



## IV520 - May 2018

### IVP520 PDF magazine

31 May 2018, by **robm**

IVP520 PDF magazine available to [download here](#)

## Italian crisis -Neither the European Union nor a racist national sovereignty

31 May 2018, by **Dave Kellaway**

### Matterella's risky move

Even within the overwhelmingly pro-Matterella media and the traditional political forces there are voices questioning whether he might have merely delayed a far bigger crisis if, as polls suggest, the Lega and the M5S win an even bigger majority in the upcoming elections in September or October. The proposed government contract did not include anything about withdrawing from the Euro or even a referendum, it merely raised the issue of negotiating some new terms on the Italian debt and public spending limits. Allowing the government to be formed and relying on its internal contradictions to make it a short-lived one leading to elections might have favoured a return of the traditional pro-austerity parties like

the PD (Democratic Party, centre-left) or Forza Italia (Berlusconi). But apparently the dominant capitalist interests decided that even the merest threat of a pro-capitalist government which had some reflationary public spending programmes such as wider social security cover might be popular (as Larry Elliot astutely spotted in his Guardian analysis) and difficult to roll back. [1]

Commentators suggest it is the first time a President has effectively blocked a government because of political differences rather than questions of propriety. Such an anti-democratic, and some would claim unconstitutional manoeuvre, was never taken against Berlusconi who was actually convicted of fraudulent activity. Nor is Matterella particularly concerned about the racist plans of Salvini, who was due to become Minister of the Interior, to forcibly

deport half a million migrants and build a massive new network of detention centres. No reference was made to those policies in his motivation for vetoing Savona.

### A massive government debt

Along with Britain, Italy currently suffers from sluggish economic growth but its real Achilles heel is the huge mountain of debt. It services this debt to a large extent by issuing government bonds which are bought by banks and other investors. Now, if the interest rates on these bonds become greater than the average in Europe then the cost to the government can become very serious indeed. At the same time confidence in the bonds declines.

The usual comparison in Italy is the spread between what interest you get on German bonds and the Italian ones. At the time Berlusconi fell to be replaced by the technocrat, Monti in 2011, the spread had reached around 500 points, last week the figure was heading north of 200. The Italian banks are said to hold 10% of these bonds so are vulnerable. Stock markets are taking a hammering as we write. In another scenario being touted by the anti-Lega/M5S politicians any exit from the euro would mean people holding Italian bonds would suffer huge losses. A return to the lira would effectively devalue the debt.

## Why the M5S/Lega have become popular

Perhaps what sums up better than anything else the reasons why the M5S and Lega won a majority is the statement issued by the leader of the biggest union (CGIL), Susana Camusso. She basically stands full square behind Matterella's position arguing that workers interests lay in defending Italy's responsible behaviour within the EU fiscal guidelines. The PD, whose political line dominates the CGIL, had carried out a full scale New Labour style austerity and modernisation programme in recent years which has hit working people hard and further weakened the ability of workers and their unions to fight back. It was significant that the pro-Matterella editorial in *The Guardian* yesterday incorrectly identified him as a centre right politician when in fact he is a well-known member of the PD which is officially defined as centre-left. But of course the PD governed in alliance with the centre right Berlusconi so it is a mistake that could easily be made.

Over 2 million PD voters are said to have switched to the M5S in the recent elections. Some of the people I saw recently in Italy who have always voted on the left and have no time for Salvini's racism, at the same time were not opposed to some of the proposed government's policies - on pensions for example. Many people

hoping to retire have been forced to work longer and longer. The proposed citizens income of around 750 euros a month championed by the M5S would have brought Italy closer to Northern European regimes of social security and was extremely popular in the south where deprivation is worse. At the same time there are policies like the flat tax in the programme which the Lega favoured and was obviously very popular for its petty bourgeois and small business base.

Once the left and the working class are no longer protagonists politically, as there were even in a mild social democratic way for decades and particularly after the 1969 upheavals when many gains were made, then inevitably the political space can be occupied by the strange combination of populist forces expressed in the M5S/Lega alliance. The M5S were particularly attractive to former left of centre voters since they had some good ecological policies, were anti-corrupt, pro transparency campaigners and against wasteful public works like the high speed train link near Torino. Di Maio's ascendancy in the movement has meant the more orthodox, uncompromising wing has weakened and the more moderate pro-institutional current became a majority. Hence a rightward shift took place, particularly with regard to anti-migrant rhetoric which cleared the way for linking up today with the Lega - even if this has created some tensions in their base.

On the other hand Salvini has transformed the Lega from the parochial limits of Padanian 'nationalism' to become the dominant force within the centre right, displacing an ageing Berlusconi. His friends are Hungary's Orbán and Le Pen in France and he is proud to put himself about as the scourge of the Roma and migrants generally. He boasts of organising the bulldozers of Roma camps. In many ways he is a more effective politician than Farage because of his ability to appeal to working people too - he is the complete antithesis of the lawyer/academic representative of the traditional Italian political parties. He speaks in much more down to earth and vulgar way. Given the hollowing out of working class leaders with the

evolution of Italian Communist Party into the PD which is essentially the historic compromise borne fruit since a large chunk of Christian Democracy coalesced into it, then it is not surprising Salvini has become so popular.

## How can resistance and a real left be built?

What is to be done? The radical left as expressed by currents like *Comunione Net*, *Potere al Popolo* or *Sinistra Anticapitalista* have correctly denounced the Matterella decision but without any support to or illusions in the Lega/M5S proposed coalition. Today the task is to rebuild the movement both in the workplaces, through self-organisation and mutual solidarity in the community and by electoral initiatives such as *Potere al Popolo*. There is no hope left with the PD or even with its satellite forces such as the LEU (Free and Equal).

Reconfiguring political coalitions around some uncritical pro-European Union left will lead nowhere. Indeed it is more likely that Renzi and Bonino may try and build a pro-EU coalition to stop Di Maio/Salvini in September. What is certain is that the instability will continue and the odds are the left will have to rebuild in a context where the national sovereignty/populist forces may well be in government come the autumn. A priority task will be to defend the half million migrants under immediate threat of deportation.

Finally this whole episode reveals what the real relationship is between the state, elections and democracy. If the people vote in a way that is not acceptable to dominant capitalist interests then all types of anti-democratic machinations and economic blackmail can be used. Such actions will be carried out on an international scale. Any approach to politics which minimises the international dimension will fail to grasp reality.

This is a very important lesson for the Corbyn movement. We may win an

historic electoral victory with a pro-working class government but it is necessary to prepare for all the attacks and manoeuvres a ruling class under even a mild threat to its

interests will muster. We will need more than votes. We will need mass consciousness of who is making these attacks and why and concrete forms of

self-organisation to roll them back. The Parliamentary Labour Party will not be the barricade that stops them.

[Socialist Resistance](#)

# **No to Trump's, Netanyahu's, Bin Salman's Imperialist War Drive Against Iran. Support Progressive and Revolutionary Opposition to Iranian Regime**

**30 May 2018, by Frieda Afary'**

For Iran it will mean crushing sanctions and direct or continued indirect war declared by Israel and Saudi Arabia with U.S. support. For the Middle East, it will mean further destruction and regional imperialist competition. For the world, it will mean further division between the U.S. and the European Union and further global imperialist competition.

Trump and Netanyahu have claimed that the Iranian government had violated the terms of the 2015 nuclear agreement by holding on to secret plans for developing nuclear weapons, by promoting a ballistic missile program and by its military intervention in Syria, Yemen, Lebanon and Iraq. While the nuclear agreement did not include the latter two points, it had successfully imposed a limit on Iran's nuclear capabilities and a verification program to which Iran had abided according to the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations and the other signatories of the nuclear deal (Germany, Britain, France, Russia, China).

The U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal and the imposition of further sanctions on Iran will punish not only Iran but all banks that do business with Iran's Central Bank and all companies that do business with Iran. These companies will have 90-180 days to wind down their operations in Iran or they will run afoul of the U.S.

banking system. The sanctions on oil will require European and Asian countries to reduce their imports from Iran.

For now Britain, Germany and France have declared that their countries and the European Union as a whole will stay committed to the nuclear deal but will also try to work out a broader agreement with Iran on the issue of its ballistic missile development and military interventions in the region. Iran's government has also announced that it will stay committed to the nuclear deal if Europe, China and Russia abide by it.

Israel and Saudi Arabia have enthusiastically supported Trump's decision. Within an hour of Trump's announcement, Israel launched another missile attack on a Syrian base used by Iran. Iran responded by firing missiles at Israeli military outposts in the Golan Heights. Israel then, notified Russia before responding with air attacks on 50 Iranian military and security installations in Syria. A direct war between Israel and Iran has already started.

## **U.S. withdrawal**

## **from Iran Nuclear Agreement in context of Israel and Saudi Arabia's Power Struggle with Iran**

Iran is still the second largest Middle Eastern economy after Turkey and a government with a degree of regional imperialist involvement that rivals Saudi Arabia (the third largest economy in the Middle East.) While the Islamic Republic's opposition to Western imperialism and Israel had given it much appeal among both Shi'a and Sunni Muslims for much of its existence, Iran's military intervention in Syria in support of Bashar Assad's murderous regime has taken away much of that appeal. This intervention and other interventions in Lebanon and Iraq have also bankrupted Iran economically.

Iran's recent alliance with Turkey in competition with Saudi Arabia and Saudi Arabia's new ally, Israel, once again shows that the power struggle within the region transcends the Shia-Sunni divide and now even the Muslim-Jewish divide. It involves a struggle for control over capital and strategic geopolitical influence in the

region and is not limited to exporting Shi'a Islamic fundamentalist ideology.

The current economic bankruptcy of Iran and the growing Iranian popular opposition against the Islamic Republic however, have created a situation which Saudi Arabia and Israel find opportune for getting rid of the Iranian regime.

It is in this context that the Trump administration has announced the U.S. withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear agreement negotiated by the Obama administration.

## **U.S. Further Dividing Itself from European Union and Indirectly Aiding China & Russia**

The current position of the U.S. however, not only puts it at odds with its former European allies, but can actually strengthen its global imperialist rivals, Russia and China.

In the words of Susan Rice, the national security adviser during President Barack Obama's second term: "The costs to American global leadership are steep. When the United States unilaterally abrogates an international agreement in the absence of any breach, we undermine international perceptions of our reliability and responsibility. That is precisely what we have already done with the Paris climate agreement and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. But violating the Iran deal is far more dangerous." (*New York Times*, May 9, 2018)

China which is one of Iran's main

trade partners and its largest provider of imported goods would continue to purchase Iranian oil and pay with goods and construction projects. Russia which sells arms to Iran and is involved in oil and gas facility and nuclear power plant construction in Iran, has already announced that the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal will actually help Russia. In the words of Vladimir Yermakov, a high-ranking representative of the Russian ministry of foreign affairs, "The U.S. withdrawal will help us economically because there will no longer be limitations on economic cooperation with Iran. We will continue our bilateral relations in all fields, including energy, transportation, high technology..."

## **Need for Solidarity with the progressive and revolutionary opposition inside Iran**

Those who will suffer the most will be the Iranian popular masses. Not only will they face even more back-breaking sanctions. Iranians now face the strong possibility of a direct war on Iranian soil launched by Israel, Saudi Arabia and the U.S.

Just at a time when a wave of labor protests and strikes has spread throughout the country following the December and January mass protests which called for the overthrow of the Islamic Republic and an end to its intervention in Syria and Lebanon, the sanctions and a possible direct war will have deadly effects. They will allow the regime to label any genuine progressive or revolutionary opposition as an expression of support

for the U.S., Israel and Saudi Arabia. It will also strengthen nationalist sentiments to rally forces behind the regime. Young people who are now protesting on the streets will be conscripted as soldiers.

Even if the regime is not able to rally enough forces behind itself to legitimize itself, war and imperialist intervention will make it extremely difficult for progressive and revolutionary forces.

In the midst of the war sirens, it is the plea of a woman labor leader, Parvin Mohammadi that progressives and socialists around the world need to publicize: "The Iranian government has a large budget and immense assets ... The most important part consists of large funds given to military and religious institutions inside the country and war expenditures in Syria, Lebanon, for Hamas, Yemen etc. This is not to mention billions stolen and embezzled. . . A government that responds to hungry workers with anti-riot guards, repression, imprisonment and expulsion, has only one message. Its message is that it has no solution for resolving the problems and economic dead end and wretchedness that workers face. . . The task we face is addressing the lost lives of millions of working-class households and offering them welfare, healthcare, housing, education, in one word, a life worthy of a human being in the 21st century." [2]

Those who are opposed to U.S. imperialism and all global and regional imperialist forces, need to express their support for progressive and revolutionary forces that are speaking out within Iran's labor, feminist, student and intellectual opposition movement.

May 10, 2018

[Alliance of Middle East Socialists](#)

# **Israel's 70-year history of ethnic cleansing**



# 29 May 2018

The ethnic cleansing of Palestine's indigenous Arab population is well established, thanks to the work of Palestinian scholars such as Noura Erekat, Rashid Khalidi and the late Naseer Aruri; Israeli historians such as Ilan Pappé; organizations like the U.S. Campaign for Palestinian Rights and Jewish Voice for Peace; and, of course, the memories of Palestinians themselves.

Yet this claim of "ethnic cleansing" remains highly controversial. So it is worth revisiting some of the basic facts from 70 years ago about the founding of Israel in May 1948.

While there is no accepted definition of "ethnic cleansing" under international law, a United Nations report from investigations in the former Yugoslavia defines it as "rendering an area ethnically homogeneous by using force or intimidation to remove persons of given groups from the area" and later as "a purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas." [3] [4]

The forcible removal and displacement of roughly 750,000 Palestinians during the 1948 war—about 80 percent of the Palestinian Arab inhabitants of the land that became Israel—in order to create a Jewish-majority state certainly fits both of these definitions.

The Israeli nonprofit Zochrot has carefully documented the destruction of Palestinian villages from 1948. According to its research, 601 Palestinian villages were destroyed—33 of which had more than 3,000 residents, including Jaffa (76,000) and Haifa (70,000). [5]

One of the most heinous acts of "terror-inspiring" violence occurred on April 9, 1948, when two right-wing Zionist militias banded together to attack the Palestinian village of Deir Yassin, massacring at least 110 of its residents. [6] Other Palestinians were

placed in labor camps by Israeli forces between 1948 and 1955.

