europe, where politics may well prevail over legal considerations. And no European government or state institution has expressed support for the Catalan right to self-determination; many of them face actual or potential challenges to their territorial integrity from oppressed national minorities. This points to the prime importance of developing a European-wide and international public campaign in defense of the Catalan people and their nationalist leaders, a goal the mid-April demonstrations should help to promote.

Already, there are some encouraging signs of growing sympathy in Europe for the Catalan defense, even in the German media. For example, in an editorial titled "Asylum for Puigdemont," Jakob Augstein "an influential journalist and co-owner of *Der Spiegel*" calls for the Catalan leader to not be extradited. Augstein writes that "The detention of Puigdemont is an embarrassment. For Spain. For Europe. For Germany." [70]

And he also reminds readers about the arrest of another Catalan president, Lluís Companys:

"The Germans already handed over one Catalan politician to the Spanish. Lluís Companys declared independence in 1934. He was arrested and tried. After the victory of the leftist forces he was freed, fought against Franco, escaped to France, and was captured there by the Gestapo and sent back to Spain. He was executed on October 15, 1940."

Germany must reject the Spanish demands, says Augstein. "A politician who uses peaceful means to fight for his objectives should not have to go to prison."

In Scotland, Clara Ponsatí, education

minister in the Catalan pro-independence government and the subject of a Spanish extradition demand, raised nearly £200,000 in less than a day through a crowdfunding appeal for her legal expenses. Ponsatí is currently teaching at St. Andrews University.

In Spain itself, the government and mass media are waging an intense battle to consolidate and win further public support for their campaign against Catalan self-determination and sovereignty. Catalan socialist Martí Caussa notes:

"The immediate objective ... is to reduce independence to a minority fraction of the Catalan population by resorting to temporary emergency measures. The fundamental objective is to consolidate the authoritarian evolution of the monarchical regime of 1978, and this requires convincing the population that "after the end of the Basque ETA struggle" new and dangerous internal enemies have appeared, against which we must defend ourselves by restricting democracy.

"Two conditions are necessary if this fundamental objective is to be met:

1. convince the majority of public opinion that there is a collective (a group) that "is not ours," to describe it in terms that make it appear as an enemy and discredit those who don't agree with this narrative; and
2. justify the exceptional measures with the argument that will be limited to a particular territory and duration, but promoting legislation and a method of applying it that can be generalized throughout the state and without limits in the future."

Although the first of these conditions, which is fundamental, has been achieved, this may be only a provisional success for the Spanish state, Caussa adds.

"At present, the solidarity in major sectors of the population is weak. But there are already some magnificent examples, like those we have included in the box "Solidarity with Catalonia" on the Viento Sur website.... [71] The growth of a sense

of fraternity among all of us fighting against authoritarianism and for democracy is a necessity. Becoming a

majority is what can save us.”

[72]

April 3 2018

[Life on the left](#)

“Our Destinies are Linked”: Joseph Daher on the Syrian Revolution

12 April 2018, by **Joseph Daher**

Do the policies and actions of Bashar al-Assad’s dictatorship approach fascism? Why are authoritarians and far-rightists around the world supporting the Assad regime, and to what extent are Assad’s massacres in Ghouta and elsewhere an inspiration for them?

The Assad despotic regime definitely has fascistic trends, demonstrated by its refusal of any kind of opposition and the violence it has committed. Regarding the nature of the Assad regime, I would argue it is a despotic, capitalist and patrimonial state ruling through violent repression and using various policies such as sectarianism, tribalism, conservatism, and racism to dominate society and mobilize a cross-class popular base linked through sectarian, regional, tribal and clientelist connections to defend the regime on a reactionary basis.

The patrimonial nature of the state means the centers of power (political, military and economic) within the regime are concentrated in one family and its clique, similar to Libya and the Gulf monarchies for example, therefore pushing the regime to use all the violence at its disposal to protect its rule.

It is therefore very far from being socialist, anti-imperialist and secular as presented by some among sectors of the western left, often ignorant of Syria.

Many fascist and fascistic parties and personalities support Assad’s regime throughout the world, including Italy’s far-right Forza Nuova and CasaPound,

Greece’s neo-fascist Golden Dawn, the UK’s British National Party (BNP), and Poland’s ultranationalist National Rebirth, among others. These are part of an international front that has rallied on behalf of Bashar al-Assad and sent solidarity delegations to Syria since the beginning of the uprising. One example is European Solidarity Front for Syria (ESFS) – a coalition of neo-fascist and far-right groups that support Assad’s regime. More recently in March, seven members of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) visited Damascus.

You can find other far-right personalities supporting Assad as well, including Nick Griffin, formerly of the British National Party; American white supremacist Richard Spencer, etc.

There are different reasons that might be in contradiction sometimes, but you can found notably:

- Authoritarianism
- Islamophobia: Assad is seen as a “bulwark” against Islam and Sunni Islamic fundamentalism
- Anti-USA position, not to be confused with anti-imperialism, because they have no problem with Russian imperialism
- Anti-Semitism, which in this case includes an opposition to Israel

Links actually existed with different fascist and fascistic movements even before the uprising. For example, in

2005, David Duke, former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan and notorious Holocaust denier, delivered a speech in Damascus on state television.

On your last question, what is sure is that the impunity given to the continuous murderous crimes of Assad’s despotic regime in Ghouta and elsewhere with the assistance and/or complicity of international imperialist powers encourages other dictators and authoritarian regimes to repress violently their own people. This participates as well in a global international trend of authoritarianism present throughout the world, including among liberal democracies in the Western countries, with the advancement and deepening of neo-liberalism.

What is your response to those who say that the Syrian opposition to Assad is comprised mainly of Jihadis? What are the politics of left and democratic currents within the Syrian Revolution?

We should remember first that the Syrian grassroots civilian opposition was the primary engine of the popular uprising against the Assad regime. They sustained the popular uprising for numerous years by organizing and documenting protests and acts of civil disobedience, and by motivating people to join protests. The earliest manifestations of the “coordinating committees” (or tansiqiyyat) were neighborhood gatherings throughout Syria. The regime specifically targeted these networks of activists, who had initiated demonstrations, acts of civil disobedience, and campaigns in favor

of countrywide strikes. The regime killed, imprisoned, kidnapped and pushed to exile these activists.

Tragically throughout the year, each defeat of the democratic resistance strengthened and benefited the Islamic fundamentalist and jihadist forces on the ground. The rise of Islamic fundamentalist and jihadist movements and their dominations on the military scene in some regions has been negative for the revolution, as they opposed its objectives (democracy, social justice and equality). With their sectarian and reactionary discourses and behaviors, these movements not only acted as a repellent for the vast majority of religious and ethnic minorities, and women, but also to sections of Arab Sunni populations in some liberated areas where we have seen demonstrations against them, especially among large sections of the middle class in Damascus and Aleppo. They attacked and continue to attack the democratic activists, while they often tried to impose their authority on the institutions developed by locals, often bringing resistance from local populations against their authoritarian behaviors.

Nobody denies that we are no longer in March 2011 and that the situation of democratic and progressive forces is very weak today in Syria. Revolutionary processes are long-term events, characterized by higher and lower level mobilizations according to the context. They are even characterized by some periods of defeat, but it's hard to say when they end. This is especially the case in Syria, when the conditions that allowed for the beginning of these uprisings are still present, while the regime is very far from finding ways to solve them.

The other element that could also play a role in shaping future events is the large documentation of the uprising that has never been seen before in history. There has been significant recording, testimonies and documentation of the protest movement, the actors involved and the modes of actions. In the seventies, Syria witnessed strong popular and democratic resistance with significant strikes and demonstrations

throughout the country with mass followings. Unfortunately, this memory was not kept and was not well-known by the new generation of protesters in the country in 2011. The Syrian revolutionary process that started in 2011 is one of the most documented. This memory will remain and could inspire and inform future resistance. The political experiences that have been accumulated since the beginning of the uprising will not disappear.

Regarding the expansion of ISIS and other extremist jihadi forces, some people argue that we must "choose a camp," between Assad's regime and jihadist forces in order to find a concrete solution to the conflict. In effect, this means we must throw our support behind Assad and his allied Iranian and Russian forces. Sadly, baseless discourse like this became particularly prominent after terrorist attacks by ISIS in different countries in the world. After these attacks, many in the West began advocating for a "global war against ISIS." Those on the left and right alike argued for the need to collaborate with the Assad regime, or at least seek a solution in which the Assad dynasty remains in control of the country.

Those, like myself, who oppose this outlook are charged with being idealistic. Our critics tell us we must take "more realistic" approaches toward Syria, in order to save lives. What these individuals fail to appreciate, however, is that it is not enough to defeat ISIS, jihadist forces and other Salafist organizations. Brute military force alone only ensures that other militant groups will take its place, as al-Qaida in Iraq demonstrates. Real solutions to the crisis in Syria and elsewhere in the region must address the socio-economic and political conditions that have enabled the growth of ISIS and other extremist organizations.

We have to understand that ISIS's expansion is a fundamental element of the counter-revolution in the Middle East that emerged as the result of authoritarian regimes crushing popular movements linked to the 2011 Arab Spring. The interventions of regional and international states have contributed to ISIS's development as

well. Finally, neo-liberal policies that have impoverished the popular class, together with the repression of democratic and trade union forces, have been key in helping ISIS and Islamic fundamentalist forces grow.

The left must understand that only by ridding the region of the conditions that allowed ISIS and other Islamic fundamentalist groups to develop can we resolve the crisis. At the same time, empowering those progressive and democratic forces on the ground who are fighting to overthrow despotic regimes and face reactionary groups is part and parcel of this approach. Clearly, no peaceful and just solution in Syria can be reached with Bashar al-Assad and his clique in power. He is the biggest criminal in Syria and must be prosecuted for his crimes instead of being legitimized by international and regional powers.

What impact did the anarchist economist Omar Aziz have on the Syrian Revolution, particularly on the establishment of self-governing local councils? In 2016, Leila Al-Shami cited an estimate that there were 395 local councils across Syria. What has happened with the councils since then?

Omar Aziz, a 63-year-old anarchist activist who was arrested in October 2012 and died under torture in a regime jail in February 2013, was the first to call for the establishment of "local councils" in October 2011. Certainly in Damascus and its province his ideas and call for self-governing councils was important and inspirational for many activists. However, this was also the result of the reality of the ground. After the regime's forces withdrew from some regions, people had to organize society politically and to coordinate between civilians and armed opposition groups.

The number of local councils has diminished considerably after the fall of Eastern Aleppo in December 2016 and because of the military advances of pro-regime forces capturing opposition held territories, and also as a result of the attacks of Islamic fundamentalist and jihadist armed groups that replaced civilians councils with their own.

Regarding local councils that played an important role in the opposition held areas, we must be clear that their very important experiences did not mean that there were no shortcomings, such as the lack of representation of women, or of religious minorities in general. Other problems existed as well such as some forms of disorganization, undemocratic practices, overrepresentation of some influential families in some areas, etc. Civil councils were also not always completely autonomous from military groups, relying often on military groups for resources. While numerous council members were generally elected, nearly half of them, there were also a number of councils undemocratically appointed rather than elected, based on the influence of local military leaders, clan and family structures, and elders. Another problem that was encountered in the selection of the council's representatives was the need for particular professional and technical skills.

Despite these limitations, local councils were able to restore a minimum level of social services in their regions and enjoyed some level of legitimacy.

In your article "The Kurdish Crisis in Iraq and Syria" you argue that "we should not isolate the struggle for self-determination of the Kurdish people from the dynamics of the Syrian revolution." [73] What suggestions do you have for people who support both the Syrian revolution and the Rojava revolution despite the clashes between elements of these two struggles?

We should not separate their destinies firstly, and we should oppose the various military attacks on Afrin, Idlib and Eastern Ghouta and support all the civilians in Syria.

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

international actors.