Even today, Israel continues its policy of "transfer" of Israeli citizens into the West Bank in order to advance its agenda of pushing Palestinians off their land in order to establish ever more Jewish-only settlements. [7]

For all 70 years of its existence, Israel has denied the massive Palestinian refugee population the right to return to their homes—a right required by UN General Assembly Resolution 194, article 11, which reads in part:

Refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and...compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible. [8]

Palestinians rightly refer to the combination of events leading up to, and after, 1948 as al-Nakba ("the catastrophe"). Israel, by contrast, celebrates this as the birth of a nation.

-----

To this day, the Israeli state practices apartheid against the Palestinian population in Israel and the Occupied Territories.

This is also a contentious claim, but a careful look at the internationally accepted definition of "apartheid" and the practices of the Israeli state show that this is a fitting description.

Importantly, the definition of apartheid under international law is not specific to the former practices of South Africa, so charging Israel with apartheid is not a direct comparison. Rather, apartheid is defined in the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid (ICSPCA) as "inhuman acts committed for the

purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them." [9]

The ICSPCA goes on to list examples of policies that constitute apartheid, including:

— Under (a.iii), "arbitrary arrest and illegal imprisonment of the members of a racial group or groups."

— Under (c), "denying to members of a racial group or groups basic human rights and freedoms, including...the right to leave and to return to their country, the right to a nationality, the right to freedom of movement and residence...and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association."

— Under (d), "Any measures, including legislative measures, designed to divide the population along racial lines by the creation of separate reserves and ghettos for the members of a racial group or groups...the expropriation of landed property belonging to a racial group or groups or to members thereof."

— Under (f), "persecution of organizations and persons, by depriving them of fundamental rights and freedoms, because they oppose apartheid."

-----

Every one of these examples is practiced by Israel. Let's consider each in turn:

— (a.iii): The Israeli human rights group B'Tselem has thoroughly documented the apartheid practices of the Israeli prison system:

In administrative detention, a person is held without trial without having committed an offense, on the grounds that he or she plans to break the law in the future. As this measure is supposed to be preventive, it has no time limit.

The person is detained without legal

proceedings, by order of the regional military commander, based on classified evidence that is not revealed to them. This leaves the detainees helpless—facing unknown allegations with no way to disprove them, not knowing when they will be released, and, without being charged, tried or convicted...

The power to incarcerate people who have not been convicted or even charged with anything for lengthy periods of time, based on secret "evidence" that they cannot challenge, is an extreme power. Israel uses it continuously and extensively, routinely holding hundreds of Palestinians at any given moment. [10]

— (c): Rather than having an "Israeli" nationality, citizens of Israel have a variety of recognized nationalities. The most common is simply "Jewish," which comes with additional national rights.

Moreover, under the 1952 Israeli Nationality Law, Palestinian citizens of Israel are denationalized, and can only claim "Arab," but not "Palestinian," as their nationality.

The freedom of residence is also flatly denied to Palestinians. The Jewish National Fund (JNF) holds half of the seats on the Israel Land Administration (ILA), which controls 93 percent of public land in Israel. The JNF itself controls 13 percent of all the land in Israel, and rents and sells its properties only to Jews.

According to Adalah, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, 43 percent of residential areas in Israel have selection committees that can legally reject applicants they determine to be "unsuitable to the social life of the community...or the social and cultural fabric of the town." [11]

In practice, according to Human Rights Watch, these committees "have notoriously been used to exclude Arabs from living in rural Jewish communities." [12]

The recent massacres of protesters in Gaza, followed by the remark by Israel Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman that "there are no innocents in Gaza,"

flies in the face of the right to peaceably assemble. [13] And in the West Bank, the IDF regularly issues closed military zone orders under martial law in order to declare rallies unlawful at will. [14]

— (d): In addition to segregation enforced by "selection committees," Israel constructed a wall—deemed illegal under international law—through the occupied West Bank to physically enforce its segregation. [15]

At the same time, it routinely expropriates land from Palestinians in the West Bank for the construction of Jewish-only settlements beyond the 1967 borders, which is then followed by increased militarization and checkpoints to keep Palestinians away from the settlements. [16]

— (f): In response to the growing popularity of the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement against Israeli apartheid, the Knesset passed the Law for Prevention of Damage to State of Israel through Boycott in July 2011 to criminalize anti-apartheid measures within Israel, allowing institutions to sue for claimed damages due to boycott. [17]

Israel has also banned members of 20 anti-apartheid organizations from entering the country. [18]

-----  
Every single one of these practices is consistent with the UN definition of "the crime of apartheid," and a plethora of other practices—from segregated schooling to the very definition of Israel as "the nation state of one people only—the Jewish people—and no other people" in the words of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu—make "apartheid" merely a descriptive term for the reality of present-day Israel. [19] [20]

Conditions are even worse in the Gaza Strip. It has been under military occupation—along with the West Bank—since 1967. And since 2007, Israel has imposed a blockade on Gaza with the assistance of Egypt, controlling the land border, access to the Mediterranean Sea, and the airspace above Gaza.

This has been condemned as collective punishment in violation of international law by the International Committee of the Red Cross. [21] The state of utilities in Gaza is horrific: more than 90 percent of the water is undrinkable, and it has severe electricity shortages, receiving as little as four hours of electricity per day. [22]

A UN report from 2015 concluded that Gaza, home to a predominantly refugee population of nearly 2 million Palestinians, could be uninhabitable as soon as 2020. [23] In addition, the blockade has contributed to driving unemployment in Gaza up to 43 percent overall and 60 percent for youth. [24]

Israeli official Dov Weisglass summarized the strategy of the blockade by saying, "The idea is put the Palestinians on a diet, but not to make them die of hunger." [25] This has earned Gaza the title of "the world's largest open air prison." [26]

-----  
In order to end Israel's multifaceted system of oppression against Palestinians, it is the task of people of conscience everywhere to take up the international BDS call [27] until Israel meets the three demands that are essential for any just peace agreement:

— Ending the occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the separation wall.

— Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality.

— Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN Resolution 194.

This means campaigning for institutions to: withdraw all financial holding in Israeli companies and other companies operating within Israel and the Occupied Territories; sever all ties with Israeli universities and other government institutions; and end all research activity funded by the Israeli government or intended for developing technology for surveillance

and "security" purposes in the West Bank and Gaza. [28] [\[https://socialistworker.org/2014/02/27/who-is-afraid-of-bds\]](https://socialistworker.org/2014/02/27/who-is-afraid-of-bds) ]

Apartheid in South Africa crumbled under the weight of mass struggle divestment campaigns by supporters internationally. We can now help bring

Israeli apartheid to an end.

May 15, 2018

[Socialistworker.org](https://socialistworker.org)

# Ni Una Menos Stares Down Conservative Reaction

28 May 2018, by **Jelke Boesten**

Well before outrage over Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein gave rise to the #MeToo movement in October 2017, feminists throughout Latin America had been using social media to organize large-scale nation-wide protests against gender violence. Between 2015 and 2016, mass demonstrations shook Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela, each triggered by local events: in Argentina it was the murder of a young woman later found dumped in a garbage bag in March 2015; in Brazil, it was the May 2016 gang rape of a 16-year-old girl, filmed and posted on YouTube; in Peru, it was impunity surrounding a man who violently dragged his girlfriend through a hotel lobby, recorded and uploaded for the world to see. Though sparked in each instance by different cases, all protests converged around a shared slogan—'Ni Una Menos' (Not One [woman] Less)—and one demand: an end to violence against women.

These protests happen amid staggering levels of violence against women. At least 75% of Peruvian women report facing some form of violence from their partners or ex-partners during their lifetime. Femicide—the murder of women—ranges from an estimated ten a month in Peru to seven a day in Mexico. [29] Meanwhile as more women enter politics on their own terms, they are increasingly subject to political violence, as the recent assassination of Rio de Janeiro city councillor Marielle Franco chillingly

exposed. And though no solid figures on sexual violence against minors exist, reliable estimates based on available data suggest at least one in five girls experiences sexual violence before they turn 15. [30] It is plausible, then, to assume that many and perhaps most teenage pregnancies—so charged an issue in Catholic Latin America—result from rape. In turn, these shocking figures have spurred new debates around legalizing abortion, at least in cases of rape.

Still, numbers only scratch the surface of what, in each instance, is a deeply disturbing personal story. What Ni Una Menos has accomplished is to make abstract figures tangible, imaginable. Relegated to reports and statistics, numbers can be dismissed. But testimony—long a feature of Latin American social justice movements—is a powerful tool. Peru's Ni Una Menos campaign began on a Sunday morning in July 2016 when Natalia Igúñez, Jimena Ledgard and Elizabeth Vallejos set up a Facebook page, aiming to organize a march similar to those held earlier in Brazil and Argentina. Within 24 hours, women of all ages and backgrounds had posted their stories. They told of childhood abuse never before shared, of sexual coercion as adolescents, of physical and emotional abuse by partners and ex-partners, of the impunity that followed, of lack of support from relatives. Suddenly, abstract figures came alive.

To be sure, feminist consciousness-raising campaigns are far from novel. What is new is the potential audience

for these traumatic experiences, now reaching tens of thousands instead of ten. Though resembling #MeToo in scale, the level of detail relayed in Ni Una Menos testimonies far exceeds that found in #MeToo. Inclusion and diversity are also hallmarks: though in Peru three well educated urban middle-class women created the platform, women from many other backgrounds and geographies quickly joined the movement. Now tangible, the multiple violences women of many social classes experienced, identified with, and shared generated enormous energy among group members and drew in family and friends. In turn, this energy grew into powerful political mobilization, including alliances with the private sector and state institutions that sponsored and participated in nation-wide marches held on August 13, 2016. By some estimates, as many as half a million people took to the streets in support.

## A Conservative Backlash

Unsurprisingly, as Peruvian feminists have notched impressive successes, they have also increasingly met with conservative reaction. Cardinal Juan Luis Cipriani, the Catholic Church's highest authority in Peru, hit back fiercely. In response to calls for legalizing abortion in cases of child rape, Cipriani said on national radio in late July 2016 that "[They tell us] there are many abortions among young girls, but nobody has abused these girls. Often it is women who put

themselves on display, provoking men.’ By suggesting that girls-minors-provoke sexual harassment, Cipriani denies them even a public debate about abortion, or indeed, sexual violence. After the Ni Una Menos protests in August 2016, Cipriani supported counter-mobilizations opposing compulsory sex education in schools, based on the notion that “gender ideology” harms biologically given roles and turns children into homosexuals. In early May 2018, the Archbishop organized a pro-life demonstration that showed forceful mobilization of schoolteachers and children and aggressive anti-feminist sloganeering.

Peru’s conservative backlash is far from unique. In November 2017, evangelical activists in Brazil staged mass demonstrations against feminist critical theorist Judith Butler as she participated in a conference in São Paulo. Protesters greeted Butler with screams at the airport and picketed in front of the venue where she was due to speak. Online, a widely-distributed petition against Butler’s alleged promotion of “gender ideology” in Brazil gathered as many as 370,000 signatures. [31]

Driving these protests is fear of the increasingly changing nature of gender relations that question heteronormative family values, as women’s autonomy grows more visible, acceptable, and even legislated. As some Latin American women make political history-witness the ground-breaking presidencies of Michelle Bachelet in Chile (2006-2010, 2014-2018), Cristina Kirchner in Argentina (2007-2015), and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil (2011-2016)-other highly skilled and educated professional women enter the labor market, reshaping the economy. And while Afro and indigenous groups do far worse than their white and mestiza counterparts in terms of education and political participation, and remain among the poorest throughout the Americas, increasingly they too break with that trend. Women are central to World Bank-supported innovation in social protection for the poorest, with cash transfers largely directed toward mothers.

These advances in women’s

emancipation are not without controversy, contestation, or ambiguity. A long tradition of mobilizing women from a maternalist perspective suggests that women’s rights are not necessarily central to a politics of emancipation. In part, the mass scale of demonstrations against gender violence in 2016 was possible because openly approving of gender violence, even for conservative religious sectors, is difficult to justify. That Ni Una Menos garnered cross cutting support-in terms of class, race, even religion-reflected its focus on violence, not on feminism as a political identity. At least in Peru, Ni Una Menos did not stake a united position on issues such as abortion or LGBTQI rights, precisely the issues conservative sectors call upon to oppose any social, cultural, or legal change in gender relations.

But one cannot oppose violence against women without also supporting women’s rights more broadly-the lack of rights and autonomy is what makes violence possible and pervasive. That must include reproductive and sexual rights for both men and women. But conservative religious sectors view abortion as an evil tied to the transgression of women and girls’ sexuality. Likewise, they often frame sex and gender education that might help foment mutual respect, less sexual violence, and hence, fewer forced pregnancies, as sinful. In the process, conservative sectors ultimately help justify continued violence against women and girls.

## Reaction Turns Deadly

The backlash against women’s rights in the wake of Ni Una Menos is more than talk. In March this year Marielle Franco, Afro-Brazilian city councillor, lesbian feminist activist, and human rights defender for Rio de Janeiro’s favelas, was shot dead alongside her driver, Anderson Pedro Gomes, on her way home after a meeting with women’s organizations. Days earlier, she had condemned President Michel Temer’s militarization of Rio’s favelas. Her death, alongside those of environmental activist Berta Cáceres

in Honduras in 2016, and women human rights activists in the Peruvian Amazon and in Mexico, expose just how powerful a challenge women’s participation in public life other than on maternalist grounds poses to the status quo. [32]

These deaths must be seen in a context of gender-based violence. Many of these women upheld a feminist politics, denouncing the violence of individual men as well of the state and its institutions. Often, too, impunity is framed in a gendered narrative of victim-blaming: she must have done something to provoke the violence. For instance, the brutal murder of Mexican poet and activist Susana Chávez Castillo on the streets of Ciudad Juárez, Mexico in 2011 was dismissed as a quarrel with street “three teenagers high on drugs.” [33] The problem, then, was Castillo being on the streets at night, not those who killed her for her activism. In fact the phrase Ni Una Menos, now a powerful reference throughout Latin America, originates in one of Chávez’s poems-*Ni una mujer menos, ni una muerte más* (“not one woman less, not one more death”)-published in the mid-1990s in protest over an unprecedented spate of femicides in Juárez.

Resistance to these multiple violences is not ceasing. On the contrary: social media as a tool for mass feminist consciousness raising, for debate and mobilization, and for denouncing violent incidents and their perpetrators in the absence of criminal accountability and justice, provides women a powerful pressure mechanism. Sharing stories on social media draws in allies who might not immediately identify with feminist activism-“especialmente hombres y miembros de la familia”-thereby expanding support.