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

In general, no solution for the Kurdish issue and an inclusive Syria can be found without recognizing the Kurds as a proper "people" or "nation" in Syria and providing unconditional support to the self-determination of the Kurdish people in Syria and elsewhere. This does not, however, justify being uncritical of any negative PYD policies (or any other Kurdish political party).

We can see that defeat of the Syrian uprising would probably mark the end of the Rojava experience and the return to an era of oppression for the Kurds of Syria. The Assad regime and the reactionary forces, which now dominate much of the scene in Syria would not allow any possible development of a political experience that is at odds with their authoritarianism.

We should oppose also all forms of sectarianism and racism. Our slogan should be "Our destinies are linked." More generally we have to link once again the uprising in Syria to the uprisings in the region in other countries. Like this, we can see the links in our struggles and that each defeat of people in struggles for more democracy and social justice is a defeat for all. Despotic and authoritarian regimes learn from their experiences in repression and share them with their allies. This is a reality, and this is why we need more collaborations between progressive forces throughout the region.

What is the effect of Turkey's invasion of Afrin on the Syrian and Rojava revolutions?

It is catastrophic in humanitarian aspect of course, but also politically.

So in mid-March 2018, as a reminder, the Turkish army and its Syrian

proxies took over the city of Afrin, following the withdrawal of YPG forces of the city. Following the conquest and occupation of the city, fighters of the Syrian opposition armed groups linked to Ankara plundered and looted civilian residences and shops, while they tore down a statue of Kawa, a central and symbolic figure in a Kurdish legend about the new year celebration of Newroz. Nearly 100,000 people also fled their homes after the invasion of Afrin. This is not to forget that during the military campaign against Afrin, they also attacked civilians and mutilated the corpses of Kurdish YPG and YPJ soldiers and displayed it on social media, notably of a member of the Kurdish Women's Protection Units, fueling ethnic tensions. Tensions were heightened, and ethnic divisions were deepened between Arabs and Kurds.

Opposition activists have to be clear in their opposition to the Syrian Coalition. The Syrian Coalition, composed mainly of liberal, Islamic and conservative personalities and groups, not only supported Turkish military intervention and continued its chauvinistic and racist policies against the Kurds in Syria, but also participated in this operation by calling Syrian refugees in Turkey to join the Syrian armed opposition groups fighting in Afrin. They have called for Turkish military intervention for a long time and have encouraged Arab chauvinism and racism against the Kurds, while even justifying and supporting the presence of Islamic fundamentalist movements. The Syrian fighters in Ankara have multiplied racist speeches against Kurds since the beginning of the military operation.

Turkey is also using this military intervention to serve internal objectives by crushing the Kurdish issue and satisfying the Turkish far right and extreme nationalists. In addition to this, and as I had mentioned on numerous occasions in the past, as the fight against Daesh is nearly completed, the USA has announced its willingness to withdraw its forces from Syria, which would leave the opportunity for Turkey to intervene militarily, just as in Afrin, in the northeastern areas of the country controlled by PYD, without opposition

from the USA. Erdogan has actually declared that Turkish forces will press their offensive against Kurdish YPG fighters along the length of Turkey's border with Syria and if necessary into northern Iraq.

How should the internationalist left respond to calls from some Syrians and Kurds for assistance from the United States military?

There is definitely no easy answer, especially when people are getting massacred on one side and, on the other, the USA has no willingness of any regime change in Syria, as has been the case since the beginning of the uprising, or, as we saw, to stop the Turkish intervention against the Kurds in Afrin.

Today the main issue is really demanding the end of the war, an end to all military interventions and guaranteeing rights for the civilians. I expanded on this issue in the last question.

However, while disagreeing with groups demanding military interventions, we should still maintain our solidarity with all the democratic and progressive forces in Syria as well as the Kurdish socialist and democratic forces that resist against the two actors of the counter revolution: the Assad regime on one side and the jihadist and Islamic reactionary forces on the other side.

From this perspective, what we can argue is that it is necessary to defend a local dynamic of self-defense rather than increasing the stranglehold of imperialism, and therefore we should also support the provision of weapons and arms to these democratic forces in the region to combat both counter-revolutionary forces. These are important element that could empower the democratic and progressive forces on the ground and give them the tools to defend themselves.

For the people who don't feel at ease with the fact of demanding arms and weapons with no political conditions and strings attached from the West, I would like to invite them to read Trostky's "Learn to Think." [74]

This does not mean of course that we are uncritical of the leadership of these groups that have such demands, and we should maintain our independence and critical opinions, even when dealing with them.

We have to be clear that imperialist actors and regional powers all act according to an imperialist logic that maintains authoritarian and unjust systems. They all oppose the self-determination of the peoples of the region and their struggles for emancipation. Hence, anti-war activists whether in the Middle East or the West need to address all forms of repression and authoritarianism, and condemn all forms of foreign intervention against the interests of the people of the region.

What is Israel's role in the conflict and view on regime change? How do you respond to those who say Assad's regime is a champion of Palestine?

Unwilling to see any radical change at its borders, Israel favored a similar option in Syria to the USA's. The main priorities of the Israeli state were firstly to prevent the civil war in Syria from spreading across its borders and secondly to prevent chemical weapons from falling into the hands of extremist Islamic groups or the transfer of significant arms to Hezbollah in Lebanon. In September 2017, former Israeli air force chief Amir Eshel declared Israel had hit arms convoys of the Syrian military and its Hezbollah allies nearly 100 times since the beginning of 2012. Assad's regime, unwilling to provoke Israel, never responded to these interventions, except in February 2018 when an anti-aircraft fire downed an Israeli warplane returning from a bombing raid on Iran-backed positions in Syria. Israel then launched a second and more intensive air raid, hitting what it stated were 12 Iranian and Syrian targets in Syria, including Syrian air defense systems. Following this confrontation, both Israel and Syria signaled they were not seeking wider conflict, while Russia and the USA were concerned about any more violent escalation.

Israeli authorities also publicly stated their opposition to seeing any Iranian

or Hezbollah troops close to its borders and called on Russia to prevent this from happening. In this context, Israel multiplied attacks, especially from 2017, against Hezbollah and pro-Iranian targets in Syria.

As a possible gesture to appease the apprehensions of the Israeli state, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi stressed at the end of February 2018 that his country's presence in Syria at the invitation of Damascus was not aimed at creating a new front against Israel, but at combating terrorism. The main issue today for Israel is therefore the presence of Iran and Hezbollah close to its borders in Syria.

Regarding the second question, this is one of the biggest lies of the Syrian regime. Actually the final break in 1970 between Salah Jadid, de facto leader of Syria at the time, and Hafez al-Assad, who was Minister of Defense and head of the Air force, occurred following the refusal of Hafez al-Assad to support the government decision to allow the Palestinian Liberation Army (under command of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA)) to intervene in Jordan during the war in 1970 between the Palestinian resistance and King Hussayn's army. This led to the bloody Black September with thousands Palestinians killed. The Ba'th party led by Jadid started a process to expel Assad from his positions of power, in order to dominate the army more firmly. The decision was never implemented. The army took control over the party headquarters, on the orders of Hafez al-Assad and Mustafa Tlass. This new bloody coup led to complete control of the party and of the regime by Assad.

As for anti-imperialism: the Assad regime has a history of collaboration with various imperialist forces. Assad's regime forces entered Lebanon in 1976 to crush Palestinian and Lebanese leftist forces with the support and approval of the United States and Israel. Throughout the eighties you had the war of the camps between mostly Amal and Palestinian groups, and Syria was supporting Amal against the Palestinian groups and crushing them.

Less known, following 1982 and the crushing of Palestinian groups in Lebanon by the Syrian regime, Yarmouk camp, which is a neighborhood of Palestinians in Damascus, witnessed a couple of uprisings or protest movements on a massive level within Damascus. There was massive repression by the Syrian secretive services against them, with more than a 1,000 political prisoners throughout the eighties in Assad's prisons.

In 1991, Syria supported the US led intervention against Iraq. From 1974 until 2011, not a single bullet was shot from Syria to liberate the occupied Golan. Assad was always ready to enter into a peace agreement with Israel if Israel gave back at least a section of the occupied Golan but Israel never wanted that. It wasn't the opposite and it's very important to understand this. Until this day they see Assad as the lesser evil, as the best guarantee for their own borders. So this is why they are happy with a weakened dictatorship in Syria, as opposed to regime change. Israel fears various uprisings in the region, because authoritarian regimes had interest to, directly or indirectly, collaborate with Israel and crush their own people along with the Palestinians. The best example was a statement made by Avigdor Lieberman, Israel's Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2011, when he declared that the biggest threat to Israel is a successful Egyptian revolution, an Egyptian democracy, and not Iran. Because this revolution could be extended to the region, and people liberating themselves will turn towards the Palestinian cause that has been a central cause for decades in the region. So no, definitely the Assad regime is very far from being an ally of the Palestinian people or of any of the peoples struggling for freedom and dignity.

Since 2011, there has been massive repression against Palestinians refugees in Syria. Syria's Yarmouk camp suffered a horrible siege with hundreds of people dying of hunger etc. In the first week of the uprising Bouthaina Shaaban, the advisor of the Syrian regime, accused the Palestinians of fomenting sectarian

strives within Syria, especially in Latakia etc. Several Palestinian refugee camps have been bombed. Today there's more than 20,000 Palestinians wanted by the Assad regime.

I believe that the liberation of the popular classes of the region and of Palestine are linked. The liberation of Palestine and its popular classes is linked to the liberation and emancipation of the popular classes in the region against their ruling classes and the various imperialists, particularly the USA and Russia, and regional powers, such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar. In this similar logic we have to fight against all attempts by regimes and Islamic reactionary forces to divide the popular classes according to their gender, religious sects, nationalities, etc. in an attempt to rule them and therefore prevent their liberation and the Palestinian popular classes' liberation as well.

What are some direct actions that anti-fascists and anti-authoritarians can take in solidarity with the Syrian people, including those being massacred in Ghouta, Idlib, and Afrin?

Multiple things should be done. I think anti-fascists and anti-authoritarians should call for an end to the war, which has created terrible suffering. It has led to massive displacement of people within the country and driven millions out of it as refugees. The war only benefits the counterrevolutionary forces on all sides. From both a political and humanitarian perspective, the end of the war in Syria is an absolute necessity.

Likewise, we must reject all the attempts to legitimize Assad's regime, and we must oppose all agreements that enable it to play any role in the country's future. A blank check given to Assad today will encourage future attempts by other despotic and authoritarian states to crush their populations if they come to revolt.

We have to guarantee as well the rights of civilians within Syria, particularly preventing more forced displacements and securing the rights of refugees (right of return, right for

financial compensations in case of destruction of their houses, justice for the losses of their relatives, etc.).

Assad and his various partners in the regime must be held accountable for their crimes. The same goes for the Islamic fundamentalist and jihadist forces and other armed groups.

We need to support the democratic and progressive actors and movements against both sides of the counterrevolution: the regime and its Islamic fundamentalist opponents. We have to build a united front based on the initial objectives of the revolution: democracy, social justice, and equality, saying no to sectarianism and no to racism.

We of course need to oppose all imperialist and authoritarian actors intervening in Syria.

In their own countries, the left internationally should also struggle

- for the opening of borders for migrants and refugees and against building walls or transforming Europe for example into a fortress that would turn the Mediterranean Sea into a cemetery of migrants
- against all forms of Islamophobia and racism
- against all cooperation of Western states with despotic regimes and the Apartheid, colonial and racist state of Israel (in this latter case, support BDS campaigns)
- against more "security" and anti-democratic policies promoted in the name of "the war against terrorism."

April 6, 2018

["Its Going Down"](#)

Elections in Russia, 2018: Managed Democracy?