Social media also allows for ferocious public debates between those who feel the need to protect male privilege and those with the energy to contest. In these debates, male fear of mob justice is real, as many men do not see or understand how their own harmful behavior “normalized harassment” rests on the same power structures as physical violence, child abuse, and femicide. Yet all



available information on gender violence powerfully shows that it is far more likely for women to be harassed than for men to be accused of harassment, let alone falsely. So while these fears may be real, they are unfounded.

Peruvian novelist and Nobel Prize winner Mario Vargas Llosa, writing in the Spanish newspaper *El País*, recently argued that “feminism is literature’s worst enemy,” as feminist critics unpack and debate the many machismos of the male-dominated twentieth century literary canon. [34] Vargas Llosa’s comments not only defend his own work and literature as defined by male writers, but forcefully reject the power of critique and social change. Along with other icons of Latin American literature—Pablo Neruda and Gabriel García Márquez, especially—Vargas Llosa is now rightfully being read in the appropriate context of a violent and misogynist century. Their novels are being debated in universities alongside female writers who give their perspective upon the twentieth century.

## Resisting Reaction

The recently discovered and published epistolary novel by Colombian artist Emma Reyes may yet become part of this new canon. Reyes (1919-2003) was a quintessential twentieth-century Latin American nomad. She travelled

through Colombia before moving to Paris, where she worked with many in the mid-century Latin American intellectual diaspora before dying as a largely unknown artist in Bordeaux. A small and dedicated Colombian press, Laguna, published her only literary work for the first time in 2012. The memoir consists of 23 letters Reyes wrote to her friend, Colombian journalist and historian Germañ Arciniegas. Recognizing their quality, in the 1970s Arciniegas showed the letters to Gabriel García Márquez, intending to edit, publish, and spread Reyes’s work. But Reyes felt betrayed as she had not given Arciniegas permission to share her personal correspondence. She would not write again for twenty years, after which she penned a final letter in 1997.

Reyes’s letters tell a personal story of growing up in extreme poverty, collecting garbage, being locked in dirty rooms and abandoned houses, unloved and unrecognized. The narrative takes Reyes and her sister from Bogotá to the Colombian provinces and back. “Maria,” as Reyes calls her mother, lives off the men who make her pregnant before abandoning her, and she resolves to abandon her children instead. One brother is returned to his absent father. Another baby is abandoned. Reyes suggests her mother’s men come from high standing; they have money and families, houses and political fiefdoms; they are the local bosses of the time. At the age of six or seven, Maria leaves Emma and her younger sister behind at a railway

station. They eventually end up in a convent where life is cruel to both girls and nuns, a rigid and joyless existence of nothingness behind heavily barred doors.

Emma Reyes’ story tells the other side of growing up in twentieth-century Latin America, as did others before her, with great contrast to Vargas Llosa’s machismo and García Márquez’ magical realism. She offers a different perspective upon this world in which autocrats often ruled houses, communities, and countries, in which a conservative Catholicism set the law and turned women into eternal sinners, to be abused, abandoned and disciplined at will, where poverty could be absolute, and race an organizing principle. The *Book of Emma Reyes*, published in Spanish in 2012 and just last year in English, could not have been more timely considering Latin America’s feminist revival. Insofar as men dominated twentieth century literature, it was not because women did not write, or did not write well, but because they were not encouraged or published nearly as much as men. The violent misogyny of the twentieth century reverberates in the twenty-first, but now there is mass opposition—in literature and the arts, in politics, on social media, and on the streets. And while Nobel Prize winners, archbishops, and thugs may challenge it, Latin American feminist resistance is here to stay.

May 8, 2018

# Discussing the nature of the Chinese state with Professor Dic Lo

28 May 2018, by **Au Loong-Yu**

## Is China a Capitalist State?

Professor Lo argues that China is not a neo-imperialist state. However,

before discussing this, we should first discuss whether China is a capitalist state. Imperialism is a special form of capitalism, so only capitalist states can become imperialist. The Communist Party of China claims that the Chinese state is not capitalist, its

nature is one of “socialism with Chinese characteristics”. If this claim is true, then the question of “whether China is imperialist” is not relevant at all, and there is no point in discussing it. In other words, in order to discuss whether China is imperialist, we have

to affirm that China is a capitalist state.

The question of “whether China is a capitalist state” is Professor Lo’s Achilles’ heel. He doubts that China is a capitalist state<sup>[35]</sup> although he believes that China has integrated into global capitalism and argues that this integration does not necessarily prove the capitalist nature of the Chinese state. In another essay, he claims that, “facing the logic of systematic accumulation of global capitalism, China is both compliant and resistant”, thus it is not a capitalist state. [35]. He also complains that people who have the opposite opinion are “Western-centric leftists” and only cites David Harvey and Alex Callinicos.

First of all, it is not only “Western-centric leftists” who believe that “China is a capitalist state”, but also native Chinese fellows. Chairman Mao Zedong might also be included amongst them. According to Chairman Mao’s standards, today’s China is certainly capitalist. In August 1962, at the Beidaihe meeting, Mao criticized Liu Shaoqi for “contracting production to households” (the Household Responsibility System) in the countryside. He argued that this system encouraged peasants to “work alone”, which would “inevitably lead to polarization in less than two years”. Then he directly talked about the danger of revisionism and capitalist restoration. [36] If “contracting production to households” was already the beginning of capitalist restoration, why is today’s China, in which the main components of the national economy are producing for profits, still non-capitalist?

## What is Capitalism?

Defining “contracting production to households” as the beginning of capitalist restoration was a huge mistake, but Professor Lo probably would not label Mao as a “Western leftist”. Of course, Mao died a long time ago and we cannot know what he would think about today’s China. Fortunately, the native Maoists, who are the successors of Mao Zedong

Thought, still exist in China. In 2008, for example a document titled “Statement to the People of China by the Maoist Communist Party of China” was circulated on the internet. It argues that, “the great restoration over the past 30 years has proved that the so-called ‘reform and opening up’, which is being implemented by the revisionist ruling clique that controls the leadership of the Communist Party of China, is an incontrovertible course of capitalist restoration”. [37]

Professor Lo’s only argument against “China is a capitalist state” is that “facing global capitalism, China is both compliant and resistant”. However, what is China’s resistance? And what does it resist? Does it resist capitalism with anti-capitalism (like during the Mao era)? Or, does it resist the devil with another devil<sup>[38]</sup> using Chinese capitalism to fight foreign capitalism? Was the first kind of resistance successful or not? If it was successful, why can the Maoists and other leftists still point out various capitalist defects in today’s China<sup>[39]</sup> extreme polarization, privatization, and the conversion of government officials to capitalists? Professor Lo does not offer an explanation in his article; moreover, he could not even see “the elephant in the room”<sup>[40]</sup> severe social polarization.

The Maoist theory of capitalism seems a bit vulgar, so let’s check the definition of capitalism in A Dictionary of Marxist Thought edited by Tom Bottomore: (1) production for sale rather than own use by numerous producers; (2) the emergence of the labor market; (3) predominant if not universal mediation of exchange by the use of money, which also gives a systemic role to banks and financial intermediaries; (4) the capitalist or his managerial agent controls the production (labor) process; (5) the universal use of money and credit facilitates the use of other people’s resources to finance accumulation; (6) competition between capitals.

If we analyze China using these six criteria, it is hard to say that China has successfully counteracted the logic of capitalism. There is resistance, but not “anti-capitalist

resistance”. China’s ‘resistance’ is actually a struggle for a higher global market share between itself as a rising capitalist power, and the old power bloc of Europe, America and Japan.

## Professor Lo Asks the Wrong Question

In his article, Professor Lo’s mentions a lot of things to try to prove that China is not imperialist. He puts forward two arguments: firstly that China’s foreign investment has neither exploited developing countries nor has caused their deindustrialization and secondly that China’s cheap labor force has not undercut the bargaining power of the other countries’ workers.

Nevertheless, none of the classic theories of imperialism, whether they were developed by liberals such as John Hobson, or by leftists such as Hilferding, Lenin, and Bukharin, regard the above two conditions as the most important criteria of imperialism. According to these theories, the key conditions to define imperialism are: (1) the degree of monopoly of the main sectors of national economy; (2) the integration of industrial capital and financial capital; (3) large-scale capital exports; (4) colonialism.

These conditions led to the battle for hegemony between the veteran imperialist powers and new powers such as Germany and Japan, resulting in two world wars. Although most of the colonies formally become independent countries after the Second World War, the new generation of left-wing scholars, such as Ernest Mandel, argued that these countries were still indirectly controlled by the political and economic powers of Europe, the United States and Japan. In spite of the continued existence of economic colonialism, many developing countries have more or less achieved some degree of industrialization. The theories of imperialism do not indicate that backward countries cannot achieve industrialization. In other words, professor Lo asks the wrong question.

Other than colonialism, the other three conditions are quite applicable to today's China. And since nowadays imperialist powers have changed from direct control to indirect control over backward countries, colonialism is no longer a necessary condition for imperialism.

## Non-imperialist Powers can be Bullies as well

Nevertheless, whether China is imperialist is not the key issue – a large enough capitalist power, even if it is not imperialist, can still be “sub-imperialist” or “hegemonist”, and bully weak countries. Brazil in Latin

America, South Africa in Africa, and India in South Asia, are all such examples. China is a superpower. In history, it was a super empire for a long time. Modern China has implemented state capitalism, which is even more predatory. If it is not restrained, even if China is not imperialist now, it will become hegemonist in the future.

The rise of China and the “One Belt, One Road” are big topics, which should be discussed by people from all kinds of backgrounds. However, the Beijing government wants its voice to be dominant and refuses to listen to voices from domestic and international civil societies. Professor Lo did not persuade the Beijing government to listen to other voices. Instead, he denounced the rare voice of the

“People’s Forum”, only because he believes that Professor Patrick Bond (who comes from South Africa and also the keynote speaker in the forum) is “famous for China-bashing”, but Dic Lo offers no proof whatsoever. Moreover, Patrick Bond was not the only voice at this forum. The speaker from Sri Lanka, for example, argued that Chinese investment had brought both negative and positive impacts. In the end, I would like to beg professor Lo to be fairer in his comments so as not to mislead Beijing.

(The Chinese version of this article was first published in Ming Pao Daily, 27th March 2018. Professor Dic Lo teaches at SOAS, University of London)

[Borderless HK](#)

# Nigeria's conflict is a result of environmental devastation across West Africa

27 May 2018, by **Olalekan Adekola**

In January 2018 alone, the conflict claimed the lives of 168 people. [38]

The herdsmen are predominantly Fulanis, a primarily Muslim people scattered throughout many parts of West Africa. The farmers, meanwhile, are mostly Christian. Therefore, when violence erupts between the two groups, with symbolic results like churches being burnt down, it is unsurprising that the dominant narrative in Nigeria and abroad is that this is a conflict motivated by religion and ethnicity. [39]

What's missing is the environmental perspective. Nigeria spans more than 1,000km from a lush and tropical south to the fringes of the Sahara Desert in the north. And, in Nigeria, the Sahara is moving southward at a rate of 600 metres a year. [40] At the same time, Lake Chad in the country's far north-east has largely dried up. Fulani herdsmen who once relied on the lake have thus moved further

south in search of pasture and water for their livestock. The further south you move, the more the population becomes Christian, hence when resource conflicts emerge they appear religious.

Such conflicts between herdsmen and farmers aren't entirely new. A drought in the late 60s, for instance, kicked off struggles over land use across the Sahel, and the Fulanis do have a history of strategic annexation of territories. [41] [42] What's new this time round is that the conflict has taken on an entirely different scale, as a problem once restricted to the north of Nigeria has become a major issue in the country's south.

This is because environmental devastation has necessitated widespread migration of Fulanis from all over West Africa to the south of Nigeria, which has been unable to prevent nomads from other countries from coming in along its long borders.

The influx of new people has disrupted the existing dynamics and relationship between predominantly farming local communities and nomadic herdsmen.

But environmental explanations are largely ignored in favour of talk of ethnic or religious conflict. Such talk quickly becomes highly emotive, preventing a full analysis of all the driving forces behind the conflict. The dominance of the “ethnic war” narrative therefore makes it harder to develop holistic and sustainable solutions and, in a country that is a mix of cultures and religions, puts national unity and peace-building at risk.

## Silence from the authorities

The government's response to all this has been near silence. In the vacuum, political explanations have emerged,

often from people with a vested interest. For instance, elites and political leaders from affected regions suspect the president, Muhammadu Buhari, who himself is Fulani, of being complicit in the attacks (though they have stopped short of directly accusing him). [43] There's no evidence the president has anything to do with the conflict but, in a hierarchical society like Nigeria, the word of elites can be taken as gospel.

The central government has proffered solutions such as cattle "colonies", which take lands from indigenous farmers and give it to the Fulanis to graze. But among the farmers this only reinforces worries of an ethnic land grab. [44]

The president has often spoken of "recharging" Lake Chad to its former size, perhaps using water diverted from the Ubangi River in the Congo

basin, and he recently spoke on the subject at an African Union conference. [45] [46] Yet the lake still is not really built into the government's strategy for the farmer-herder conflict. [47]

## Healthy lake, peaceful people

So what would a sustainable and just solution to the conflict actually involve? Lake Chad certainly will need to be "recharged", along with a massive programme of tree growing and sustainable water management. This will require the engagement of neighbouring countries - who have serious environmental problems of their own - and the support of international donor agencies, but it would go a long way towards

stemming the migration southward and should reduce incidences of conflict. [48]

The government must also recognise, publicly, that this is at root a conflict over resources exacerbated by environmental problems. It must point this out when the need arises, rather than waiting until half-truths dominate public discourse.

The Nigerian media, for its part, often thrives on emotive narratives. But this story of conflict between herders and farmers calls for less sensationalism and more investigative journalism that helps reveal further nuances to the complex issue. This isn't a simple tale of ethnic conflict - the environment cannot be ignored.

*Feb 22 2018*

[the conversation](#)

# Racism and reproductive health: migrant rights and the Irish abortion referendum

**26 May 2018**

"A lot of people have heard internationally about the 8th Amendment, but don't know the issues of our communities," says Emily Waszak, a co-founder of Migrants and Ethnic Minorities for Reproductive Justice (MERJ).

Like most of Ireland, Emily is busy ahead of Friday's referendum in the Republic of Ireland, where citizens will vote whether or not to repeal the 8th Amendment to the Constitution. Introduced in 1983, it enshrined in to the constitution an effective ban on all legal abortions. If successfully repealed this week, it would allow parliament to pass legislation regulating abortion.

MERJ describes themselves as: "a platform for and of migrant and ethnic minority women who speak for ourselves on the issues around

reproductive justice in Ireland." Only Irish citizens have a vote in the referendum, so many of those affected by the laws won't have a say in them. Moreover, as Emily says, offering such a platform is necessary "because even though obviously most of the high profile cases are migrant women, you don't hear the migrant voice about those cases very often."

## Not Taking The Boat

Due to the restrictive laws in Ireland, around 12 women a day make the difficult journey to England to access abortion. But, between the costs of travel, accommodation, the fees of a private clinic (€1000+), getting time off-work, and arranging care for dependents, for many the costs of

accessing abortion are prohibitive. [49]

Emily: "These are all barriers that a lot of people face - especially these economic barriers - but that really affect migrants more acutely because of the ways that immigration status and visa restrictions affect travel and freedom of movement."

Introduced in 1992 following the 'X Case' where a suicidal teenager, pregnant as the result of rape, was ultimately allowed to travel to England to procure an abortion, the 13th Amendment allows women to legally travel abroad for abortions. Yet Cristina, also a member of MERJ, notes how the safety valve of this amendment discriminates against those who can't travel.

Cristina highlights the case of Aisha



Chithira, a Malawi born woman who settled in Ireland, who died in a taxi after leaving an English hospital for treatment she should not get at home. [50]

Aisha had a history of fibroids and became pregnant. She decided to have an abortion having miscarried twins at 30 weeks and feared complications having had a child already by C-section. She could not procure this procedure in Ireland and so had to wait a month to get a visa to travel to the UK.

At 22 weeks she was at a late stage in the pregnancy and her fibroids made the procedure more complex. Aisha complained of dizziness and pain but was told she could not stay overnight in the clinic and so left to stay in her cousin's house. She had suffered a tear to her uterus and bled to death overnight.

Having to wait for a visa to travel to the UK heightened the risk of complications for her and ultimately caused her death. Had she been able to procure an abortion in Ireland, she would probably be alive today.

## Direct Provision

The issues around reproductive health can be most acute for those seeking asylum in Ireland. Along with its abysmal record on abortion and women's rights, Ireland's Direct Provision asylum system has received sustained local and international criticism. [51] [52] People live in cramped conditions, with little privacy and often far from local communities. Asylum cases are lengthy (average is almost four years, although many are longer), people have no right to work or access to benefits, and must live off Â£20 a week. Getting permission to leave Ireland - and separate permission to enter the UK - is timely and complicated.

Two decades after the 'X' case, which gave women the right to travel for abortions, 'Ms Y' was denied this right. [53] [54] Like the young woman in the X case, Ms Y was also a suicidal teen pregnant as a result of rape. She attempted to cross the border but, as she was seeking asylum

in Ireland and did not have permission to enter the UK, she was turned back. Forced to carry the pregnancy to term, Ms. Y went on hunger strike. She was hydrated against her will, and the baby was delivered via caesarian section at 25 weeks.

Cristina emphasizes the effect of being forced to wait: "In Ms. Y's case, waiting forced a rape victim to carry the pregnancy to term. In Savita's case, waiting was a death sentence."

Savita Halappanavar is perhaps the most known woman to die as a consequence of our laws. [55] A young dentist living in Galway in 2012, Savita requested several times for her pregnancy to be terminated because she was miscarrying. Even with her life in danger, her requests for abortion were refused; with hospital staff tell her Ireland is "a Catholic country". Days later, she died from septicaemia. Her death sparked mass vigils and demonstrations across the country, and was a pivotal moment in the fight for repeal.

## Racism and reproductive health

Emily says MERJ "see the 8th as connected to a larger culture of misogyny and institutional & structural racism." While that racism has made itself visible in the No campaign - like when Vicky Wall from the Life Institute told a BBC journalist that we should only be concerned with white or 'native' Irish women who access abortions - or in the vox-pop conspiracy theories about the 'great replacement', it is often unseen by those not affected. [56] [57] [58]

MERJ are keen to highlight that the issues facing migrant and ethnic minority do not start and end with the 8th. Emily says it's important for them to "shine a light on maternity services in Ireland, because there is this notion that Ireland has some of the safest maternity services - but that's just not true - especially not for migrant women."

Maternity Advocacy group AIMS have highlighted how "40 percent of maternal deaths in Ireland are migrant women, despite only making up 17 percent of the general population." [59] Again even outside of crisis pregnancies the high profile deaths in maternity hospitals have often by migrant women, like Bimbo Onanuga, or Malak Thawley. [60] [61]

Emily stressed that even if the 8th is repealed, migrant women risk being unable to access abortion equally:

If you look at the proposed legislation, you still have waiting periods and conscientious objection. Which is going to disproportionately affect access for people in rural communities, for people seeking asylum, in Direct Provision, outside of Dublin.

Your medical card is tied to your GP, and you have to access health care through them. So if your GP conscientiously objects, how are you going to get that service?

You'll have to travel, you'll have to pay out of pocket. And there is a [72 hour] waiting period, so you might have to travel twice. Or arrange accommodation.

These costs will be a barrier to most, but if you are on Â£20 a week and can't work - it will make it inaccessible. Further, if you leave your bed in Direct Provision for more than two nights you risk losing your place, and rehoused in a totally different part of the country.

## Referendum

MERJ have been engaging with Together For Yes, the national civil society campaign, as well as engaging in their own work. [62] They've been canvassing, running street stalls, having conversations with migrant groups and communities, and hosting awareness raising events.

As Emily says, "We also bring knowledge of the world beyond Ireland, which I think is really important." Many members come from countries where abortion is legal. At a recent event in a Dublin City social

centre, MERJ members from several countries – including Malaysia, Brazil, Poland, Romania, Ghana – spoke about the situation in their countries.

Traveller activist Eileen Flynn spoke about issues in her community, which faces pervasive discrimination in Ireland. [63] Describing her own journey from anti-choice to pro-choice activist, she quoted research which showed that only 41% of Traveller women trust medical professionals on reproductive health issues, compared to 84% of settled women.

## Solidarity

To MERJ, solidarity means “showing up for people on the sharp of oppression, even if their oppression doesn’t look the same as ours.”

This is illustrated regularly. Our Table – a refugee-led project that aims to “highlight the need to end Direct Provision in Ireland” – recently held a

“Hummus for Repeal” event to fundraise for MERJ. [64] [65] And a recent MERJ meeting was cut short when their members went to help translate and support 40 Brazilian tenants resisting an eviction.

During this referendum and the decades that preceded it, there has also been constant support for repeal from activists in the north of Ireland. [66] While legally part of the UK since the island was partitioned in the 1920s, Britain’s abortion legislation does not extend to Northern Ireland. [67] Instead it has draconian abortion laws similar to those in the Republic.

MERJ are keen to play their part in returning that cross-border solidarity. They were part of the last annual Belfast Rally for Choice, and have plans to travel up after the referendum and help activists in their campaigning, where people have already reached out to explore how MERJ can help. [68]

MERJ operate under the idea of “nothing about us without us”. As Emily says “we are marginalised within a larger campaign, and again within a larger feminist movement – I think one thing people who are not in Ireland can do is share our narrative.”

Cristina says that “needing outstanding legal and financial resources to take care of my reproductive health...is a constant pressure”. The road to reproductive justice is steep, but a Yes vote on Friday will go a long way to ease that pressure.

You can find more about MERJ here, and can support by donating to Abortion Support Network who help people who need to travel for abortion care, and Alliance For Choice who campaign for reform in the north of Ireland. [69] [70] [71]

23 May 2018

[Verso](#)

# Turkey’s Snap Elections and the #TAMAM Campaign

25 May 2018, by **Yasemin Dildar**

Last month, Erdoğan announced snap presidential and parliamentary elections for June 24, more than a year earlier than scheduled. There are several reasons behind Erdoğan’s move. Foreign debt above 500 billion US dollars, increasing inflation and unemployment, slowdown in construction sector growth, and the daily erosion of the lira (The Turkish lira lost over half of its value against the dollar since 2013) are all signs of a sharp slowdown. The sooner the vote, the better Erdoğan’s chances of winning before the crisis hits.

Another reason is to benefit from the wave of Turkish nationalism after the military operation targeting Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) militants in Afrin, Syria. The military

campaign against Kurdish forces in Afrin was portrayed as a successful operation in the media. In his first speech after the announcement of snap elections, Erdoğan vowed that “the operations will continue until not one terrorist is left” as an election promise.

The third reason is about catching the parliamentary opposition, especially the İYİ (Good) Party led by Meral Akşener, off guard. The İYİ party has the potential to attract the votes of the nationalists who are abandoning the MHP (the Nationalist Movement Party) because of their leader’s U-turn from opposing Erdoğan to becoming his ally. Erdoğan ordered the Supreme Electoral Council of Turkey (YSK) to reduce the number of parties in the

elections. The speed with which the snap elections were called was an attempt by the Erdoğan’s party, the AKP, to disqualify the İYİ Party from running, because it had been registered less than the mandatory six-month period prior to elections. The social democrat opposition party, CHP (the Republican People’s Party) transferred 15 of its own parliamentarians to the İYİ Party’s bloc of five (defectors from the MHP), entitling it to run in the election.

The opposition parties made an alliance agreement for the general elections. The strategy is to run as many presidential candidates as possible in the first round and to support Erdoğan’s rival in the second round. This can be either Akşener or

the candidate of CHP, Muharrem Ince. The Kurdish HDP (People's Democratic Party), whose leader is still in jail, was left out of the opposition alliance not to risk the nationalist votes for the alliance (particularly ?yi Party votes).

These elections are going to be the first time Turkey votes for both president and parliament on the same day. The presidential system that gave Erdo?an unprecedented power was passed with a small margin in 2017 with a fraudulent referendum. Nobody thinks that the elections are going to be fair at this point under the state of emergency rule. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights warned Turkey last week, stating that "the elections to be held under the state of emergency are not credible". If Erdo?an wins, it will be a narrow win. He will have to face the ongoing problems. If he loses, he will not accept the result and he will seek to undo it.

Socialist parties are not able to go to the elections with their presidential candidates due to additional requirements set by YSK. Some of

them declared that they will support HDP for strategic reasons. If HDP cannot pass the threshold vote (10%) in the first round, this will strengthen the AKP-MHP coalition. Some others protest the elections. For example, the Communist Party of Turkey (TKP) will participate in the general elections with independent candidates in several locations, but it is calling on people to protest the presidential elections by casting an invalid ballot. Half of the country is against the presidential system, and this is one way of showing opposition to the new system. TKP will use the election platforms to raise propaganda for system change and socialism.

Social democrats and other leftists are united with the rest of the opposition (including very reactionary elements of opposition) to get rid of Erdo?an. Sixteen years under the rule of AKP and Erdo?an meant increasing poverty and worsening working conditions for the working class. This period has seen the most extensive privatizations in the history of modern Turkey. The state-run tobacco company (TEKEL), chrome company, oil refinery Tüpra?, electricity companies, ports and other public establishments were all

privatized. Occupational murders increased by 20 thousand under the AKP rule. State of emergency rules brought a ban on workers' strikes. Overall inequality in society as well as poverty and indebtedness among workers has increased. The attacks on secular education, women's rights, and the war against Kurdish citizens in Eastern provinces of Turkey are among many other reasons why people are united around the idea of getting rid of Erdo?an.

#TAMAM was a spontaneous response to Erdo?an and the AKP government's policies. It gave a slogan to the opposition alliance. The alliance itself doesn't have a program that will bring real change for working people. While the strategy for some socialists is to solely focus on defeating Erdo?an, this is a short sighted strategy, as socialists we need to emphasize the inadequacy of electoral politics and build a movement for revolutionary socialist change.

May 18, 2018

[Against the Current](#)

# Daughters of the Strike: A May Day Statement

24 May 2018, by **Ni Una Menos Collective**

With the force of that moment we decided to launch the call for the first International Women's Strike on March 8, 2017, which we later repeated with the International Feminist Strike in 2018. The word STRIKE is already part of the vocabulary with which we have chosen to organize ourselves. We made it ours and expanded it so that it would cover all the forms of work that women carry out every day, which create a triple working day for us.

This May 1, we salute all women, lesbians, and trans women, because

we are all workers!

## Daughters of the Strike

Who are we?

We were born from the confluence that is taking place between workers in neighborhoods, in factories, in the popular economy, between domestic workers, care workers, precarious workers, among those organized in unions and multiple other feminist

collectives, among those who don't have a visible boss but engage in piece work in their homes and those who are unemployed workers. This encounter has been brewing ever since the first national women's strike, because feminism is expanding a common frame for understanding that links and empowers very heterogeneous struggles and experiences, enabling an unthinkable popular recomposition to occur that transgresses and transcends the fragmentation of unions and divisions between political parties.

The international women's strikes on March 8, 2017 and 2018 condensed the social force of this multiplicity and demonstrated a tide that continues to grow and engulf us. This process demonstrated that the strike can be appropriated, reinvented, and broadened beyond the limits of the world of waged formal work organized in unions almost exclusively by men. When the women's movement calls for a strike, the strike stops being an order and becomes a question: what does it mean to strike in each concrete situation? How is multiplicity constructed in a single powerful political act: the strike of housewives, street vendors, women agricultural workers, students, the unemployed, care workers, migrants? Even more: what does it mean to strike when your union does not give the order?

## The Bad Strikers

It is common practice to attempt to isolate women's experience in unions from other political practices. The decision to mix and form alliance expressed the force of the strike and elicited an immediate response. Since then they continue telling us that feminism is sectarian: that it leaves out men and weakens the unity of demands. Thus, the women's movement is presented as a sort of "external agent" in regards to unionism, erasing the intersectionality

of our experiences and its power to question masculine authority and its patriarchal logic of construction.

We are told that women are not prepared to take the spaces of power that we reclaim: they say that we are intransigent and therefore, supposedly, do not know how to negotiate. They do not recognize that we are engaging in another logic of construction, one that makes clear the limits and inefficiencies of the form of negotiation with the government they have carried out for so long. They say that when the feminist movement calls a strike it delegitimizes and weakens the power of the union leadership, in a moment when unions are being attacked and losing prestige: thus we are blamed for taking initiative in the face of their inaction. We are told that taking action on March 8 takes away force from other actions: they ignore and despise the inclusive form that has been produced by a feminist view of the conflicts.