11 April 2018, by **David Mandel**

Putin's speeches during his brief electoral campaign did not point to any major changes in domestic and foreign policies. In the international realm, one can expect the continued degradation of relations with the "West," for which the West is largely responsible. One can also suppose that there will be a significant effort made to prepare Putin's succession after 24 years in power (starting in 1998 as Security Director to the end of his current presidency in 2022). However, his leaving power is not certain in a system where personal relations of corruption play an important role.

Some spokespersons for the regime have themselves described it as a "managed democracy." This is a regime that is somewhere between a classic dictatorship (one that tolerates no organized and public opposition) and a capitalist democracy that does tolerate political liberties (but in which the interests of the dominant class are guaranteed by means other than brutal repression). "Managed democracy" tolerates political freedoms, but only to the degree they do not present a serious threat to the continuity in power of the political élite.

Managed Democracy

This said, support for Putin among the people of Russia cannot be explained entirely by the state's repressive measures or by its abuse of the so-called "administrative resources." The latter include, among others, its control of the major television networks, severe restrictions on public demonstrations, various illicit pressures exerted on public sector employees, and, when necessary, falsification of electoral results.

Putin's popularity is clearly cultivated by the regime. But it also finds a real basis in the population, even if that basis is not easily separated from the regime's efforts to cultivate it.

The first element of that popularity is the profound contrast, especially economic, between the Putin and Yeltsin periods. Even if the younger generation has no direct personal memory of the Yeltsin era, it still looms large in the popular consciousness. The 1990s were a period of very deep and prolonged economic depression, hyperinflation, dramatic impoverishment of the people, mass unemployment, deferred payment of wages and pensions (sometimes many months - with no indexation), massive theft of national wealth, and domination by the mafia of entire sections of the economy.

Even if it is not principally thanks to Putin's effort but to the rapid increase in the price of oil starting at the end of the 1990s, these processes ended and were largely reversed under Putin. While popular living standards have stagnated, even declined somewhat in the last few years, they saw a rapid rise in the 2000s, and the stark contrast of the present with the 1990s is still very much alive in popular memory. To cite one demographic indicator of popular well-being, life expectancy in 2000 was 65 years (as against 79 in Canada). Today it is 72.

The Mafia, The Oligarchs and The State

As for the suppression of democracy, which is usually attributed wrongly in the West to Putin, it, in fact, already occurred under Yeltsin. Putin at least removed mafia control of the economy

and restored the state's monopoly of violence. And he domesticated the oligarchs, without, however, touching their illicit fortunes, except in the few cases where they persisted in interfering in political affairs. Putin also arrested and reversed the centrifugal tendencies that threatened the integrity of the state, even if he used terroristic methods to achieve that in the case of irredentist Chechnya.

The second factor in Putin's popularity is his affirmation of Russia's sovereignty in the face of the West's actions, which are largely perceived by Russians as aggressive and antagonistic. This popular perception has, in my opinion, a significant basis in reality.

It is no exaggeration to say that the Russia of the 1990s was under the colonial administration of the G-7, in particular of the USA. Shock therapy, concocted by the IMF and World Bank at the request of the G-7, in the course of a few years transformed an industrial giant into a country dependent on the export of natural resources. Adoption of that policy was the condition of G-7 support, which was precious for Yeltsin. The G-7 also encouraged and then approved the violent suppression of democracy by Yeltsin in the fall of 1993 and validated his theft of the 1996 presidential election. [75]

To this one must add the illegal bombardment by NATO in 1999 of Serbia, traditional ally of Russia, the abrogation of the ABM treaty by the U.S. in 2002, the continued expansion of NATO, and, finally, the role played by the West in the armed overthrow of the regime in the Ukraine and in the civil war that followed.

Twelve nations have joined NATO in the past 15 years, bringing it to its

current level of 29 member countries.

It is true that the Putin regime has put a lot of effort into cultivating patriotic sentiment. He even had the election date postponed to coincide with the anniversary of the annexation of Crimea, a very popular act. But the regime finds fertile ideological terrain for these efforts in the population – of all political colours, except the most neoliberal. To understand that, one has only to have a passing knowledge of Russian history and to recognize the aggressive nature of NATO policy, particularly of the U.S., in defence of its domination of a unipolar world.

The third factor in Putin's popularity is the outcome of the so-called "revolution of dignity" of February 2014 in Ukraine – the overthrow of a corrupt, but legally elected government by a movement that was popular in its origins but was soon

joined by armed neo-fascist forces and NATO emissaries. While it is true that Russian media, controlled by the government, propagate an image of chaos and disaster in Ukraine, it is the case that they really do not have to exaggerate that reality.

However one looks at it – except from the point of view of the ultranationalists and the oligarchs – the situation of the popular classes in Ukraine has radically deteriorated. And that makes the situation in Russia look so much better. This contrast weighs heavily on the political choice even of people who hate the Putin regime. While it is true that this is aided by the regime's efforts to prevent the emergence of a credible alternative to Putin, the Ukrainian situation is of great help.

A few words about Russia's young people. Recent reports cite surveys that show that the youth support Putin

even more than the rest of the population. That is perhaps the case – the mass of young people appears even more apolitical than their elders. But 2017 saw some very big protest demonstrations, mainly of people 16-24 years of age. These demonstrations were called – but not organized – by Alexei Navalny, known as an anti-corruption campaigner. These young people came out despite the very real threat of arrest, of which there were hundreds. Having witnessed one of these myself, I can say that what mobilized these young people was less their anger at corruption in high levels than their protest against the arbitrary limits on their freedom. This beginning of an awakening among Russia's young people perhaps augurs change in that country's hitherto rather stagnant political scene.

[Socialist Project](#)

17th Congress: Analyse, act, build

9 April 2018, by **Léon Crémieux**

This was a reminder of these anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles, the mobilization of youth on an international scale, but also the powerful general strike of 10 million workers in France for several weeks and the Italian "creeping May" that followed. This turn of the late 1960s was a powerful stimulus for tens of thousands of activists and promoted the building of many revolutionary organizations including sections of the Fourth International. This was the spirit that Alain brought to the congress, a perspective open to the future, the international convergence that was seen in full light in 1968 is today echoed in the multitude of fightbacks and struggles occurring throughout the world.

The contrast between this evocation and the present situation made particularly obvious the need to work on analysing the world situation, reviewing the activity of social

movements and the building of anti-capitalist organizations.

Indeed the discussions covered many issues that have emerged since the previous congress of 2010. The climate of the congress reflected both the weight of attacks and setbacks, and the real involvement in struggles and fightbacks and perseverance in efforts to bring together radical forces.

Those who were present want to think and build based on the achievements of an activist International committed to building political convergence at the heart of all social struggles. Today, our International brings together 55 sympathizing sections and organizations in 40 countries, bringing together more than 13,000 activists.

This congress took stock of a situation marked by the revolutionary explosions of the Arab region, the

experiences of the Latin American popular governments, the outbreaks of Indignad@s, Occupy and Nuit Debout, the Greek people's resistance to the injunctions of the Troika, massive feminist mobilizations against violence, rape and feminicide to push for women's rights. But it is also marked by the power of Trump, Putin, Erdogan, Netanyahu and Duterte and the reactionary drift of many governments in Europe. All these political elements are occurring in a context of prolonged crisis of a capitalist system accumulating financial, ecological, social and political crises.

In this period the popular and revolutionary movements have not succeeded in firmly countering reactionary offensives and in particular the challenges to social gains won in the old industrialized countries in previous decades. The revolutionary upsurges in the Arab

region have given way to reactionary governments, and in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela, popular governments have not kept their promises of economic transformations that would challenge the system. The capitalist offensive against the Greek people succeeded in making the Tsipras government play the role of executor of the Troika attacks. Finally, in Europe as well as in the Middle East and Asia, reactionary religious forces have been able to take root in popular layers, developing violent campaigns against women and LGBT people.

The delegates expressed their desire to build our International because the past years have confirmed the need to regroup to act in a world where wars, violence, attacks against the workers and oppressed have weighed even more heavily, increasing the need for solidarity, internationalist coherence, and also for an anticapitalist and revolutionary orientation, addressing the problems at their root.

Analysing the situation

In the first place, there was a debate on the current phase of capitalist globalization and the analysis of the imperialist powers, the political chaos and its implications. [76] Analysis of the balance of power between US imperialism, which, even weakened, remains the main military power, master of the main economic levers, and the dynamic rise of China which has an imperialist policy through its military presence in the China Sea and its power of international economic investment. The vast majority of delegates agreed with this framework. At the same time, interventions underscored the internal resistance to the Trump Administration's policy and the power of women's mobilizations and responses to racist violence in the US. Other comrades testified to the aggressiveness and increasing presence of Chinese capital in Latin America and Africa, grabbing control over vast areas of farmland, jeopardizing traditional production and social fabric. The important presence of comrades from Asian countries brought to the discussion all the dimensions of this chaotic social

situation in which, nevertheless, our International is developing strong organizations, well established in the popular classes, in particular in Pakistan and the Philippines.

America and Europe were solidly represented among the 180 activists who participated in the debates of this congress. The presence of delegates from our North African organizations and that of comrades invested in the tasks of internationalist solidarity, allowed the situation in the Arab region to be present in our debates, in spite of the absence of delegates from the Middle East - apart from Turkey - as well as from sub-Saharan Africa except South Africa, reflecting both the real difficulties of coming to Europe but also the weakness of our forces. [77]

The second debate dealt with the capitalist destruction of the environment and the eco-socialist alternative. [78] This was the third world congress to deal with this issue, which was already put at the heart of our work in 2003. Unfortunately, the situation has only become even more catastrophic in the past 15 years. The resolution adopted emphasizes the essential responsibility of the capitalist system rather than of humanity in general, in the destruction of the environment. There was a general agreement to fight at the same time against climate change and for the eradication of the capitalist system as a mode of production. This goal requires that people take control of their destiny, not relying on the working of the market as part of a green capitalism but acting to meet their social needs, starting with the public appropriation of resources, while questioning the extractivist policies and useless mega-projects. The debate highlighted the place of women and peasant communities in these struggles, the role of Via Campesina and the militant involvement of our organizations, particularly in the Philippines, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Brazil, but also in Canada, the USA, especially against the Keystone pipeline, and in Europe in the mobilizations around the COPs of Copenhagen and Paris, as well as through the protests in France against the project of Notre Dame des Landes airport, or in Germany around

the movement of civil disobedience Ende Gelände ("it stops here and now") which opposes lignite mines.

The next debate focused both on the analysis of growth and wage transformation on a global scale - with the rise of precarious forms of employment, and the record of resistance movements and popular clashes. [79]

The comrades defending two minority resolutions insisted on the numerical growth of the working class at the world level and its central place in the struggles. [80]

For the majority, the problem posed to us is in no way that of a numerical decline of the working class. On the contrary, over the last 10 years, there has been a growth in wage labour, both in production and in services, particularly in the new industrialized countries. But this numerical growth is coupled with a political weakening of the workers' movement due to several essential causes: one is the crisis of the traditional reformist, social-democratic and Stalinist organizations in the old industrialized countries, in the case of the first as a result of their policy of managing neoliberalism, and for the second dragged down by the fall of the Stalinist systems. Another element of weakening comes obviously from the defeats accumulated in recent years, within Europe and on the American continent the frontal attacks through the policies of social compromise, seeking to undermine many gains in the field of employment and social protection. Likewise, the development of new working classes, particularly in Asia (China, India, Turkey, etc.), has not occurred in the same context and balance of power as in the 20th century. This defensive situation has not, however, broken the will of the exploited and oppressed to struggle, and the social struggles, for example, in the Maghreb, Latin America, Europe in recent years have shown this fighting spirit.

The discussion also highlighted several strengths: the affirmation of workers' combativity in the new industrialized countries, the decisive weight of young people in all the mobilizations of these last years and

the place of the feminist movement with generations of young women activists animating not only feminist struggles but being at the heart of all fights. Further to this, several delegates emphasized a strong interconnection between battles in the workplaces, issues of discrimination, the environment and the fight against sexist violence. These links are even stronger in all the struggles carried out in rural areas, often against the multinationals and military interventions. Experiences of resistance, as well restarting production in a self-managed framework in factories and rural areas were also underlined.

Many young comrades, especially women, spoke in this discussion, testifying to their intervention in the mass movements and enriching the debate, both on the trade union struggles in Italy or the US and on mobilizations of the youth, as well as solidarity in Pakistan around our comrade Baba Jan, threatened with life imprisonment for taking part in peasant mobilization against land evictions. In the end, the authoritarian drift of many governments has not diminished the power of many actions challenging capitalist exploitation and oppression. [81]

Our role and party-building tasks

The last point - on the role and tasks of our International and its sections - was the point of convergence of the previous discussions and of the

questions on which two alternative platforms had been formed. [82]

In recent years, our debates have focused on several of our sections' experiences in building broader parties, playing a useful role in the class struggle and leading the fight against capitalism and the lessons have been learned from the recent experiences of our comrades in Podemos in the Spanish state, the PSOL in Brazil, the Awami Workers Party in Pakistan, the Bloco de Esquerda in Portugal, the Red and Green Alliance in Denmark, or the orientation towards Syriza.

The debates focused on several issues: the situation of aggressive capitalist globalization, chaos and international disorder has not closed the door to revolutionary eruptions and major political crises. Anti-capitalists on a global scale today have heavy responsibilities: to build political organizations useful for resistance in everyday life and capable of facing crises posing the question of power. Faced with the criticism of two distinctly minority positions, the text adopted by the Congress defends the need to keep both ends of the process. Resistance requires forging tools that oppose austerity policies, no matter where they come from. All the situations discussed during this congress thus show the double need to build, where possible, broad and effective political convergences and to defend within them an important anti-capitalist and ecosocialist orientation. This confirms the choice to maintain in all cases the organization of activists of the Fourth International.

This congress confirmed the work of cohesion, reflection and political agreement that rejuvenates the leaderships of our organizations and of our International. It is also the strength of this process that makes it possible in countries where divisions take place within our sections, as has recently been the case in Brazil and Italy, for the International to remain a strong link that in the long run enables us to reunite our forces in a common organization, as has just been the case in Germany.

The presence of several new organizations that were invited for the first time, such as the Brazilian MAIS and the Pakistani The Struggle, also testifies to this desire for democratic convergence in our International. From the same point of view, also in Brazil, the MES now has the status of sympathizing organization of the Fourth International.

Finally, the Congress was an opportunity to reaffirm our choice of building our International, developing our analytical and programmatic thinking through regular seminars, the development of our educational Institutes in Amsterdam, Manila and Islamabad and the initiative of an annual gathering of young people in Europe. These efforts are paying off in the rejuvenation of the new elected leadership. On the other hand, among the participants in this congress as a whole, there were only 25% women, although many FI organizations had respected parity in their delegations and there are 40% women in the new leadership.

Bangladesh's Incomplete Revolution

8 April 2018, by **Alex de Jong**

In 1968-69, Pakistan was rocked with protests. Tariq Ali described it as the "unfashionable" 1968:

[F]ar removed from the glamour of Europe and the United States,[i]t was also different in character. The gap

between the actions of the Pakistani students and workers and the actual conquest of power was much narrower than in France or Italy, let alone the United States or Britain... The scale of the movement was breathtaking: during five months of continuous

struggles that began on November 7, 1968, and ended on March 26, 1969, some 10-15 million people had participated in the struggle across East and West Pakistan.

Repression had been deadly,

especially in the East, where almost two thousand were killed.

After the partition of India in 1947, Pakistan was an anomaly. It consisted of two geographically separate wings: West Pakistan, which became the political and economic center even though a minority of the population lived there, and East Pakistan, created from the Muslim majority eastern regions of Bengal. Pakistan was to be built around this shared Muslim identity, but there were few other bonds linking the East and West.

The West Pakistani language Urdu, was declared the official language. East Pakistani citizens staged large protests, and the police killed several demonstrators. West discriminated against East in other ways, as well: what would become Bangladesh had fewer representatives in the civilian and military hierarchy than their western counterparts.

By 1968, pro-independence sentiments in the East had been simmering for two decades. It took hold of the student and worker unrest to make itself into a potent force.

East Pakistan faced what amounted to internal colonialism. Economic exploitation extracted millions annually, and the Pakistani government still heavily discriminated against Eastern citizens. Badruddin Umar, active during this time in the East Pakistani Maoist movement, wrote that "the slogan of Independent Bengal had begun to be raised in the streets of Dhaka, especially by the workers belonging to the leftist students' organisations during the 1968-69 movement. [83] At mass rallies, demonstrators chanted *Joi Bangla* (Long Live Bengal) and called for *Krishok-Sramik Raj*, "rule by peasants and workers."

Fearing they would lose control because of pressure from mass movements, Pakistan's generals demanded that dictator Ayub Khan step down. His successor, General Yahya Khan, declared martial law. But, in hopes of placating the protesters, he also announced the country's first-ever general elections for December 1970. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Ayub Khan's former minister

of foreign affairs emerged victorious in the West. Bhutto came from an aristocratic and well-connected family and in 1967 had established the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). The PPP combined populist, even socialist rhetoric with Pakistani nationalism and alliances with sections of wealthy landlords. But in the East, the Awami League (AL) capitalized on the mass movement, winning 167 of the 169 seats allotted to the East in the national government. [84]

The AL held essentially conservative positions, oriented toward constitutional politics. It was the party of the urban petty-bourgeois and civil servants: lawyers, teachers, and merchants. But the AL also demanded respect from West Pakistan and regional autonomy, a platform that won it massive support.

Though the East had stronger left-wing traditions than the West, Communist parties failed to lead the mass movement or profit from the elections. One reason for this was that both the most dynamic parts of the Left and Pakistan itself had strong ties to Mao's China. Most left-wing forces were in some way influenced by Maoism, and the government maintained friendly relations with China as a counterweight to their shared rival, India. Because of Ayub's "objective anti-imperialist characteristics," much of the Maoist left did not oppose his regime and avoided making demands that might weaken Pakistan's position in relation to India, including self-determination for the East.

During a visit to China in 1963, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, a peasant leader and one of the most prominent figures in the pro-Beijing left, praised the Ayub regime, saying he was "pleased" that "Pakistan's current government has already eliminated much of imperialism's influence on politics and the economy. Particularly fortunate is that they have developed friendly relations with China." Mao's Foreign Affairs Minister Zhou Enlai asked Bhasani not to put too much pressure on Ayub Khan in the future.

Not everyone heeded the request in the years to come. Inspired by the

Naxalites in India, segments of the East Pakistan Maoist left radicalized in the late sixties, but they abandoned work in mass movements for small-scale guerrilla attacks and boycotted the elections. Despite the radical turn, most of the Maoist forces still rejected self-determination.

The pro-Moscow left was much smaller, but it enjoyed disproportionate representation in the press and academia. In both halves of Pakistan, these leftists focused on restoring parliamentary democracy so single-mindedly that they became almost indistinguishable from liberal forces. In the East, Soviet sympathizers supported self-determination but were little more than an appendage of the AL.

The AL's election victory entitled it to form the new government, but Bhutto "who had campaigned on the promises of a strong army, a strong central government, and used fiery nationalist rhetoric" refused to accept the results and boycotted the new parliament. Military commanders, a privileged clique that spent over half of the country's yearly budget, also rejected self-determination for East Pakistan. Even the AL's moderate platform threatened the ruling class's hold over the region's cheap resources and consumer market.

A new mass movement took shape, this time specifically around the issue of self-determination. AL leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman called for protests and strikes. Security forces killed several people, ramping up tension. At a huge rally, Rahman called on the government to lift martial law, investigate the murders, withdraw the army, and transfer power to elected representatives. Pro-independence sentiments were spreading and radicalizing, and even judges on the high court refused to work.

The Yahya regime entered negotiations with the AL, stalling so that it could move troops and weapons into East Pakistan. At midnight on March 25, 1971, the Pakistani army struck. Among its first targets were the dormitories at the University of Dhaka. Soldiers killed and raped hundreds of students and teachers,

and Rahman was arrested the following day.

In classic colonial fashion, ethnic and religious bigotry motivated the Pakistani army and their supporters in Islamist militias, the Razakar. The fighters saw the Bengali people as weak and inferior. They especially targeted the Hindu minority: in Dhaka, soldiers burnt Hindu neighborhoods and killed people in the streets. One Pakistani officer promised that once the East was defeated, “each of his soldiers would have a Bengali mistress and that neither dogs nor Bengalis would be allowed in the exclusive Chittagong Club.”

As violence spread, resistance took shape. Both pro-Moscow and Maoist groups organized militias, and Bengali soldiers and police rebelled.

But while the Pakistani army committed atrocities on a genocidal scale, Beijing remained quiet. [85] On April 12, 1971, the Pakistani press published a message from Zhou Enlai praising the government for its “useful work” in upholding the unity of the country and declaring that “what is happening in Pakistan at present is purely an internal affair of Pakistan.” China provided more than verbal support for the Yahya Khan regime – in May, it gave the regime an interest-free loan of \$100 million.

Some Maoists inside Bangladesh and abroad denounced the independence movement as an anti-Chinese conspiracy of “Indian expansionists” aided by “Soviet social-imperialism.” Others, disgusted by this analysis, joined forces with the AL. Bhasani, for one, called on his followers to fight for an independent Bangladesh. But one of the largest pro-Beijing factions, the East Pakistan Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) (EPCP-ML) directed its guerrillas to fight not only the Pakistani army but also the AL-led Mukti Bahini (Freedom Fighters).

At the end of the war, the EPCP-ML was marginalized. Though Maoist factions had played an important role in the struggle against Pakistan, Beijing’s attitude severely harmed the movement.

For many of the same reasons as

China, the United States wasn’t excited to see the birth of a new state at the expense of its old ally. In his book *The Blood Telegram*, Gary J. Bass describes why President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger supported the Yahya Khan regime. They believed that India and, through it, the Soviet Union would enjoy a strong influence on the new state. “Bengalis,” Kissinger opined, “are by nature left.” After Archer K. Blood, the US consul general in East Pakistan, sent a telegram disagreeing with this policy and decrying Pakistani war crimes, he was removed from his post.

The total number of people killed in the war is unclear – many scholars estimate the number to be around half a million, and the Bangladeshi government claims that 3 million died.

India saw the crisis as an opportunity to weaken its rival and gain influence along the Chinese border. New Delhi provided shelter and support for the AL leadership, but the Indira Gandhi government worried about how the struggle was developing. The independence movement was becoming increasingly dependent on support from workers and peasants. Leftist ideas were gaining support, and, under pressure from its popular base, the AL was taking more and more radical positions.

To forestall a further leftward shift and ensure its influence, India decided to intervene directly. On December 3, 1971, its army went into Bangladesh. With help of the local population and the Mukti Bahini, Pakistani forces were routed within two weeks.

The defeat also meant the end of Yahya Khan’s rule, and he handed power over to Bhutto a few days later. The following month, Mujibur Rahman was released from prison and became the first leader of an independent Bangladesh.

Independent Bangladesh

Initially, the AL and Mujibur Rahman enjoyed massive support, but they faced pressure from their radicalized

base. In keeping with a long tradition of tactical flexibility, as Badruddin Umar writes, “the Awami League took up the slogan [of socialism] and declared it as their own.” The new state was officially a “people’s republic,” and its constitution described its founding principles as “nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism.” The AL promised to nationalize all local banks and insurance companies, all jute, textile, and sugar mills, and major portions of foreign trade as a first step to socialism.

But the new government quickly became mired in corruption and nepotism, and its radical promises went unfulfilled. Despite American opposition to the independence struggle, large parts of the AL leadership held fundamentally pro-US positions. The nationalization program avoided touching American or British interests, and the government tried to refrain from antagonizing the United States. Prices multiplied while wages dropped. The nationalizations that took place just allowed the politically connected to loot the expropriated companies.