## Why Are We Organizing Ourselves?

The confluence of struggles that links diverse territories of work (domestic, community, waged, precarious, of care, migrant) through a feminist perspective allows for radicalizing and

deepening our demands. We put the concept of patriarchal work into crisis because: we question the idea that the only dignified work is that which comes with a wage.

We question the fact that the only masculine work is recognized as work.

We question the idea that only work that is done outside of the house or the neighborhood is considered productive work.

We stop waiting for the ideal moment to raise the issue of the multiple forms of oppression we face.

From this intersection we are constructing a popular feminism that recognizes the multiplicity of ways in which we produce value. Our struggle is not contained by issues of quotas and representation.

From this intersection we are elaborating a diagnosis, a dynamic of transversality and a form of resistance, that allows us to confront the pension and labor reforms because it politicizes all spheres of the reproduction of life.

**We are all workers!**

We want ourselves alive, free, and without debt!

<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3792-daughters-of-the-strike-a-may-day-statement>

# Permanent confusion or strategic re-orientation?

**24 May 2018, by Josep María Antentas**

Sometimes simplifying reality can be necessary to encourage a certain mobilisation. The problem arises when the facts brutally produce a scenario that is much tougher than foreseen. This is when the long term is imposed over the short term. The challenge for them is then to maintain the motivation and mobilisation of their

own base while the strategic perspective becomes more complicated.

None of the following perspectives are today credible as achievable projects:

- 'easy' independence through repealing each law blocking

independence in turn supported by PdeCat, ERC and the ANC (Puigdemont is the leader of PdeCat)

- by converting themselves into the sincere and combative guarantors of the decisive break, pushing the movement to its limits expressed by the CUP (radical left wing of independence movement)



- the articulation of a new majority for change in the whole of the Spanish State put forward by Catalunya en Comu/Podem (currents led by Ada Colau and Podemos)

Each project does indeed function as legitimate proposals that express particular political areas. Given their internal collapse, the respective founding projects have been transformed into weak charades.

October ended in a defeat that was never really acknowledged. A defeat that is perhaps temporary, not necessarily definitive but a defeat at the end of the day. A defeat not just of the independence movement but also for the Comunes movement (grouped around the Mayor of Barcelona, Ada Colau) for inverse reasons - the lack of active, concrete political activity in relation to the proces (process - the mainstream independence project). We have, all of us, to take this on board and understand it as this is a condition for the strategic recovery of

the struggle. This resurgence does not easily fit in with all the urgent parliamentary manoeuvres and the climate of permanent electoral competition.

The legitimisation of Puigdemont exemplified at the last moment in the designation of Torra as the Catalan president has as much symbolic power as it is empty strategically but it reflects the consolidation of the right wing leadership within the independent movement. This implies the re-assertion of political premises that have outlived their usefulness and are even worsened by the very profile of the newly elected president. The ERC intends to explore new approaches but runs the risk of just capitulating in a disordered way.

The CUP can stick to its honest voluntarism which does not question the fundamental limits of the independence movement expressed in the 21st December events. Neither, it seems, does it particularly look to win support from the social base of the

non-independence left.

On the other hand the Comunes movement is stuck in a process of 'eurocommunication' which brings them closer to the legacy of the Moncloa Pact and the Tripartido (the famous deal between the right and the left that managed the post Franco transition) than to the values of the 15M movement.

It is not easy to sketch out a road that leads to a real break with the system in the context of the existing relationship of forces and which could correct the inherent weaknesses of the proces as well as overcoming the divergence between the future proposed by the independence movement and that envisaged by the 15M movement. However the first step is to be conscious of the necessity of working at this. Searching for a new way forward begins by recognising the present one is blocked. .

18/05/18

## Macri's neoliberal fantasies

23 May 2018, by **Claudio Katz**

The failure of these forecasts was very visible from the beginning. Hence the government moved the take-off to the second half of the year and then postponed it to the next year. Now it disguises his meagre results with new tricks.

### Pretexts and deceptions

The spokespersons for the ruling party, Cambiemos, present the reduction of inflation, which initially doubled, as a great achievement. The percentage over the two-year period reached the very high level of 73%. The goal for 2016 was 12% and it was 41% and the guideline of 17% for the following year ended at 24%. With the single exception of a peak in 2014

(38%), inflation under the Propuesta Republicana, (PRO) exceeded all averages since 1991. The absence of credible data during the preceding decade does not preclude corroborating that conclusion, with numerous alternative estimates.

The data from some investigations (CIFRA, 2018) belies the announcements of the government. What Macri presents as an unusual "invisible growth" is the well-known rebound that succeeds falls. Computing the 2016 recession (-2.2%) with the recovery of 2017 (2.9%), the result is neutral, and the level of activity is located at the same level as 2015. The increase in employment is not large and it simply reflects this movement. It also includes the replacement of stable jobs by precarious ones.

The government claims that wages have recovered, forgetting that the recomposition of 2017 did not compensate for the fall of the previous year. In the biennium, there has been a 4.2% decrease in incomes in private activity and 6.3% in the public sector. The weighted recovery of investment repeats the low percentage of 14-16% of recent years. The improvement in agriculture or construction hardly compensates for the decline in industry.

Officials highlight the reduction in bond issues, omitting their replacement by indebtedness. Macri has turned the country into the main planetary issuer of public securities, at rates that exceed the regional average. This has already placed Argentina among the five economies

most vulnerable to the effects of a possible international crisis.

By any calculation methodology, the fiscal deficit has skyrocketed. The primary imbalance rose slightly at the beginning because of extraordinary income from laundering. But the financial component of the budget deficit has climbed with the interest on the debt. The tax slump (6-7%) already borders on the same figures as in the large economic earthquakes of the past.

This cluster of imbalances led to the unexpected December devaluation. The same bankers who supported the rise in the price of money (to profit from the recycling of Lebac's [local currency peso-denominated central bank notes]) were frightened. They observed with concern the dollar's lack of synch with domestic prices and the potential volcano surrounding indebtedness. The government has already covered half of its financial needs for the year, but doubts about its future capacity of payment remain.

The trade deficit is the highest in the last 40 years and the flight of capital is incessant, involving 84 of every 100 dollars entering, the same level as under Kirchnerism. This scenario increases the passing of bucks within the economic team. Those who demand higher interest rates and a halt to bond issue collide with supporters of devaluation and the pumping up of the level of activity. It is a discussion with no way out without causing the same disaster. As there is no growth or investment, there is little space for any alternative.

Macri announces that "the worst is over" when the worst is yet to come. At the beginning of 2018, the recovery in GDP has slowed down. The official forecast for inflation (15%) lacks credibility, against a wave of tariff increases for public services. As the government validates the upturn of the dollar, the inflationary bonfire expands. The ruling party hoped to rein in prices by holding back wages, but this reduces consumption and extinguishes the sole engine of GDP, given the stagnation of investment and the decline of exports.

To make matters worse, the fiscal slump threatens the continuity of public works as support for the level of activity.

## Disconnect and justifications

Faced with the bleak economic scenario, officials improvise justifications. They repeat the pretext of the delay and predict a happy future for mid-2018, as a result of the adjustments made in tariffs and the exchange rate. But that reading ignores the fact that inflation continues to undermine both variables.

Economists of all stripes raise their voices. The bogging down of the current program is evident and it is debated whether the failure is reversible or has ignited a pump with uncertain date of explosion. Also, the strategists of the PRO seek new explanations for its inoperability.

They argue that the "inheritance was heavier than imagined" and that they did not tell "the whole truth". But that commonplace - repeated by all governments to export blame - has little audience, since the imbalances inherited were not on the scale of the hyperinflation of 1989 or the collapse of 2001 and were accentuated by the measures adopted by Cambiemos.

The cost of gradualism is the most common justification for the failures. It is argued that a slow pace of changes also generates lethargic results. But that diagnosis does not clarify anything. It justifies what does not work, assuming that by pressing the accelerator different effects would be observed. It is simpler to perceive the opposite: the current disaster would be infinitely worse with a higher dose of the same recipe.

If the course was correct, the green shoots of the magnificent future that Macri predicts should be emerging. In fact, the opposite is observed: the advance payment on the future hecatomb being prepared. Gradualism is just a pretext to justify the debt. Before it was presented as the foundation of productive investments and now it is accepted as a tap to

cover current expenditure. The gradualist argument establishes in fact the enormous dimension of popular resistance. When the government says that an "abrupt adjustment would unleash social war", it recognizes the frontal opposition that exists to its abuses. This rejection explains the limited profile of the permanent aggressions of the government.

The impotence of Macri has also multiplied criticism from the Neanderthal right. They question the slowness of the adjustment from a perspective of pure savagery. They rant against officials who "do not dare to fire public employees" and they proclaim the non-existence of solutions "without a painful shock". Obviously, they exempt themselves from suffering the tragedy that they promote for the rest. Among the well-off classes, there are no potential victims of the impoverishment advocated. The rightists also do not offer any indication of the promised renaissance that would result from the shock. They usually do not mention that in the 1990s the "surgery without anaesthetic" they now promote as an innovation was tried. Nor do they remember that the collapse of 2001 was an effect of that experiment. The background of the problem does not lie in the pace of the model. Both gradualism and its acceleration lead to a gloomy result.

## Myths of neoliberalism

Macrismo also revives old neoliberal beliefs to justify its setbacks. It attributes the decline of the economy to the gigantism of the state and to the consequent weakness of the private sector. But this forgets that state expansion was always a reaction to some failure of the private sector. The state rescued countless bankers, industrialists or agricultural proprietors from bankruptcy. It tried to compensate for the sterile behaviour of a bourgeoisie that invests little, capital flight and inflation.

The problems of the economy do not

originate in the state, but in the failed businesses of the dominant classes. The Cambiemos leaders replace this diagnosis with diatribes against populism. They contrast the demagoguery of that ideology with the laborious attitude of the modernizers of Argentina. Macri especially praises the generation of the 1980s and rant against the populists who ruined the country.

But he never defines the meaning of this demonized condition. He only suggests that some evil popular presence destroyed the paradise of the oligarchy. The neoliberals do not assign populism a concrete meaning. They identify it with the misadventures generated by Maduro, Kirchner or any adversary of the moment. The ideologists of the PRO are especially unaware of the great responsibility of their predecessors in the misfortunes that they denounce. They assume that since 1930 Argentina was managed by enemies of liberalism, forgetting all the rulers who anticipated the current economic policy. Macri did not invent the trade opening, the aggression against trades unionism or the plunder by foreign capital. It is an error to label the conservatives, the military, gorillas or Menemistas who managed the state as populists. It takes a lot of amnesia to recreate these deceitful foundational illusions.

Their spokesmen proclaim that they need time to extirpate the "culture of the disproportionate", which seeks easy solutions through caudillo saviours (Llach, 2014). But the most recent attempt of that redemption was faced by Macri himself, when he assumed that his figure would awaken the confidence required to solve the problems of the economy. The most sophisticated authors raise the same theses with some resentment.

They accuse Argentines of "living beyond their means", trapping the country in a nostalgic attachment to riches already extinguished (Gerchunoff, 2016). They attribute this mirage to the "psychology of the middle class" (Levy Yeyati, 2015) and challenge with great anger the "fantasy of

consumption" of the last decade (González Fraga, 2016). A great belt tightening is called for.

But they generalize to the whole of society the behaviour of the enriched, forgetting that waste is not a habit of the people. It is a privilege of minorities that waste resources denied to workers. Argentina did not become a desert. It preserves the same assets of the past but subjected to a greater predation or disablement. PRO theorists conceal those responsible for that stalemate and blame their victims.

Liberals often combine bleak diagnoses with enthusiastic omens of opportunities for all. The myth of the entrepreneur synthesizes that reverie. It is supposed that with some savings, any individual can be enriched by private activity. Dismissal itself is presented as an advantageous possibility to create grills or breweries. With this illusion, they praise the conversion of stable workers into precarious ones. They avoid any balance sheet of what happened in the 90s, when unemployment generated by privatizations pushed millions of Argentines into the informal labour sector.

In the same spirit of individualism, social plans are cut while the reduction of marginality is promised with a greater educational effort for those receiving social aid. An observation of the brutal aggression against teaching is enough to notice the hypocrisy of this initiative.

How do they hope to train the unemployed if at the same time they destroy public education? But even after improving their educational qualifications, the bulk of the unemployed will continue without work. The lack of employment comes from the stagnation of the economy and not of the absence of graduates in primary or secondary schools.

Liberal blindness not only prevents the recording of that evidence. It also assumes that citizens accept the sacrifices of the current model. The Macristas affirm that this understanding is reflected in the expectation of future improvements

recorded by some surveys. The fear of a repetition of 2001 is a trauma still present in a large part of society. Ultra-rightist critics take advantage of this combination of discomfort and fear to unfold their demagoguery. The hegemonic media sponsor their preaching and accommodates the characters who proclaim the inadequacy of the adjustment. Milei, Gaicomino, Espert, Broda, Artana always find a microphone to explain the convenience of a virulent cut in public spending. All advocate the pruning of wages and not the debt interest. They adopt poses of great irritation to channel general discontent towards a more regressive project. Later they tend to adapt to what the establishment needs.

## Off shore bankers on order

Cambiemos has recycled the old liberal belief attributing the Argentine crisis to corruption. But they forget that this scourge is often observed as an advantage by capitalists. It allows rapid profits, and in many economies, there is high growth with low transparency in the public administration. The engine of the system is profitability and not honesty.

The false equation of institutional cleanliness with prosperity is a myth from the right to manipulate public opinion. The traditional pretext of military coups is lately used to point out that the money lacking in hospitals and schools was monopolized by the Kirchner government.

But this belief clashes with the current scale of tax theft. The kleptocracy that the government handles blatantly privileges its private businesses. The sale of capitalized companies with confidential information is an in-vogue mechanism for these scams. Several companies linked to the presidential family favoured by official measures were sold at high prices (tolls, wind parks, air transport). Macri's crony (Nicolás Caputo) left his construction

company in the same manner and his cousin (Calcaterra) is negotiating a similar deal.

All cabinet members shore up their businesses from both sides of the counter. Aranguren awards Shell, Quintana Farmacity and Braun the supermarkets While proclaiming the absence of conflict of interests, they transfer fortunes to their own companies. Only the manipulation of the judges and the shielding of the media blocks the spreading of these scandals.