The material demands of the uprising were lost – the Awami League only delivered on its more symbolic promises. In the sarcastic words of Bangladeshi writer Ahmed Sofa:

Our leaders are constantly talking about doing this and that [for] the Bengali language. The gist of their speeches is: O, Bengali people, you have suffered a lot to get an independent nation. Bangladesh is a beautiful country, that is why we call it the mother. Bengali language is the mother goddess’s language. Those who speak against it, we call them collaborators and Pakistani spies. You have sacrificed a lot for this Bengali language. If independent Bangladesh cannot give you clothes to wear, cover up your privates with Bengali culture. And if you cannot get two meals of rice a day, chew on Bengali language with great relish!

As the AL lost support, it began to splinter. Parts of its student movement and a left-wing nationalist current organized the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD, National Socialist Party). Other

left-wing parties gained strength. The Maoist Purbo Banglar Sarbahara Party (PBSP, East Bengal Proletarian Party), led by Shiraj Sikder, had fought the Pakistani army alongside the AL's Mukthi Bahini. [86] The PBSP's influence waned during Mujibur Rahman's heyday, but as the AL's popularity declined, the PBSP grew. It continued to wage low-level guerrilla struggles and began organizing mass strikes.

Pressured, Rahman became increasingly autocratic, and AL militias attacked opposition activists. On January 2, 1975, police killed Sikder, and Rahman taunted his opponents by asking in parliament; "Where today is that Shiraj Sikder?" Later that month, he declared one-party rule "still supported by the pro-Soviet Communist Party.

But while Mujibur Rahman repressed the forces to his left, the right wing brought him down. On August 15, 1975, pro-US officers murdered him and most of his family, marking the beginning of several months of political instability. Eventually, Major General Ziaur Rahman emerged as the new strongman.

After a counter-coup in early November 1975, Ziaur Rahman was put under house arrest, but a soldiers' revolt, which the JSD helped organize, freed him a few days later. Ziaur Rahman quickly turned on his allies, sentencing Abu Taher, a JSD leader and hero of the liberation war, to death in a secret trial. [87] Other JSD activists received long prison sentences.

From Dictatorship to Democracy

Ziaur Rahman turned to the West for political support and allied with Islamist forces at home. In 1977, he removed secularism from the constitution. He also rehabilitated the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), whose militia had sided with the Pakistani army and committed war crimes during the liberation struggle.

Eventually, Ziaur Rahman himself was murdered. His successor, General H.

M. Ershad, presided over another authoritarian regime until 1990, continuing Ziaur's policy of complying with IMF demands by liberalizing trade and privatizing enterprises. The influx of foreign aid and development projects created a new Bangladeshi middle class, closely linked to NGOs.

Like Ziaur, Ershad used right-wing religious forces against the Left. Both regimes supported Islamist student organizations in hopes of balancing out leftist influences on college and university campuses. A 1988 amendment declared Islam the state religion, and the government supported militia attacks on Hindu businesses in hopes of diverting popular dissatisfaction with the government into religious conflict.

During the eighties, left parties lost much of their strength. Former leftists, opposed to the AL, ended up supporting the Ziaur and Ershad regimes, seeing the enemy of their enemy as their friend. The Communist Party continued to follow the AL's lead, but Maoist groups refused to work with those they considered "paid agents of Soviet social-imperialism."

Fortunately, leftist ideas found fertile ground in various opposition groups and movements. Women's organizations took the lead in challenging the religious drift of the Bangladeshi state. Both independent groups and organizations linked to different left parties formed, including the Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, which started as an offshoot of the pro-Soviet CP.

Though right-wing forces depicted their activities as primarily "anti-religious," these feminist organizations also criticized the state's development policies and opposed discriminatory inheritance and divorce laws.

Students also resisted Ershad's regime. The government met their demonstrations with violence, which only increased public support for the students. In November 1982, police and militia invaded Dhaka University, savagely beating students and faculty. During a protest the next February, government forces killed at least four people when shooting at student

protesters.

Women and students weren't the only ones who took to the streets during the Ershad regime. In 1984, the trade union federation Workers-Employees Unity Council called a two-day *hartal*. More involved than a strike, a *hartal* is a mass protest often involves shutting down not only workplaces and shops but also schools and roads. The protesters demanded that the government allow the organization of independent unions. Hundreds were arrested and several killed. Peasant and agricultural workers, lawyers, teachers, doctors, and cultural workers joined the movement.

In October 1990, the regime once again met protesting students with deadly force. In response, tens of thousands swore they would not give up until Ershad resigned. The following month, pro-government militias attacked Dhaka University, but, after hours of fighting, they were driven off campus. Militant demonstrations and *hartals* spread throughout the country. Faced with continuing protests, Ershad finally resigned in December 1990.

Since then, Bangladeshi politics has been a game of musical chairs. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Ziaur Rahman's widow Khaleda Zia, and the AL, led by Mujibur Rahman's daughter and current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, hand power back and forth.

The party's ideological differences extend back to the Liberation War. The BNP still has close links to the army officer corps and to right-wing Islamist forces, and the AL still claims the mantle of secular nationalism. As a result, it enjoys particularly strong support among non-Muslim minorities.

But the AL is not a consistent defender of secularism or democracy. It restored the principle of secularism but retained the wording on state religion. In fact, hoping to capture the BNP's base, Sheikh Hasina has adopted increasingly reactionary positions, promising "stern action" against anyone "defaming Islam."

The AL allies with Islamists when it sees an opportunity. In 2006, it

promised to give certain Islamic scholars the right to issue *fatwa* and to punish blasphemous statements. It also said it would reject any laws that contradict the Quran or *Sunnah*. It has even joined forces with Ershad's Jatiya Party (JP), which calls for "bringing existing laws into line" with the Quran, punishing blasphemy, and providing compulsory religious education.

The restoration of democracy did not end political violence. According to the human-rights organization Ain o Salish Kendra, over a thousand people were killed in political clashes during the last five years.

The army also continues to play an important role in politics. It took direct political control of the country in 2007-9 and has significant economic power thanks to the dozens of companies it owns. Leftist academic Anu Muhammad said in a 2010 interview that "elected and nonelected, military and nonmilitary governments made no difference in the realm of government policy." [88]

Today's Social Struggles

Of Bangladesh's over 160 million citizens, more than 40 percent lives on less than \$1.25 per day. The IMF ranks Bangladesh as among the thirty poorest countries in the world, while the World Bank praises the country for its "competitive wages."

A majority of the labor force works without contracts or any kind of social protection. The size of the informal sector makes it hard for trade unions to organize workers, but, more important, the three biggest trade union federations, which represent some two-thirds of industrial workers, are actually fronts for the three biggest parties: the AL, BNP, and JP. The parties use these unions to campaign or to attack their rivals. When the AL was in opposition from 2006 to 2009, its federation called more than 170 days of strikes.

Despite the low unionization rate and the politically connected federations, the Bangladeshi working class

regularly organizes militant actions such as *hartals*. Most left-wing sentiment is now channeled into social struggles. For example, the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power, and Ports has fought against privatizing utilities, open-pit mining, and coal-fired power plants.

Several left parties, such as the Revolutionary Workers' Party and Revolutionary Democratic Party, have managed to build unions in the textile industry. Organizing in this sector represents both a difficult and an urgent task.

Garment manufacturing has grown rapidly since the late 1970s. In 1984, Bangladesh had 177 factories; by 1992, that number had ballooned to over a thousand. [89] Now, garments make up about three-quarters of Bangladesh's exports, and the nation is second only to China in apparel exports for western brands. Most factories are owned by Bangladeshi entrepreneurs, but orders come primarily from large retail firms based in the United States and Europe. Factory owners routinely violate the already limited legislation around working conditions and wages. [90] For example, most bosses pay less than the legal minimum wage of \$68 monthly.

As Dutch activist and academic Peter Custers writes, the rise of the garment industry means that, "for the first time in Bangladesh's history, [women] have been recruited in large numbers to toil as collective workers in factories." [91] But women's work is still considered "unskilled," and the "skilled" positions often go to men. Women face sexual violence on the shop floor, not to mention on their way to work. Factory owners are legally required to provide childcare facilities, but, in reality, they fire women who get pregnant.

The "capitalist exploitation of [women's] labour," Custers writes, "is interwoven with the patriarchal oppression that pervades the entire fabric of Bangladesh's society." Though the majority of garment workers are women, they have been historically underrepresented in labor leadership, which means the unions

often ignore the needs of female workers. Fortunately, this seems to be changing, as women labor activists like Kalpona Akter and Mushrefa Mishu are becoming more prominent. Two-thirds of factory-level leaders are now women.

Other important struggles are unfolding in the countryside. Bangladesh's rural sector continues to play an important economic role. Around two-thirds of the population lives in the countryside, and, out of a total labor force of about 75 million, 32 million work in agriculture. A large majority of this population is land poor, meaning they either own no land or have insufficient land to sustain themselves. Moreover, public facilities are lacking, and struggles for such resources can escalate into violence. In 2004-5, almost two dozen people were killed in the course of a peasant movement demanding electricity.

One of the largest peasant organizations, the Bangladesh Krishok Federation (BKF), was established in 1976, originally as the peasant wing of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist-Leninist) (CPB-ML, the new name of the EPCP-ML). In the eighties activists started occupying land and distributing it to peasants. Typically, the lands they occupied were legally supposed to be left fallow, but local businessmen were using them to grow cash crops. The occupations at times provoked harsh clashes with goons who are paid to drive away the peasants, attacking activists with acid and sometimes murdering them. Despite this, the BKF distributed tens of thousands of acres to tens of thousands of the poorest people in Bangladesh. Successful occupations are only the first stage of the struggle, which then calls on the government to provide public facilities such as schools, storm shelters, and drinking water. BKF thrived as a social movement even as its associated party declined. The CPB-ML is now trying to re-organize, linking up with the Fourth International and reevaluating its previous ideology.

The BKF is now focusing on climate change, which would have damaging effects on Bangladesh. The changing weather hurts agricultural production, and increasing incidences of cyclones

and flooding threaten people's lives and subsistence. Two-thirds of the country is less than fifteen feet above sea level, so a three-foot ocean rise would submerge almost 20 percent of the nation and displace more than 30 million people. The BKF demands sustainable agricultural practices and food sovereignty in order to help peasant communities mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change.

Another part of the Left still continues to support the AL; the only nominally left-wing parties with parliamentary representation are part of the government coalition. Much of the nongovernmental left, over ten parties, is part of the Democratic Left Alliance. Social movements have become the leading edge of struggles in the country while the leftist parties lost influence and strength.

Opposing Fundamentalism

The other significant vector of opposition has been against Islamic fundamentalism. As with many other political conflicts in Bangladesh, this too is linked to the legacy of the Liberation War.

In early February 2013, Abdul Kader Mullah, the assistant secretary general of Jamaat-e-Islami, the country's largest Islamist party, received a life sentence for crimes against humanity. Specifically, he was sentenced for the massacres he committed during the Liberation War, which earned him the nickname "butcher."

Emerging from court, Mullah smiled at the cameras and made the victory sign. The previous month, another JI politician, Abul Kalam Azad, had been sentenced to death for the atrocities he committed during the Liberation War. Azad, who is still in hiding, had been tried in absentia. Islamists had organized a campaign of violence and intimidation in the weeks leading up to Mullah's trial and saw his life sentence as a victory.

When Mullah's sentence was announced, over one hundred thousand people gathered in Shahbag

Circle in Dhaka. [92] None of the established parties called this demonstration. Rather, young activists organized it in opposition to Islamic fundamentalism and communalism. The protesters chanted that they were Bangladeshi first, and Muslim, Hindu, or Christian only second.