It is evident that Macri heads a government of capitalists, delegating the management of the country to its proprietors, forming a cabinet of CEOs that has moved its management model to all levels of the public sector. A large segment of the electorate endorsed this, imagining that it would stimulate the investment of the bourgeoisie. Cambiemos encouraged that belief, presenting its ministers as patriots, who had renounced large private incomes to serve the nation.

Two years have been enough to deny these fantasies. Each minister manages their radius of influence as a business plan. But this embezzlement has not been as unexpected as the incompetence of the CEOs. They exhibit a much higher level of inefficiency than their political peers. The lack of control of expenditure and the absence of a clear command in the economic area means that disorder prevails.

The current chaos is also due to the predominance of the financiers. The bankers impose a crazy indebtedness that will face the next generations. They do not act as simple commission agents. They manage their fortunes with offshore companies to evade taxes, cover up fraud or launder money.

All the leaders of the PRO (Macri, Caputo, Aranguren, Grindetti, Avruj, Clusellas) hide their money in tax havens, reproducing the behaviour of the main capitalists (Mindlin, Elsztein, Galper n), who carry out their big operations through offshore accounts. For their part, the ministers locate their personal assets abroad, while they call for strengthening national

savings. In the height of hypocrisy tax collection has been delegated to an expert in evasion. The new head of the AFIP (Cuccioli) specializes in protecting millionaires who evade tax obligations. Argentina already ranks fifth in the world ranking of evasion and with Macri will remain located on that podium.

## The comparison with the 1990s

The enormous influence of the bankers overshadows the initial favouritism enjoyed by the agromining lobby. Soy, lithium and oil are the main businesses on the agenda, but no subsidy compensates for the torrent of money captured by the financiers. In addition, old conflicts persist with international seed suppliers (Monsanto) and the governments extolled by Macri are closing their markets in Europe and the United States. The continued appreciation of the exchange rate and the effects of the drought anticipate new tensions.

But the biggest clashes involve industry. Although the leadership of the UIA supports the government - posing a drastic demolition of employment rights - the bulk of the sector suffers from the opening to imports. The huge trade deficit illustrates the magnitude of this invasion.

The conflict with industry assumes dramatic contours with the closure of businesses. A haemorrhage of suspensions, bankruptcies and layoffs affects all manufacturing areas. The project of converting the Tierra del Fuego plants into empty spaces for tourism illustrates that devastation.

This scenario has many similarities with Menem. Macri takes up the same adaptation of the Argentine economy to the requirements of neoliberal globalization. Analogies extend even to the personnel implementing this remoulding. The same rightists return to occupy key state positions. It is evident that with a new rhetoric Macrismo is repeating the 1990s.

This policy demolishes the social fabric and expands misery. The

widespread image of a project for a third of the population (with no place for the rest) portrays the current model. The destruction of stable employment reproduces the helplessness that Menem bequeathed. But there are several differences with that precedent. Cambiemos face a popular resistance far superior to that prevailing in the 1990s and have paid a high cost for each aggression.

In December, it perpetrated the looting of retirees in Congress but lost the battle in the streets. As the current relationship of forces prevents it from moving forward, it is betting on

re-election to impose the adjustment. But it will need many fortunate alignments to pull this off.

Macri buys into the same fantasies as Menem. He assumes that the world supports him and

he takes seriously the pathetic compliments he receives from the West. He does not register how much has changed on the international scene in recent decades. The euphoria over privatization in Latin America is already history and the markets of the big powers are closed to Argentine exports. The powerful of the world try to do their business in the country without offering anything in return. After provoking Macri with disparaging treatment, Trump breached his promise to reopen US purchases of lemons. He also blocked the sales of

biodiesel and now steel. In Europe the same behaviour predominates. No government has agreed to buy meat or biodiesel in exchange for an agreement with MERCOSUR, which would nullify the prerogatives of the state in the management of public tenders. Disappointment with the West has forced the PRO helmsman to forget his criticism of Russia and China, with improvised emergency visits to those countries to beg sales, credits and investments. The "return of Argentina to the world" entails an inexhaustible accumulation of troubles.

Also, on the internal level, the comparison with the 1990s is unfavourable to Cambiemos. As Macri came to power without the nightmare of a previous hyperinflation, he has not



been able to profit from the mirage generated by convertibility. The structural inflation suffered by Kirchnerism - due to the restriction of supply before a recomposed demand - has been replaced by the typical redress of devaluation and tariffs. As in the 90s, the appreciation of the exchange rate destroys production and weakens exports. But the most dramatic resemblance to the past is in indebtedness. The government has reserves and margin to continue taking loans, but it feeds a dangerous escalation. Any distrust from the creditors or unforeseen international adversity can unleash disaster. Macri has placed the country in this trap again.

## The background to the decline

The neoliberals conceal the problems of the economy with daydreams. The latest trend is to present Colombia and Peru as the models to follow (Espert, 2017). Curiously, this South American comparison ignores Bolivia, which has had the most intense pace of growth of the last decade. Traditionally rightists emulated the United States or more recently Spain and Italy. The fact that they now postulate the imitation of underdeveloped economies is a confession of what they imagine for the future. They try to transmit a sweetened vision of the extractivist models, hiding how they increase social exclusion.

But they also do not explain why Argentina attracts immigrants from those

nations (and not vice versa). Their account also forgets that Colombia or Peru lack

an industrial structure, which neoliberalism aims to demolish in our country. Other exponents of Macrismo call on us to follow the path of Australia (Levy Yeyati, 2016), as if Argentina had possibilities of choice. They do not know that the distant nation in Oceania has a lower population density and a higher percentage of natural resources per inhabitant. They forget its complementarity and agricultural rivalry with the United States and its

proximity to Southeast Asia which has allowed it to convert its primary exports. It also maintains a structure of social equality and has never faced the tensions of any Latin American country.

In their comparative zeal, PRO propagandists avoid evaluating the similarities with Brazil. There the same industrial regression and reliance on export-oriented raw materials as Argentina has taken place. Volatilities of capital are also observed, and the peaks and troughs of GDP are very similar.

But the industrial retreat of our country is much greater. It is enough to observe the

trade balance between the two nations to register that decline. Argentina was industrialized before with a more solvent internal market and social conquests of a superior scope. That is why it faces a greater maladjustment to the demands of profitability of capitalist globalization. The principles of competitiveness and productivity - which neoliberals deify - are the misfortunes that this system imposes on the popular majority.

Argentina has lost the privileged place it had in the past in terms of exports of meat and wheat. Soy does not fulfil the same multiplying function of other productive activities. The bankruptcy of integral agriculture and the irruption of mining extractivism accentuate the elimination of jobs. Neoliberal globalization is a nightmare for the capitalist restructuring of the country. That is why a permanent setback has been stabilized that condemns a third of

the population to the informal employment sector. The structural assistance that the public budget has incorporated illustrates that harsh reality. It is an outpouring of the popular struggle, which has become indispensable for social reproduction. While Macri points to the mirror of Europe, the social data relate the country to the rest of Latin America.

## The neo developmentalist

## critique

Many who object to the current course avoid evaluating the difficulties faced by an expansive reconversion of Argentina. They observe capitalism as an immovable fact and reduce all the misadventures of the economy to the mistakes of the model in force. They oppose the project of Macrismo with a neo-developmental policy, which would allow us to support a path of growth and inclusion. This contrast is stressed by the defenders of Kirchnerismo, who stress in particular the differences between the two models in the evolution of wages, indebtedness, imports and tariffs (Scaletta, 2017).

But this approach forgets the common capitalist substratum of the two schemes and their

consequent adaptation to different moments of accumulation. neo-developmentalism emerged in to make amends for the 2001 debacle. It tried to revitalize industry with state aid, low interest rates and competitive exchange rates, without removing the agro-export model.

Because of this limitation, it once again depended on the international situation and could only prosper while export prices were high. In that period, it recomposed production and sustained growth with the influx of dollars. But keeping the foundations of underdevelopment intact, it was paralyzed by the adverse change in the international context. Then the bottlenecks re-emerged, the consumption incentive stopped working and the fiscal deficit re-emerged with high inflation.

This balance sheet is usually omitted by supporters of Kirchnerism. Most ignore any characterization of what happened in the economic field. They estimate that Macrismo prevailed because of errors in the political or cultural plane and they extend those mistakes to the relationship with the middle class or to the management of communications strategy. With this approach, they idealize the Kirchner approach and limit the questioning of Macrismo to its grossest outrages. They also avoid defining their proposal for the future, in full gestation of more conservative alternatives of Peronism.

This attitude tunes in with the strategic concerns of the ruling class, which seeks to ensure continuity of the current course in the variant of the PRO or in a substitute Justicialista option. To conceive another path, we must start from another diagnosis, registering how the Argentine crisis fits in with the crisis of dependent capitalism. That characterization induces us to look for alternatives committed to the eradication of a system which impoverishes the popular majorities.

## References

- CIFRA (2018) Informe de coyuntura, n.º 26 Febrero. Mariano Barrera, Ana Laura Fernández, Mariana González y Pablo Manzanelli.
- Llach, Juan J; Lagos, Mart  n (2014). En el pa  s de las desmesuras, La Naci  n, 26-9.
- Gerchunoff, Pablo (2016). La Argentina est   en una trampa y no est   condenada al   xito, Clar  n, 2-10.
- Levy Yeyati, Eduardo (2015), Una explicaci  n psicol  gica a la

decadencia econ  mica argentina, Infobae, 12-7.

- Gonz  lez Fraga, Javier (2016). "Le hicieron creer al empleado medio que pod  a comprarse plasmas y viajar al exterior", La Naci  n, 27-5.
- Levy Yeyati, Eduardo (2016) La trampa del desarrollo argentino, La Naci  n, 17-9
- Espert, Jos   Luis (2017). Argentina debe imitar a Per   y Colombia, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dc aGzfzRz0>, 13-3.
- Scaletta, Claudio (2017) El shock macrista, P  gina 12, 24-9.

# Oppression of Pakistan's caricatured feudalism

23 May 2018, by **Farooq Tariq**

In the Indian subcontinent, the system prevailing before the advent of the British was known as Asiatic Mode of Production, or as Karl Marx put it, "Asiatic despotism." The land was not privately owned but a common ownership of agricultural land. In this sense it was egalitarian. Feudalism was imposed by British imperialists through the Permanent Settlements Act. "Classical" feudalism, as described within the European context, never existed.

The Permanent Settlement Act was introduced first in Bengal and Bihar by the East India Company's administrative head and later extended by Governor General, Lord Cornwallis over northern India in a series of regulations dated 1 May 1793. With it the British colonialists bestowed vast tracts of land mainly to the revenue collectors (zemindars) in order to raise land revenue. This grafted native Indians onto the British structure, insuring their loyalty to British authority.

After partition this class, along with the comprador bourgeoisie, became Pakistan's hybrid ruling class. In their failure to carry out a national

democratic revolution as the European bourgeois did in the 18th and 19th centuries Pakistan's capitalists failed to abolish feudalism. Thus Pakistan was suspended in a hybrid model of feudal and capitalist relations.

Over the last few decades, a new form of feudalism emerged particularly during the periods of military dictatorship. With the help of the state machinery, the poor, small landholders are forced to hand over their land to a particular family for insignificant sums. New feudal owners like Jahangir Tareen of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf now own thousands of acres of land. He has become a typical Pakistani feudal: a "well-educated" person who, with the help of military dictators, was able to buy sugar mills along with thousands of acres of land. It's a vulgar combination of feudalism and capitalism.

The landlords' base of power over local people is taken place at every step. Debt bondage is passed down "generation after generation" and the landlord controls the "distribution of water, fertilizers, tractor permits and agricultural credit." This in turn gives

them influence over the "revenue, police and judicial administration" of local government and its officials. In recent times, particularly harsh feudalism has existed in rural Sindh, Baluchistan and some parts of Southern Punjab. It is a form of slavery in 21st century Pakistan.

The feudal system is not confined to the political arena. Land ownership links feudal lords to Pakistan's various other patronage networks. Landlords, such as Shah Mahmood Qureshi, act as religious patron saints to thousands of peasants as their disciples, who loyally vote for their feudal lords in elections.

The Pakistani army is also deeply entrenched in this hybrid economy. It is an important actor particularly in the industry and services sector as well as in the parallel economy.

However its elite layers are also part of the landed aristocracy, amassing vast landed estates. Army officers are bequeathed agricultural lands for serving in the army, and these are often rented out to larger landowners. In Punjab alone 68000 acres of agriculture land is directly or

indirectly occupied by the Military Farms administration. Any struggle for their rights by those tenants has been ferociously crushed by the state and its civilian administration.

Ayub Khan's land reform failed to deliver after it was introduced in 1959. Similarly the landed aristocracy in connivance with bureaucracy avoided the execution of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's land reforms in 1972 and 1977. The idea of land reform was simple - take the land from the rich and distribute it amongst the poor free of cost.

However the broad based Land Reform Act of 1977 was challenged by Qazalbash Waqf. He sued, arguing that Islamic laws provide broad protection from expropriation if the owners' property was acquired through legitimate means, and the Supreme Court of Pakistan agreed. A petition against this decision of the Shariat Appellate Court has been pending since 2012, but a hearing has yet to be set.

When the military dictator Zia ul Haq came into power in 1977 with his Islamization agenda he fully used religious edicts in the interest of landlords and capitalists.

After he took control, it was announced that 1) no law in Pakistan may be repugnant to the Holy Quran and the Sunnah and 2) federal Sharia courts were established to serve the interests of Pakistan's property owners. Looking over the last seventy years it is reasonable to conclude that state structures reinforce the power of landlords and capitalists and oppose an agrarian revolution.

## **An urban solution to the poverty of peasants?**

An increasing number of small and marginal farmers migrate to urban areas to escape poverty. In fact Pakistan is already the most highly urbanized country in South Asia. Clearly increasing migration from the rural areas will create more pressure on already stretched infrastructure of

urban metropolises.

Additionally, as industrial growth in the country remains stunted, and much of the installed industrial base is already capital-intensive, most migrants will be forced to work in the services sector. Thus majority will probably end up working in the informal or black economy at extremely low wages and atrocious working conditions, reinforcing the cycle of poverty and exclusion.

## **Small farmers and peasants**

Let's look at some of the actual situation of small farmers and peasants. In 2017, Agriculture contributed about 24% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Pakistan and accounted for half of employed labour force. Important crops are wheat, cotton, rice, sugarcane and maize. The full potential of crop production is still a dream.

While over 60% of the population consists of small farmers, peasants and landless peasants, there is not a single school or a training center for hands-on-job farmers. [Is this actually true, or did I misunderstand something?] Extension Services that can educate and guide farmers with sound advice remain dormant. The knowledge gap is filled with the sales representatives of supply companies. Of course their advice is to urge farmers to buy inputs, driving them into greater debt while decreasing the quality of their produce and leading to greater environmental pollution.

Pakistan's underground water level dropped an average of over 80 feet in the past 20 years due excessive pumping. This has caused wastage and salinity in the soil, resulting in reducing the land's fertility. Both the quality and quantity of agricultural production is declining. Industrial agriculture, introduced in late 1960s, uses inorganic materials and genetically modified seeds.

Despite much opposition by peasant and civil society organisations (CSOs) and small farmers, the Senate of Pakistan approved the Seed

(Amendment) Act in early 2016. According to the amendment, no unregistered person, whether farmers or institutions, will be allowed to stock, sell or exchange any seeds without official permission. It is a punishable crime with prescribed fines and imprisonment.

This is in contrast to the 1976 Seed Act, which was a farmer friendly. The earlier act made citizens sovereign over their seeds and placed responsibility for seed development registration on the public sector alone. In contrast, the present Seed Act allows multinational corporations to produce basic seeds for its multiplication and certification. Further the corporations are now in charge of accredited seed testing laboratories.

Industrial agriculture interrupts essential natural processes that sustain soil fertility. Instead of supplementing natural ecosystem dynamics, this kind of agriculture substitutes its inputs of energy and chemicals that disrupt and/or displace biological processes.

Agricultural productivity depends fundamentally on the sustained FERTILITY of soil systems and on the SUFFICIENCY of productive resources - land, water, labour, and capital. However, there are no mechanisms for helping the small farmers and peasants. They are the real losers at the hands of the corporate seed and fertilizer companies.

The situation of rural labourers is graver than for the peasantry. More than 80% of rural workers do not own their homes; they live under the age-old semi feudal system, which does not grant them right to shelter. Therefore all human settlements that are located on state land held by any civil and non-civil government departments or institutions remain unregistered. Government policies are designed to support landowners and those who own agricultural processing.

## **Peasant struggles**

One of the most daring examples of peasant resistance has come from the

tenants of the Okara Military Farms. They have constantly fought for their land rights over 18 years. However the repression of these tenants has also continued. Most of the leaders of Anjuman Mazarin Punjab (AMP) have been in jail since 2015. The main AMP leader, Mehar Abdul Sattar, is now locked up at the Pakistani "Guantánamo Bay detention center," the High Security Jail at Sahiwal, which is meant for convicted religious terrorists.

The AMP, a component of Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee, has been advocating land rights specifically at the Okara Military Farms. The tenants and their ancestors have been working on these lands - which comprise

68,000 acres" for the last 100 years. Successive civilian governments have promised them land rights but have been unable to fulfill these promises due to the pressure of the military.

The AMP was formed in 2000, when General Musharraf's dictatorship tried to change the status of the tenants into lessee. This was a tactic to remove them from the land over the long term.. At that moment the tenants revolted and refused to pay the share of the crop that they were accustomed to pay. They told authorities that they had paid enough and would pay no more.

Since that time severe state repression has been unleashed. Eleven

tenants have been killed in various incidents and hundreds arrested under anti-terrorist laws. Women are in the forefront of the movement and have also been subjected to arrests and physical beating by the police and rangers.

The task of ending feudalism and attaining rights of the poor peasants can be accomplished through a class struggle of the workers and the peasants under the leadership of the proletariat vanguard. Such a struggle by overthrowing this system through a socialist revolution can ensure the basic rights and collective ownership of the land, means of production and a democratic control of the state and society by the toiling masses.

# Israel adds a new chapter to the Nakba

## 22 May 2018

Seventy years ago, Israel was founded through the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Today, 70 years later, Israel continues to wage war on Palestinians—driving them from their homes and denying them equal rights.

On May 14, as Israelis celebrated Donald Trump's cruel provocation [72] in relocating the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, Palestinians in besieged Gaza came out to protest an American president legitimizing the colonization of their land—and to demand the right to return to the homes and land stolen from them.

For that, they were massacred in cold blood. Israeli soldiers killed at least 55 Palestinians and injured more than 1,000, firing live ammunition into the crowds.

Meanwhile, in Jerusalem, Israeli mobs harassed and assaulted Palestinians protesting the U.S. embassy moving to a contested international city. Israeli forces, aided by U.S. troops on the

ground, confiscated Palestinian flags and herded protesters like cattle.

As they watched unarmed Palestinian protesters beaten and arrested by security forces, Israeli counterprotesters chanted [73]: "Burn them, shoot them, kill them."

Meanwhile, the new U.S. embassy opened its doors in Jerusalem for the first time. First family members Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and U.S. Ambassador to Israel David Friedman attended the ceremony.

Trump himself was missing from the scene, but made sure to send a video celebrating the opening. Leading one of the prayers at the relocation ceremony was Robert Jeffress, a Baptist pastor from Dallas, Texas, who has referred to Islam [74] as "a heresy from the pit of hell."

May 15, the day after Israeli independence day, is the day that Palestinians commemorate the Nakba, which means catastrophe in Arabic. It is the day that Palestinians remember the 750,000 civilians forcibly displaced from their homes and the more than 4 million acres of Palestinian land confiscated and occupied by the fledgling Israeli state.

The Zionist slogan prior to the founding of Israel [75] had been "a land without a people for a people without a land." But in truth, Palestine had to be /made/ into a land without a people.

So between March 31 and May 15, 1948, Zionist militias destroyed more than 200 Palestinian villages, perpetrated more than two dozen massacres [76], and used terror to expel hundreds of thousands more Palestinians.

Today, 7 million Palestinians are

forbidden from returning to their occupied villages and towns. Though many live as refugees in neighboring countries or as immigrants overseas, the majority of Palestinians live within miles of their now-occupied homes.

Often framed as a religious war spanning millennia, the Nakba was, in fact, the result of the late 19th-century political movement [77] that aimed to cleanse Palestinians from their land in order to create a Jewish-majority state in historic Palestine.

Israel has attempted to frame the Nakba as just one side of the story in a two-sided conflict. In 2011, the Israeli Knesset passed the Nakba Law, which penalizes public institutions receiving funding from the state for mourning or commemorating the Nakba.

But no matter how hard Israel tries to erase the Nakba from memory, the reality is that the state's origins are inseparable from the brutality of 1948.

Trump's decision back in December to move the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem set off a series of protests around the world. Jerusalem has been and continues to be a symbol of Palestinian sovereignty.

At the time of the announcement, an overwhelming majority of the United Nations General Assembly voted against Trump's decree, but this international body holds little power to check the ambitions of a major imperialist state like the U.S.

Although nearly 40 percent of Jerusalem's population is Palestinian, Palestinians are not afforded the right to vote, the right to buy land or the right to build on land they possess. Palestinians in Jerusalem—as, indeed, throughout Israel—live in a segregated society that discriminates against them at every turn.

In Jerusalem, the streets are heavily militarized, the buses are segregated, and places of worship frequented by Palestinians are barricaded with

checkpoints and numerous restrictions.

Although legally allowed to live anywhere in the city, the majority of Palestinians are kept in East Jerusalem, where Israel has steadily been revoking residency cards. Since 1967, nearly 15,000 Palestinian residents of Jerusalem [78] have had their residency revoked.

It is clear that Trump's announcement—and Israel's enthusiasm for it—is a provocation designed to bind the U.S. and Israel closer together as the two countries, led by right-wing fanatics, embrace ethno-nationalism [79].

While this maneuver meshes neatly with Trump's pandering to the constituency of far-right Christian Zionists in the U.S., there's more to it than that.

From the very first days of Trump's presidency, he has time and again showed his loyalty to the Israeli state, perhaps most clearly by his decision to appoint his former bankruptcy attorney David Friedman [80] as U.S. ambassador to Israel. Friedman used to serve as the president of the American Friends of the Bet El Institutions, where he raised money to fund the construction of illegal Jewish-only settlements [81] in the West Bank.

Other Trump appointees, like National Security Advisor John Bolton, also have strong ties to the apartheid state. Indeed, Benjamin Netanyahu was right last year when he said, "Israel does not have a better friend than Mr. Trump."

For years, Palestinians have been fighting against the expansion of Israel's settler-colonial project. The constant threat to Palestinians in Jerusalem—from the revocation of residency cards to the innumerable bureaucratic hoops Palestinians must go through to build homes, own land, enroll in schools and visit their places

of worship—is now magnified by the embassy move.

In very concrete terms, Israel just relocated the building that represents its biggest ally, military sponsor and partner in crime from the western edge of its occupied lands to the very center. For anyone who still thinks that either the U.S. or Israel plans to pursue a two-state solution, this move has obliterated that flimsy illusion.

In his book *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Israeli historian Ilan Pappé cites primary material from the documents of the Hagana militia to reveal the true designs of Israel's founders.

Officers leading the seizure of Palestinian towns received clear instructions to either "[destroy] villages (by setting fire to them, by blowing them up, and by planting mines in their deris) and especially of those population centers which are difficult to control continuously" or to besiege and search Palestinian villages, with any armed resistance to be "wiped out and the population expelled outside the borders of the state."

Between 1947 and 1948, the Hagana was given orders to instill fear and terror in Palestinians in order to drive them out en masse. These orders were carried out in dozens of villages and towns, leaving more than 400 villages completely destroyed and hundreds of Palestinian men, women and children massacred.

Then, as now, the powers backing the formation of the Israeli state cared little about Palestinian lives. To them, the very existence of Palestinians was a threat.

In place of these destroyed villages, Israel has built illegal settlements, resorts, parks and other institutions. Palestinians are barred from entering. Yigal Allon, a military commander during the 1948 ethnic cleansing and later a general in the Israel Defense Forces, was quoted in an early Israeli



leader's diary as defending the indiscriminate killing of /all/ Palestinians:

>We need to be accurate about timing, place, and those we hit. If we accurse

>a family—we need to harm them without mercy, women and children included.

>Otherwise this is not an effective reaction. During the operation there is  
>no need to distinguish between guilty and not guilty.  
>

Seventy years after Allon said these words, Israel continues to apply his strategy. In a statement following the release of a video depicting an Israeli laughing and cheering [82]] as he shot unarmed Palestinians in Gaza, Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman insisted [83], "There are no innocent people in Gaza."

Over the course of the last seven weeks, Israel has murdered at least 90 Palestinians in Gaza as they marched peacefully to demand their right of return. More than 7,000 have been injured in these mass demonstrations.

After Trump's announcement that the embassy would move to Jerusalem, Israel waived numerous permits to expedite the construction of the new U.S. building. The enthusiasm for Trump and his far-right political ideology has been welcomed in Israel with open arms.

In Jerusalem over the course of the past few days, Jewish residents have been parading in the streets of the city, waving Israeli flags; forcing their way into the al-Aqsa compound, which is one of Islam's holiest sites; and celebrating both the annual flag day ceremony as well as the embassy move.

Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat announced last week on Facebook that a traffic plaza near the embassy would be renamed "United States Square" [84] in honor of Trump and his decree. A large sign near the embassy reads, "Trump, make

Israel great."

Since 1948, Israel has strengthened its expansionist project, incorporating more Palestinian land under its control and subjecting Palestinians to a brutal occupation. In fact, at the height of the so-called Oslo "peace process" between 1993 and 2000, the number of illegal Jewish-only settlements /doubled/.

In the last couple years, Israeli settlement construction has again risen sharply, with an estimated 3,700 new settlement homes approved in 2018 alone [85].

These settlements are illegal under international law, according to the Fourth Geneva Convention. However, just this month, the Israeli committee tasked with legal issues pertaining to settlements built in the West Bank released the Levy Report, officially called the Report on the Legal Status of Building in Judea and Samaria. The 200-page report lays out detailed proposals and recommendations for the legalization of Jewish-only settlements built on Palestinian land.

At the heart of both the protests in Gaza and Trump's decision to relocate the U.S. embassy is a driving factor, viewed from opposite vantage points: the struggle of Palestinians to demand their right of return.

More than anything, remembering the Nakba today is about confronting the fact that Palestinians are illegally and unjustly prevented from returning to their homes. Many Palestinians to this day hold the keys to properties from which they were expelled.

This is why Palestinians are marching and dying in Gaza. And this is also precisely why Israel expedited the move of the U.S. embassy. The more Israel's project expands, the more difficult it is for Palestinians and their supporters to realize their just demands to return.

All the while, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and fellow Palestinian elites are nowhere to be found.

Not a single one of the so-called Palestinian representatives released a statement regarding Jerusalem in the days leading up to the embassy relocation. Instead, most of these cabinet members were out of the country during yesterday's ceremony and massacre.

The Nakba is not a thing of the past. Its impact is felt by every single Palestinian, and its memory shields against a systematic attempt to whitewash the violence and bloodshed that characterized Israel's birth 70 years ago, and that sustains Israel's apartheid regime today.

Claims that Palestinians are "violent," "terrorists" or a "security threat" are more dubious than ever. What threat can children or the disabled possibly pose to an advanced military and nuclear power? Why is the Palestinian boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement—a nonviolent strategy for attaining justice and accountability—criminalized more than the murder of Palestinians?

The last seven weeks in Gaza are a reminder that no matter what Palestinians do, they will be characterized as violent instigators. Their existence, no matter how dismal, will be considered a threat—and their resistance a chance to indiscriminately slaughter them.

The 55 Palestinians murdered yesterday—and the 49 others killed during the Great Return marches—did not die in vain. While the Nakba is an ongoing reality for millions of Palestinians, so is their resistance.

May 15, 2018

[socialistworker.org](http://socialistworker.org)

# The shape of resistance in Brazil

21 May 2018

Rousseff's own vice president, Michel Temer, of the center-right Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB), promoted the coup and has led an aggressively neoliberal government since that time. Over the last several years, prosecutors have charged various high-ranking politicians and leading businessmen with corruption in the so-called Operation Lava Jato (Car Wash) campaign. [86]

While these prosecutions were initially understood to be apolitical, it's become clearer in recent years that the investigation is politically motivated, including the thinly substantiated charges against Lula himself that led to his conviction and imprisonment last month for a 12-year term that, conveniently enough, bars him from running in October's presidential elections, all but insuring one or another faction of the right will replace Temer.