Politically, the demonstrators were diverse. Many supported AL, but other leftist groups endorsed the mobilization as well. One observer noted that the protest marked "the first time in decades [that] twelve of the fourteen student organizations were gathered for a single cause." The activists drew up a charter demanding the death penalty for all war criminals and the banning of the JI, its associated social organizations, and media outlets. Mullah was sentenced to death on appeal and executed in December 2013.

The Shahbag mobilization provoked a violent response from Islamist groups. One protester was murdered shortly after the demonstration began. Violent clashes between Islamists and the police took place after another JI leader was sentenced to death that month.

Throughout the country, Islamists organized protests and strikes; they attacked journalists and other civilians, especially Hindus; they vandalized and destroyed Hindu places of worship and nationalist monuments. In May, the Islamist organizations mobilized tens of thousands in Dhaka, demanding the death penalty for atheists and anyone accused of "blasphemy." They also called for further restrictions on women's rights and a government declaration listing the Ahmediya minority as "non-Muslim."

Even before the protests, international human-rights organizations were warning of violence. On May 5, Islamists set up barricades and demanded that the government step down. When the police dispersed them, they killed dozens. The exact number of people killed by police is unknown and investigations into the violence were blocked.

Political support for religious fundamentalism remains limited; JI

won less than 5 percent in the 2008 elections when it allied with the BNP. But these groups have gained support in social organizations, as the size of their mobilizations shows. By framing the conflict as a battle between believers and blasphemers, Islamist leaders can draw more people into the streets than they can convince to support their political program.

A crucial base comes from schools and universities, both religious and public ones. The number of religious schools "at times the only way poor people in remote locations can access education" has grown since the 1980s, often thanks to foreign support. School leaders called on their pupils to attend the May protests and organized transportation; these students formed the bulk of the crowd.

The JI leaders describe their long-term strategy as a "silent revolution." Through activity in schools and universities, they aim to change the nation's elite and transform society from above. JI leader Maulana Delwar Hussain Sayeedi claims "most Bangladeshis are not genuine Muslims. They venerate gurus, *pirs* [Sufi spiritual guides], they kneel before tombs, they worship idols like Hindus... [O]ur work consists in Islamizing this society."

The Islamist movement owes its current strength in part to the support it has long enjoyed from the government. Ziaur Rahman and Muhammad Ershad laid the groundwork. Rahman replaced secularism in the constitution with "absolute trust and faith in the almighty Allah"; he also made Islam part of the compulsory curriculum. Ershad continued this process, declaring Islam the state religion. When Khaleda Zia's BNP governed from 2001-6, it allied with Islamist groups, including the JI. The BNP has used Islamist militias to silence its political opponents, including a 2004 attack on AL leaders that killed twenty-two.

But fundamentalists aren't the only political actors resorting to violence and repression. The police response to the May protest offers evidence of what some have called the AL's authoritarian drift. Sheikh Hasina also

used the war-crime trials to weaken her rivals, and before the 2014 elections, the government cancelled the JI's electoral registration. The BNP boycotted the elections, calling them illegitimate. As a result, very few people voted, and the AL won 280 out of 300 seats.

The government has also cracked down on opposition media, filing cases against journalists critical of the government. Matiur Rahman, editor of the liberal daily *Prothom Alo*, was charged with defamation and "hurting religious sentiments" in February

2016. Arrests of editors and journalists signal a climate that's increasingly difficult for the independent media.

Bangladesh has made considerable improvements in access to health care, and poverty has declined. Economic growth is considerable: around 6 percent. The AL is betting that enough people will be willing to trade democracy for such material advancement. Party leaders openly discuss the "example of Malaysia," which supposedly proves that one-party rule is preferable for developing countries.

Bangladesh was created thanks to a war for national liberation that had a deep, radicalizing impact on the people. Its working class has a long and militant tradition of social struggles, as peasants, garment workers, and others fought for a better life. Today, left ideas still resonate with those poised to push back against religious and governmental authoritarianism and secure the unfulfilled promises of 1971.

Jacobin

A reign of terror: Extra-judicial killings in Duterte's Philippines

7 April 2018, by **Dorothy Grace Guerrero**

The Real Numbers Update report from the website of the Philippine National Police (PNP) listed a total of 81,919 anti-drug operations, resulting in 119,361 arrests and deaths of 3,987 suspected drug users from 1 July 2016, to 17 January 2018. The Human Rights Watch World Report 2018, said more than 12,000 drug suspects were already killed in the same period. [93] In a speech delivered to the Philippine Senate in 21 February by Senator Antonio Trillanes, he pointed out that there is also 16,355 drug-related homicide cases that are still under investigation from July 1, 2016 to September 30, 2017 in the PNP Real Numbers Update report. [94] He claims that it means the real number of deaths related to the drug war is at least 20,322.

Despite the big variation in numbers, one thing is clear – tens of thousands have already been killed by his "war on drugs" policy. The dead were denied justice and killed like animals in their homes or in the street. Among the dead are innocent minors and children who are considered "collateral damage" of the senseless killing.

The history of extra-judicial killings in the Philippines

EJKs are not new in the Philippines. Suspected communists and activists were killed, involuntarily disappeared and tortured while in police and military custody under two decades of Marcos' regime. It also happened under successive post-Marcos governments. What is new, is the way the police's role in the mass killings and Duterte's cruel, aggressive and unapologetic stance about his government's intention to continue killing Filipino citizens is normalised. Much worse, no one has been punished and the impunity by which the law is blatantly disregarded daily is unprecedented.

Even if the number of EJKs so far under Duterte is indeed what the PNP claim, a low 3,800, it already equals the number of people reportedly killed in the 14-year record of the Marcos dictatorship. It would be about three

times the number of EJKs (1,200) recorded during the nine-year watch of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo from 2001 to 2010. No one was tried and punished for those crimes.

Duterte's killings

According to a feature article in the website of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), extra-judicial killing seems to be Duterte's hallmark campaign against criminality if his 19 years of service as mayor of his home city of Davao in southern Philippines is anything to go by. [95] The CBCP article is worth noting for the similarity between Duterte's methods then as a city mayor and what is happening nationally now that he is the Chief Executive.

The article described the operations of the dreaded Davao Death Squad (DDS), a vigilante group that Duterte founded. It allegedly killed 1,424 people from 1998 up to the end of 2015. From this number, the report listed that 132 were children under 17 years old, the youngest was 12 years

old.

The DDS, is believed to be responsible for summary executions of street children and individuals suspected of petty crimes and drug dealing in Davao. An article from The Guardian also described a hearing held by the Philippine Senate in March 2017, wherein Arturo Lascanas, a retired police officer and former leader of Duterte's first DDS hit squad claimed under oath that the president personally gave them orders to kill in 1989 when he was still mayor. [96] The article further quoted Lascanas' admission that he personally killed about 200 people. Lascanas also alleged that Duterte's son and current Davao vice mayor, Paulo Duterte, had links to the drug trade. However, the Philippine Senate closed the hearing, for "lack of further proof".

First they came for the drug addicts.

When Duterte campaigned for presidency, he promised that if elected his means to stop drug use in the country "will be bloody" and that "there will be no need for more jails – just funeral parlours." The term "tokhang", from the Visayan language meaning "to knock and plead" became the most feared word. It is because when a Police Operation Tokhang, goes to one's neighbourhood, it practically means someone will get summarily executed or hauled to police station on mere suspicion of drug use.

In February 21, the Department of Justice filed a motion in the Manila Regional Trial Court Branch 19 seeking to declare the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA), terrorist organizations. [97] It also sought to tag a UN special rapporteur, a former lawmaker, four former priests and at least 600 individuals as terrorists. Included in

the list of 600 is the UN special rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, and Joan Carling, UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and currently co-convenor of the Indigenous Peoples Major Group on Sustainable Development.

The motion to tag activists as terrorists blur the lines of legitimate dissent and terrorism. It is doubly alarming because of the recently passed law granting subpoena powers to the police despite their implications in summary executions. This could lead to more impunity or it could also signal that activists will be the next target of tokhang operations.

International human rights organisations already warned that indigenous leaders and environmental defenders are killed in the Philippines in an alarming rate.

Prospects for Left Unity?

After the ousting of Ferdinand Marcos, The Philippine Left was divided into various factions. The big question at this juncture in the country's deeply worrying situation is whether the Left can unite in the fight against Duterte. Joshua Makalintal's article about the challenges of building unity against Duterte offers a very good glimpse about the very crucial, difficult, and inspiring possibility of building a new Left in the country at this historic juncture. [98]

Makalintal identified three groupings. The first is the traditional militant left, the National Democrats, under the Maoist umbrella of the Communist Party of the Philippines that worked with Duterte at the beginning of his term. However, the coalition did not survive as the Duterte did not support prominent leaders from left-wing movements that he initially appointed to cabinet position in appointment

hearings. The leaders came from left mass based organisations that work in close partnership with the National Democrats. The groupings recently launched the Movement Against Tyranny.

Secondly, there is Tindig Pilipinas or "Rise Up Philippines", a broad coalition that includes minority parties in the Philippine's legislative branch and their affiliated organisations. This grouping range from members of the Liberal Party, the social democratic party Akbayan, and the nationalist, anti-communist Magdalo group. The Liberal Party is the most established party in this grouping, while Akbayan has the second largest left organizational base next to the National Democrats. Magdalo is composed of former junior officers of the armed forces led by Antonio Trillanes mentioned earlier here.

The "third force", the newly organized Laban ng Masa, or "Struggle of the Masses," is a coalition of socialist-oriented groups who have been consistent in their opposition to Duterte's presidency from the beginning. The coalition's leader is activist-academic Walden Bello. Bello ran a senate campaign supported by many progressive organisations and NGOs in 2016. He is known in the international anti-globalisation movement.

The Philippine Left and the pluralist progressive movement is much smaller now compared to its strength when Marcos was ousted. The work ahead in opposing Duterte will be difficult and there is that challenge of winning back the masses that became disappointed for the lack of structural changes after 1986. Many of them voted for Duterte. Earlier this month, the International Criminal Court based in The Hague opened an inquiry on possible crimes against humanity committed by Duterte since he started his term of office.

[Red Pepper](#)

Argentinian Women Might Finally Be Winning the Fight to Decriminalise Abortion

6 April 2018, by **Adriano Mrola Marotta**

Abortion is illegal in Argentina aside from under exceptional circumstances, like when a woman has been raped or her life is in danger. Even then it can be difficult to find a doctor willing to carry out the procedure. But immense public pressure has forced the centre-right government to table the issue—previously considered off limits—for discussion in 2018.

Green, the colour of the country's pro abortion campaign, dominated this year's Women's Day march, where Argentina's feminists turned out in force to demand their right to choose.

A bill currently passing through congress would allow terminations in the first 14 weeks of pregnancy. But while this appears to be a step forward, six similar legislative proposals have so far been rejected in the campaign's 13 years of existence. In a country that remains staunchly conservative, Argentina's feminist movement see it as up to them to push the legalisation through.

The current right-wing president Mauricio Macri, himself an abortion opponent, allowed the proposal to be considered by congress. A peculiar presidential vetoing power was invoked by his predecessor, centre-left Cristina Kirchner, to impede a parliamentary vote on abortion. Now, as a member of Argentina's senate, Kirchner could again block access to free, safe and legal abortion—or she could hold the key.

Lucila De Ponti, a left-wing MP and one of the proposers of the law, is confident congress will approve the bill. She believes Kirchner has changed her mind and could sway the vote in the traditionally conservative senate. "There are up to 500,000 illegal abortions every year," De Ponti told Novara Media, citing official figures. "It is the primary cause of

maternal mortality and over 60,000 women are hospitalised due to unsafe abortions."

Surrounded by images of Fidel Castro, Hugo Chávez, and Evita Perón, the grassroots activist turned politician explains how rapidly public opinion has changed. In a traditionally male-dominated and devoutly Catholic country, "abortions have now been taken out of the closet and stopped being taboo" De Ponti said. "We brought it to the table as a natural part of our society which a lot of women choose to do; a question of public health which needs to be resolved accordingly."

The criminalisation of abortions, punishable by up to four years in prison, made headlines in 2016 with the case of Belén, a woman from the rural province of Tucumán. In 2014, Belén, whose real name and identity is secret, went to a public hospital with abdominal pains. She was diagnosed with a spontaneous abortion and medicated. While she was asleep, doctors found a foetus in one of the hospital toilets. She woke up surrounded by police, who arrested her. She was accused and convicted of aggravated homicide, spending 29 months in prison as a result.

Her initial public defenders failed to demand a DNA-test of the foetus, something her pro-bono feminist lawyers did when she appealed in 2016. The foetus was not hers and in mid-2017, Belén was acquitted in a landmark ruling. Belén told Novara Media the case was used to scare women away from having abortions. "I think my case was intended to spread fear", she said, "to tell you that if you have an abortion you will go to prison, like me".

39-year old teacher Celeste MacDougall has accompanied the

movement for nine years as an activist and fought hard for Belén's release. A straight-talking, seasoned organiser of the yearly women's march, she refused to speculate on the future. "The women's movement considers this to be the moment to legalise abortion. We're on alert and more mobilised than ever" said MacDougall. "We don't trust anything but our own mobilising strength. We forced the government to listen to us and will continue fighting until the rights of women are guaranteed".

Chants against the Catholic church and promises of continued civil disobedience were commonplace at the predominantly young and female protest, which was the biggest yet. The size of the march was in no small part due to the substantial adhesion of trade-unions, which have strong ties to Ni Una Menos, the network whose fight against femicides in June 2015 broadened and boosted the country's feminist movement.

Deadly violence against women claimed 304 lives in 2017, said Raquel Vivanco, a spokesperson for Mumalá, the Ni Una Menos femicide observatory. "That's one every 29 hours", Vivanco told Novara Media, "and the first two months of this year saw one every 30 hours. The situation we're living is intolerable; we are fed up with occupying the role of the state".

For Vivanco, and indeed the wider movement, the state is to blame for perpetuating violence against women. While many celebrate feminist politics reaching the mainstream arena, Vivanco is quick to caution that "no one is of the illusion that this government has the intention of stopping our [female] deaths". She added: "They have the peculiarity of always speaking about women without

taking responsibility in the decisive moment.”

Part of the observatory’s role is to monitor the implementation of law 26,485, which is intended to prevent, penalise, and eradicate violence against women. The law from 2009, Vivanco noted, is comprehensive and includes the creation of a National Women’s Institute. The problem is it lacks funds; currently it is only being allocated 0.007% of the fiscal budget. In UK pounds, that is about 18 pence per woman, Vivanco said.

Despite the support for legalising abortion – 55% according to polling by the National University of San Martín – there are still many that oppose it. Abortion cuts across the political spectrum, dividing the centre-left and right. Stella Maris Huczak is an MP for the ruling Republican Proposal, and a fervent opponent of abortion. She considers life to start at the point of conception.

Together with 17 other MPs, Huczak signed a counter-proposal to the

abortion law, prohibiting terminations except in cases of sexual assault or serious risk to the mother’s health. Even in these cases she hopes to dissuade woman from having abortions: Her legislative project suggests, among other things, giving financial and psycho-social assistance to women who choose to keep their babies after being raped. She thinks this might encourage them not to terminate. Huczak would also like to see proactive social policies to stop unwanted pregnancies.

“I think legalising abortion is a thoughtless proposal”, Huczak told Novara Media. “It’s as if we go out one night and have relations with someone, and the next day we go to the hospital to have an abortion. It can’t be like that... while we have the right over our own bodies, that right ends when we infringe upon the rights of others, we can’t decide over the person we have inside us”.

For De Ponti, Huczak’s proposal is deeply prejudiced. “It’s absurd to suggest abortion is something women

do lightly, plus for examples like hers there’s the morning after pill” she said.

The current proposal to legalise abortion is likely to pass through Argentina’s congress this spring or summer. Several demonstrations are planned, to help push the project through both houses of parliament.

Vivanco places her optimism in the international feminist movement: “we don’t do what we do because we believe it will succeed, but because we have to” she said.

She added: “Us women are the protagonists of the current historical moment, shouldering the resistance against neoliberalism as some of the most dynamic socio-political actors in the world. We haven’t quite begun to fathom the dimensions of what we’re living; we might not see change in our lifetime, but I know our daughters will be freer than we are”.

16th March 2018

[Novara Media](#)

Mass protests insist pension â€ˆa right, not a handout’

5 April 2018, by **Julian Coppens**

In a statement, the group said: “The country is governed for a privileged minority that controls the economy, the banks, the electricity and gas companies, and the IBEX 35 [the 35 largest corporations listed on the Spanish stock market] â€ˆ” companies on whose Boards of Directors sit the politicians who have made labour and pension reforms with the sole purpose of favouring the interests of these companies.

“From these Boards, filled with ex-politicians of the [Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE) opposition] and PP, electricity has increased by more than 12% and gas by 10% while pensioners, along with most of the

population, are increasingly impoverished.”

Hundreds of thousands of people came out in more than 70 cities, including huge demonstrations in Madrid, Barcelona and Bilbao. As a result, a special parliamentary session was held to discuss pensions on March 14.

Legislation proposed by left-wing group Unidos Podemos to fix pensions rises to inflation was vetoed by the two main right-wing parties, the governing PP and Citizens, and never introduced for debate. This measure would have cost â€ˆ2.1 billion a year.

Meanwhile, the government has

approved a bailout for privately owned toll roads of more than â€ˆ2 billion to cover their losses.

Many of these toll roads were built by the PP and contracts were awarded to construction companies with strong links to the party. This is in a context where the PP is mired in corruption scandals involving illegal cash payments by large corporations later distributed as back handers to leading members of the government at the time.

On March 17, three days after the first mass mobilisations, the next national day of action for decent pensions mobilised hundreds of thousands more

across the Spanish state, despite torrential rain in most cities.

These demonstrations are driven not just by anger at the government's current actions, but also the structurally inequitable social security system.

Changes to social security by the PSOE in 2011 and the PP in 2013 have led to a 35% drop in purchasing power for 9 million pensioners. Spanish pensions are based on contributions to social security and vary depending on the number of years worked and the amount earned.

The average old age pension across the Spanish state is â‚¬1074 a month. However, this hides vast differences due to gender (average women's pension is â‚¬79; for men it is â‚¬1244) and region (in Extremadura, the average men's pension is â‚¬925, for women it is â‚¬716).

About 300,000 pensioners are paid the basic pension. This is â‚¬400 a month and paid to those who have not paid into social security for a minimum of 20 years, mostly women. Overall, 60% of pensioners receive less than â‚¬1000 a month and 15% less than â‚¬500.

These figures reflect a lifetime of inequality based on gender and employment opportunities. Changes to extend the calculation period on which final pensions are based â‚¬ from the average salary paid over the final 15 years of employment to the final 25 years by 2022 â‚¬ dramatically exacerbates this inequality even further.

This change was the result of an agreement between the two main union federations, CCOO and UGT, and the PSOE government in 2011, which also raised the retirement age to 67 and raised the number of years in employment to receive the maximum pension to 38.

Perhaps ironically, both CCOO and UGT support the current round of mobilisations. However, they have called demonstrations in their own name at the same time as those organised by the National Coordinating Committee â‚¬ but in different locations.

As a result, in many cities there were two demonstrations on March 17, causing frustration and confusion for many elderly militants. This is a

generation that overthrew the fascist Francisco Franco dictatorship and built the welfare state now being torn apart, many of whom are lifelong union members.

This lack of unity, the role of these federations in supporting past pension cuts, and their relatively timid response to the huge March 8 Women's Strike, has lowered their standing even further after years of inaction as unemployment soared and wages dived.

On the other hand, the feminist collectives that built the March 8 strike have swung behind the pension's movement. Youth organisations are starting to come behind the mobilisations as well. As well as the astronomical unemployment and precarious low-paid work young people face, they are also watching the right to a liveable pension disappear.

As one spokesperson said at a rally in Las Palmas, pensioners are not going anywhere: "We already did it in the '60s and '70s. We have experience and we are going to tell the union organisations and the political parties that it is on the street where rights are won."

Against Macron, organize the convergence between struggles

4 April 2018, by **Léon Crémieux**

More than 500,000 demonstrators were counted by the CGT (400,000 on October 10th). Similarly, 25,000 railway workers took part in the national demonstration in Paris called by the CGT, SUD, UNSA and the CFDT, and 35 per cent were on strike at the call of Sud Rail and UNSA. In primary education, one in two teachers was on strike. In Public Finance, there was a high rate of participation in the strike, nationally higher than 40 per cent. There was also an increase in the number of

strikers among hospital staff. In several cities, there were hospital workers on the demonstrations who had been on strike for several days (for example, at the Psychiatric Hospital of Dijon), and postal workers, as in Bordeaux where 20 post offices had been on strike for two weeks.

In most cities, youth contingents were present in the demonstrations, along with pensioners, railway workers who could not go to Paris and workers from the private sector: chemicals,

metallurgy

Everywhere, several common elements stood out

Obviously, the slogans and demands start from questions that differ from one sector to another. Overall, the plan against civil servants aims at cutting 120,000 jobs in the next four years, the maintenance of a wage

freeze and the development of insecurity. For railway workers, it is the forced start of privatization, with the dismantling of the public service and the end of statutory hiring, and on the horizon the putting into question of the pension system. Hospital workers suffer a daily deterioration of working conditions, with bed closures, and teachers are faced with the closure of classes.

But everyone is experiencing a frontal attack on public services, declining budgets for jobs and operations, and a desire to bring the country into line with the European countries that have already suffered the same attacks. These common points appeared in the demonstrations, even though the timescales are different. The goal of the government is obviously to try to splinter the fightback and at the same time suck the union leaderships into a pseudo-dialogue.

Beyond this, the preoccupations of the contingents of pensioners and youth also overlapped, with the rejection of the policies of the Macron-Philippe government, which is pursuing social regression, on the level of pensions, on housing subsidies and on processes of selection in education, which are being reinforced from high school onwards and in access to higher education.

Similarly, the contingents of private sector workers testified to the violence of the employers' policies of site closures, wage freezes and lay-off plans, with the backing of a government that reduces employers' obligations and the means of action for unions and workers, while at the same time pursuing a tax policy favouring shareholders and the privileged. The unemployed, with the new reform, will be subject to increased threats of losing benefit and to growing pressure to accept precarious and unskilled contracts.

There is therefore a climate of social polarization in the aftermath of March 22nd, a beginning of a mobilization of different categories of workers and sectors of school and university students. Now, the whole question lies in the ability to build from this, in the coming weeks, an overall movement capable of winning and blocking

Macron's policies.

Regarding this question, the last few days have been revealing

The discredit of this government is increasing. Many opinion polls confirm what can be felt around us, in workplaces and on the street: despite the triumphant and confident display of the president, saying on March 23rd in Brussels that the social movements were not "not of a kind to make him retreat from the commitments made during his campaign", as though he had benefited from a plebiscite, Macron has scarcely more support than the governments of Sarkozy and Holland had ten months after their election.

For example, a BVA poll, released on March 21st, indicated that only 17 per cent support Macron's policies (this is about the percentage of voters he obtained in the first round of the 2017 presidential election); 57 per cent of those polled have a bad opinion of his policies. In another survey, 55 per cent of those polled supported the March 22nd strike; this figure rose to 82 per cent among public sector workers.

Similarly, two-thirds of those polled consider that the deterioration of public services comes from attacks for which government cuts in resources are responsible. This discredit is obviously accentuated by the image of being the president of the rich, the CEO of France, as Macron wants to present himself

The last few days have reinforced this feeling, with the information that Bernard Arnault, CEO of LVMH, often presented by Macron as an example of the "leaders of the team", who pull France upwards, increased his personal fortune by 30 billion dollars in 2017, bringing it to more than 72 billion.

The first goal of the government is to avoid the convergence of struggles. The timetable it has given itself is obviously an advantage: the National

Assembly must launch the process of ordinances against the SNCF in early April, so as to concentrate the attack against the railway workers immediately, with the hope of isolating them. The bulk of the attacks against the civil service must be spread out over the following months, punctuated by "pedagogical" meetings with the union leaderships

The government propaganda, complacently relayed by the mass media whose editorial line has been to worship Macron since his election, focuses these days on several points: devaluing the success of March 22, making it seem a half-failure, something which is contradicted by the facts; secondly, concentrating their blows against the privileges of the railway workers, who are accused of wanting to block the country for weeks; and showing images that reduce demonstrations to violent scenes, as Manuel Valls did during the demonstrations against the El Khomri law in 2016.

Finally, the government will try to strangle at birth the possibility of building a movement among students, particularly in the universities. We saw police interventions against young people during the demonstrations on March 22nd. But there is also the taking under government control of the University Jean Jaurès Toulouse 2, where students are opposing their dissolution into the School of Engineering, synonymous with increased selection, which goes in the same direction. Similarly, the intervention by thugs at the Faculty of Law of Montpellier, with the active complicity of the Dean, is part of the same logic.

All these manoeuvres are aimed to demoralize and curb the rise of a climate of

sympathy and cohesion

But the main element on which activists can act directly is obviously the convergence of strikes, between movements of different sectors, and overcoming in the coming days the divisions and blockages of confederal trade union leaderships.

It is necessary to be able to bring about the convergence of movements among youth, employees of the EHPAD (accommodation facilities for dependent elderly people), the public sector, including the Post Office, Public Finance, hospitals and of course SNCF employees; and beyond that, workers from the private sector. The common points, the bridges exist, but for that to be effective, it is necessary for the militant forces in the unions to be conscious of the possibilities and to come together, locally and nationally, in each industry and sector. Because for a number of reasons, we do not have a trade union plan of action that is up to the task and serves as a point of support for building this convergence.

Nationally, only the CGT proposes a date for a broad inter-sectoral mobilization... on April 19th, that is to say almost a month after March 22nd, more than two weeks after the beginning of the strike movement at the SNCF, and right in the middle of the Easter school holidays. It is therefore contradictory to say, as does Martinez, the general secretary of the CGT, that we must raise the tone, and then propose such a date that does not provide a concrete deadline for the combative sectors. But this timidity is nothing compared to the policy of the leadership of Force Ouvrière (FO). While many federal and local leaders of FO have a combative language, Jean-Claude Mailly, general secretary,

for the moment refuses any prospect of convergence. He also declared on March 6th that he doubted "the willingness of workers to take massively to the streets in an inter-sectoral movement". For Laurent Berger of the CFDT, it is urgent to wait: "the convergence of struggles is not the CFDT's cup of tea". Only Solidaires, which has less weight in the trade union field, comes out clearly for a convergence between public and private sectors.

The inter-union coordinating committee of the civil service that made the call for March 22nd is meeting on March 27th. On March 30th, the Air France inter-union coordinating committee is calling for a strike over wages. On March 31st, the inter-union committee of the Carrefour supermarket chain is calling a strike for wage demands and against job cuts. The inter-union committee of the EHPAD has not for the moment planned a new date.

Despite this apparent dispersion, all the combative sectors have in mind the date of April 3rd, the beginning of the strike at the SNCF. Even though the CGT, the CFDT and UNSA unions of the SNCF advocate a rhythm of two days of strike every five days, Sud Rail is calling for a vote for an ongoing movement from April 3rd.

The inter-union committee of Public Finance Paris (CGT, Solidaires, FO) is calling for a strike on April 3rd. The same goes for a coordinating committee of CGT hospital workers, meeting last Friday. In several cities, such as Bordeaux, Rouen and Grenoble, the dates of the 3rd or 4th of April are put into perspective as new dates of convergence in general assemblies.

In any case, militant activists understood that the road was not

marked out and that it was necessary to go beyond sectoral divisions and union divisions, and not to rely on a calendar that was empty of convergences. This will quickly make necessary the formation of strong local union coordinating committees, bringing together the different sectors; and that can give confidence to sectors who are on strike and encourage the expansion of the movement. The match is obviously far from being won.

But the really essential element lies in these coordinating bodies, this change of political climate which must prevail in the coming days. This convergence should not only be in terms of "solidarity" with the railway workers, but in terms of "bringing everything together", of a convergent platform for the defence of public services, against the austerity policies of the government, made up of favours for the MEDEF (the main employers' organization) and attacks against workers.

As regards the political organizations of the left, the call initiated by Olivier Besancenot and the NPA for unity around the railway workers and all of the public services, rejecting the antisocial policies of the government, was very well received. And in a sign of the times, in recent days Besancenot has become in opinion polls the most popular personality among sympathizers of the left, thanks to a language of fighting spirit and unity.

The path that is open can be extended to weave a united front bringing together unions, parties and associations of the social movement, around common demands, a front with a long-term perspective, for a broad convergence, for a general strike to make Macron retreat.

March 24, 2018

Women, feminist economics and the

production of life in the Latin American context

3 April 2018, by **Tárzia Medeiros**

The feminist economy and women's lives

Resistance to the attacks of patriarchal capitalism has been a constant in women's lives, especially in the South of the world. The struggles to forge experiences in the countryside and in the city that place life at the center, to the detriment of the market, which seeks to impose on us paradigms of oppression and exploitation, have women as their main political subjects. In this sense, feminist economics aims to serve as an instrument that can re-signify what is conceived as work, whether paid or not. That means everything that is essential for the production of goods and services that guarantee life, including the care and affection that all people need to exist and live well.

On the basis of feminist economics, it is possible to demonstrate the interconnection between the reproduction of life and the production of commodities, showing that the reproductive work carried out largely by women is not only the foundation of all wealth production, but especially what guarantees the production of living, where the sustainability of human and non-human life cannot be guided by the interests of the market and profit. Thus feminist economics does not separate the demands of the social division of labor that today are intertwined with the realization of capitalism as a global system which articulates patriarchy and racism to usurp territories and common goods.

Latin American women and feminists who are involved in the collective construction of new paradigms based on their analyses, debates and concrete experiences, seek to base

their struggles simultaneously on these three pillars, the anti-patriarchal, the anti-capitalist and the anti-racist, in order to move towards 'good living'. In times of climate crisis and global warming brought on by a predatory and unsustainable system, there is a patent need to speed up the transition to other ways of producing, consuming, and organizing life. This is what feminist economics proposes, and it is on this basis that it strives to change the lives of women and transform the world in which we want to live.

What do women produce? Expropriation, invisibility and resistance in Latin America

The separation between production and reproduction, as well as the sexual division of labour, is the logic that guides the capitalist economy to exploit and subject women. It assumes that some tasks and functions performed in society are masculine and others, feminine. This logic goes hand in hand with an overvaluing of the tasks considered masculine. The sexual division of labour also structures a separation between the production of commodities (goods and services with an exchange value in the market place) and the reproduction of people (the men or women who produce those commodities). Reproductive work ensures the material conditions (food, hygiene, rest, health care) as well as the affective ones (encouraging self-esteem, the ability to listen, to mediate conflicts and negotiate), but it

remains invisible and devalued, without even being measured or considered work. Reproduction takes place in family units and in the domestic arena, and to this day it is the women who do most of this work, dedicating much more time to it than men.

It is clear that productive work is incompatible with the logic and rhythm of reproductive work and caring for life. With double or triple working hours, women try to reconcile these two dimensions of work, even though this costs them enormous overload, physical strain and illness. It is not only a matter of making domestic work and caring work visible, but also of showing that it too is part of the so-called productive work, and that both types of work can be carried out by men and women. The attempts to socialize reproductive work made by women's groups in some Latin American countries seek not only to recognize their economic significance, but also their importance for social cohesion and individual and collective development. The collective organization of reproductive work helps the learning, autonomy and more horizontal socialisation of children, young people, men and women. In Brazil, the "cirandas" of Via Campesina make the care and education of children and adolescents a collective responsibility of the whole movement. In several indigenous territories of Peru and Ecuador, as well as in other countries, the work of caring and preparing food is done collectively for the whole community, which reduces the time spent on domestic labour and guarantees food security and sovereignty.

Currently in Latin America, an increasing precariousness of both the productive and reproductive work done by women is the result of the

extractive industries (mining, logging), agribusiness and other megaprojects (construction of the IIRSA plan, the diverting of rivers). All these activities are responsible for the pillaging and appropriation of common goods in the continent (water, energy, land and territory), as well as for destroying local economies and breaking up the ancestral forms of social reproduction, which are impacted and redirected by the presence of these companies. When this kind of highly masculinised, productive economy takes over a community, it emphasizes the sexual division of labour and increases the undervaluation of the work of care historically carried out by women.

Privatization of water and other common goods (either by limiting access or by contaminating the available sources) creates an overload in the work done by women, who need to travel longer distances to fetch water. Moreover, they have to take care of people who fall ill because of environmental contamination, without receiving any kind of compensation from the State and without being relieved of their other regular workloads.

The loss of economic autonomy is also another effect resulting from these activities on the lives of women, since they no longer have the resources that guarantee fishing (because of the death of the fish or the lack of access to the rivers), the growing of their own food (because of the contamination of water and soil, and the genetic erosion of seeds). Apart from this threat to the food sovereignty of women and their communities, they also stop trading and marketing their food production.

This loss of autonomy for the communities, and imposition of a

capitalist economic logic, makes women's role and their ancestral knowledge even more invisible. All this goes along with a great deal of violence against women, because they end up taking a central role in the defence of their territories, which also increases the criminalization of women who resist, several of whom have been murdered without the crimes ever being brought to justice.

Challenges and tasks for the left and anticapitalist feminism

The neodevelopmentalist, economist and consumerist paradigm has been brought into our continent and established here over the last two decades. In a way, the so-called "Washington Consensus" has taken on a new garb in Latin America and presents itself as a "Commodity Consensus," based on the exploitation of "strategic natural resources," where common goods are nothing more than commodities that open the doors to a kind of "New Eldorado". The challenge for left organizations with a critical perspective (including some from the feminist movement) is not to give in or be seduced by such an "Eldorado vision", where the reproduction of life and common goods are disregarded, in a reworking of the old developmentalist myth.

Encouraged by the diversity of ideas and practices of native peoples, peasants and Afrodescendants, and fed by the exchange between academic knowledge and that produced by anticapitalist, ecosocialist and feminist organizations and

movements, the ideas of feminist economics stand in opposition to the technocratic view, which seeks to rationalize 'natural resources' and instrumentalize the knowledge and contributions of women and these peoples.

This commitment to collective work and rejection of a top-down approach implies a transformative approach, overcoming a crisis of civilization and redefining ethically and politically the conditions needed for "good living" (el buen vivir). It draws on the analyses and proposals made decades ago by feminist economics, whose questioning of the dominant conceptions of the economy and wealth, postulate the environmental and human dimensions as central and inseparable. Therefore, contributions from the experiences of self-organization demonstrate that our feminism is a constituent part of a political project for society, which we are involved in building. It is not a chapter apart, and if there are not changes in the structures that combine the different dominations and oppressions, equality and autonomy will not be a reality for all women.

Promoting an anti-capitalist and ecological feminism, based on the activism and analyses of women's experiences in grassroots movements and grassroots organizations, reigniting and critically updating Marxist and feminist theories, cannot be the task of only leftist feminists, but of all socialists and communists. Recognising and sharing the work needed for the production of life, advancing in the changes necessary for the depatriarchalisation of the State, of public policies and of our organizations, is part of this task.

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