All this in a country with a powerful military that held power under its own name for more than a quarter century until 1980 and is showing signs of wanting a more assertive role in domestic politics.

Meanwhile, targeted assassinations, like the murder of socialist city councilor Marielle Franco, and police repression are growing apace, even as Brazil's still-vibrant social movements, trade unions, and significant socialist left attempts to stem the tide and articulate an alternative.

Just last spring, millions of public-sector workers launched a powerful strike against Temer's neoliberal reforms. [87] And while the right is making gains, the left-wing Party for Socialism and Freedom (PSOL) has launched a vibrant presidential campaign with "co-candidates" Guilherme Boulos, a leader in the Homeless Workers' Movement (MTST) and S  nia Guajajara, one of Brazil's most important Indigenous activists.

Mart  n Mosquera is on the editorial board of the Argentine publication *Intersecciones*. Val  rio Arcary is a longtime Marxist leader in Brazil, historian, and retired instructor at the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology in S  o Paulo. He studied in Lisbon and Paris and was a student leader during the Portuguese Revolution of 1974. He returned to Brazil in the 1970s and joined *Converg  ncia Socialista*, a Trotskyist organization linked to the political current led by Nahuel Moreno.

He was a founder and member of the leadership of the Workers' Party (PT) until his current left the party in 1994 to establish the Unified Socialist Workers' Party (PSTU). He is currently a member of *Resistencia*, which was recently formed through the unification of the Movement for an Independent and Socialist Alternative (MAIS) and the New Socialist Organization (NOS). *Resistencia* is an internal current in PSOL.

This interview was originally published at *Intersecciones* in April. Translation from Spanish by Todd Chretien.

**How would you characterize the situation after Lula's imprisonment? What are potential scenarios for the near-term future, keeping in mind October's presidential elections?**

All in all, reactionary forces prevail in a still notably turbulent scene. Few could have imagined such a rapid negative turn in national politics as has taken place over the last few months. The announcement of the Brazilian military's intervention in the streets of Rio de Janeiro (under the cover of fighting the war on drugs), the brutal execution of PSOL city council Marielle Franco and her assistant Anderson Gomes, and political imprisonment of Lula have all

dangerously intensified the reactionary course of events. The political and social crises have been aggravated appreciably, and how this will all unfold remains unknowable. The current conflict between various political and social forces—classes, fractions of classes, parties, institutions, leaders, etc.—reveals a bitter struggle to determine the country's path. President Michel Temer has no social backing. Be that as it may, the bourgeoisie is advancing despite its own internal divisions and how to achieve its objectives. The working class and the oppressed are on the defensive, but they are resisting courageously in a series of struggles even as the middle class has turned in its majority to the right, including providing the principle social base for the extreme right. The party system of the New Republic (the electoral regime in place over the last 30 years since the fall of the military dictatorship) is shaking without having succeeded in creating a new order to substitute for it: a new equilibrium has not been achieved.

There are various political visions in conflict. The old representatives of the bourgeoisie—the center-right PMDB, conservative DEM(ocrats), and the neoliberal-clientalist (and poorly-named) Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB) are fighting to keep the weakened political-party system intact. The fraction of capitalists behind the Lava Jato anti-corruption investigations want to impose a reactionary transformation on the regime with an eye toward making it more efficient, entrenched, and repressive. Lula and the PT, for their part, are looking to survive this brutal offensive without breaking with the party's conciliatory commitments to the powers that be. The extreme right advanced vigorously in the last few years, winning influence among the masses, although only with a minority. A neofascist leader, Jair Bolsonaro—who is an open admirer of

the long-ruling military dictatorship—might make it into the second round of the presidential elections.

On the other hand, the reorganization of the left got a shot in the arm with launch of Guilherme Boulos and Sônia Guajajara's presidential campaign. The alliance formed between PSOL, MTST and PCB (Brazilian Communist Party), among other organizations, makes possible a perspective aimed at building new left-wing strategy, one based on confronting the rich and powerful in place of the class conciliationist policies pursued by Lulismo, as Lula's particular branch of politics is known in Brazil. It is possible that neither the PSDB nor the PT will get into the second round of the elections in October. In the last six presidential elections over the course of a quarter century—1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010 and 2014—the prevailing pattern has been marked by an alteration between two political camps: the PSDB and the PT. This may well repeat itself, but the second round is wide open and could end up with candidates from other parties.

**The movement for a Socialist and Independent Alternative (MAIS) emerged from the Unified Socialist Workers' Party (PSTU) over how to characterize the crisis of 2015-2016, which included Dilma Rousseff's impeachment. Can you comment on the terms of the discussion that essentially split the party in half? In addition to the tactical debates, what issues of a strategic nature were at play?**

Twenty-five years after the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc, we must admit that the forces of revolutionary Marxism, including Trotskyism, are weaker on a global scale. Ruptures opened up between the masses and the enormous political and trade union apparatuses that dominated the working class over the last decades, but they were not—in their immense majority—attracted to the different organizations of the Fourth International. Despite mobilizing and even sparking political revolutions, the masses and their vanguard could not see a potential alternative to the

bourgeois-democratic regime. Not only did socialism fail to arise as a possible option, but it was repudiated in various key countries by the majority.

This didn't alter in the least our strategy of permanent mobilization for workers to take power and for the building of Bolshevik parties and an international based on these methods. However, it does oblige us to consider whether or not the weight of capitalist restoration in the ex-workers' states, and the fact that democratic revolutions against the Stalinist regimes were led by pro-imperialist, bourgeois forces, constitutes a profound blow to the political consciousness of the masses. If it was, as we believe was the case, then the processes in the East must be considered, on the whole, regressive. The vision of a stage after the fall of the Berlin Wall—what the PSTU called the fourth stage—being more favorable for the construction of revolutionary parties was not confirmed, and we had to take this into consideration. In place of this, the vision arrived at by the majority of the PSTU's party congress deepened its commitment to a facile vision, thereby obscuring the contradictions and obstacles that I have described above.

**In Brazil, we see an accumulation of disconcerting episodes that contribute to the emergence of an authoritarian regime beginning in earnest with the fraudulent impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, the recent military intervention in Rio de Janeiro, Lula's detention without evidence, and, more generally, the deployment of an increasingly authoritarian state, including more and more frequent assassinations of social and political leaders. How do you analyze these changes in terms of the "political regime" that is being consolidated in Brazil?**

We are facing a reactionary transformation of the political regime. Bourgeois democracy in Brazil is less and less democratic. The neocolonial economic project presupposes such a transformation. The executive and legislative branches are losing strength while the judiciary and the armed forces are every day more

politically relevant. Basic democratic gains are under attack. When their ability to exercise domination by means of a class consensus diminishes, coercive tendencies grow in order to maintain a bourgeois order. We are rapidly approaching a capitalist democracy that is restricted, amputated, entrenched and repressive. The Lava Jato investigation functions in the service of this reactionary turn, particularly in terms of restricting or annulling democratic rights and especially targeting the leadership of the reformist left (the PT), and reinforcing institutions such as the judiciary, the federal police, the interior ministry and the armed forces.

In a word, we are confronted by a fraction of the bourgeoisie—with TV Globo acting as its publicity agent—that wants to impose authoritarian reforms on the political regime. This section of the ruling class is even willing to target figures from the traditional right wing (such as Michel Temer) and professional politicians who have long been known for corruption (president of the lower house of Brazil's Congress Eduardo Cunha and ex-member of Temer's cabinet Geddel Vieira, etc.) without in any way altering the character of the operation. Thus, any section of the left that lines up with Lava Jato is crossing the class line.

**You referred to the emergence of neofascism with a base among the masses in Brazil. Can you talk more about this? Does this have to do with a social and political polarization, with some breaking left and others breaking right? Or are we facing a unidirectional surge to the right in Brazilian society guided by an extreme neofascist vision?**

Your second thesis, unfortunately, describes the negative evolution in the situation better. We are not dealing with a simple dynamic of social polarization. We are confronting an unfavorable inversion of social and political forces. The execution of Marielle and Anderson, the gun shots fired at Lula's campaign caravan (before his imprisonment), an upsurge in political assassinations carried out against landless and Indigenous activists, genocidal attacks on Black

and poor people in marginalized urban and rural areas, as well as growing violence, intimidation and persecution against activists in social and left-wing movements is setting off alarm bells. Feeding on the fear and hatred scattered on among pockets of the population, the neofascist monster is raising its head. This does not mean we are not facing an immediate danger of a military dictatorship, nor of the threat of a fascist counterrevolution in Brazil.

But this fact does not diminish the gravity of the existence of an extreme right with influence among the masses, even if it's still a minority. Bolsonaro is a fascist leader who is followed by millions and he might get into the second round of the presidential elections. He is organizing a national political movement that promotes campaigns, meetings, events, etc. Speaking precisely, we can say that an embryo of a neofascist party is developing around Bolsonaro. What is the future of this project? It's very difficult to predict the future. At this point, Bolsonaro is willing to accommodate his immediate objectives to the form of the democratic-electoral regime, but tomorrow?

Now is not the time to underestimate the enemies of freedom. The policy of an anti-fascist united front is today doubly important. Unity in action for energetic confrontation in all areas is key to stopping the neofascist danger.

**Lula's detention and the crisis of the PT puts a big question mark over the future of the Brazilian left. PSOL and Guilherme Boulos' campaign appears that it might occupy an important role in a large-scale reorganization of the left. How do see the possibilities?**

Workers, the oppressed, and the youth are resisting colossal attacks even though there have been fluctuations in intensity according to the situation and circumstances at any given moment.

In other words, we see a picture of resistance struggles playing out in an overall defensive situation. For instance, on April 28, 2017, the working class spearheaded a historic

general strike against neoliberal economic reforms. And over the last few years, there have been a number of important strikes and land occupations as well as diverse and significant marches by women, Afro Brazilians and LGBT people, all fighting for their rights. The slogans at these mobilizations, in general, have been defensive, but the struggles demonstrate people's ability to react to the impact of the attacks.

At the beginning of the year, Marielle's assassination sparked a powerful convulsion and more than 150,000 people took to the streets the day after her execution. The People Without Fear (PSM) occupation in SÃo Bernardo do Campo became a powerful symbol of resistance, winning land for workers' housing. For their part, the strike by public employees in the city of San Pablo defeated cuts to social security promoted by the local PSDB government. These examples show that there is a disposition to fight coming up from below.

To confront the current capitalist offensive, we must put our hopes in unified struggle—unity to defend the rights of workers and the oppressed, unity to defend wages and jobs, unity to defend public education and health, and unity to fight for justice for Marielle and against all attacks on democratic liberties and Lula's imprisonment.

In this sense, left-wing parties—PT, the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB), PSOL, PSTU, PCB—trade unions and federations—Unified Workers Center (CUT), Brazilian Workers Center (CTB), Union and People's Center-National Coordinating Committee for Struggle (CSP-Conlutas), Union Power (Força Sindical), etc.— and all social movements—MTST, PSM, Landless Workers Movement (MST)—all have a responsibility to promote concrete unity in action for social, economic and democratic demands. There is no time to lose. We must wager that the unified struggle of the working class and the oppressed will be able to change things.

**How does the overall assessment of Lula's class conciliationist**

**government impact the potential reorganization of the Brazilian left? How do you judge the potential for going beyond Lulismo? How is it possible to avoid the tendencies toward adaption and bureaucratization that decisively weighed down the PT that was in the 1980s, after all, a class-based party that was both pluralist and socialist? Now that PSOL is winning more space for its ideas and, consequently, will be subject to greater institutional pressure to adapt, how can this process be confronted?**

Guilherme Boulos' campaign for the presidency is, simultaneously, a symbol and a bet on the reconstruction of a left that speaks the language of class struggle, the language of those from below, and not that of submission, conciliation and accommodation with those from above. The alliance sealed between PSOL, MTST and other diverse movements is pushing forward a political initiative that transcends purely electoral boundaries because it opens the door to the reorganization of the left on new political and programmatic bases. In overcoming PTism and its permanent strategy of conciliation with the powers that be, we must also avoid the error of sectarianism. At this moment, the struggle for justice for Marielle, the fight against neofascism, mobilizing against Lula's imprisonment, the unified fight against Temer's government and his reforms, and opposing military intervention in Rio are of decisive importance. Unity of the left in struggle is the principal banner under which we must march today.

However, at the same time, it is necessary to recognize that, unless it breaks with the politics and program of Lulismo, any new left will have a very short run. Class conciliationism is today not only undesirable; in fact, it was responsible for opening the door to the parliamentary coup and the wave of reaction that is hitting our people. The conciliation strategy reveals its impotence and total failure when Lula was imprisoned without heightened resistance on the part of the PT leadership. Thus, in this year's elections, it is critical to affirm a new

project for the left, with a new program. If fighting for left unity is fundamental, then during the elections we must emphasis prioritizing the construction of something new, of a new strategy, we must avoid the mistakes of the past. The PT leadership has already demonstrated

many times that it will continue on in its alliances with sections of the right and its program of class conciliation with big capital, even while Lula is in prison. We are not going to take a path that has already been shown to end in tragedy. We are taking a different road, betting on the streets,

on the independent struggle of those from below, raising an anticapitalist program with Boulas, Guajajara and PSOL.

May 11, 2018

[socialistworker.org](http://socialistworker.org)

## An Anti-Forest Policy: Rhetoric or Sleight of Hand?

21 May 2018, by **Madhu Ranath, Ashish Kothari**

The draft National Forest Policy 2018, gives the following justification: “low quality and low productivity of our natural forests, impacts of climate change, human-wildlife conflict, intensifying water crisis, increasing air and water pollution and deteriorating environment have been the issues of serious concern.” It adds that “there is a need to revise the National Forest Policy 1988 in order to integrate the vision of sustainable forest management by incorporating elements of ecosystem security, climate change mitigation and adaptation, forest hydrology, participatory forest management, ... while building on our rich cultural heritage of co-existence and relying on our rich and diverse forest resources.”

These are noble intentions indeed, worthy of a government with a vision that is concerned about the environment as the backbone of people’s culture and livelihoods, as well as a global heritage vis-À-vis climate change mitigation. India has been participating in several international summits and conventions and has committed itself to various such goals. But we need to pause and ask: does what is happening at home give us cause to have faith in these intentions?

### Protecting

### industrial-commercial, not community, interests

For the last two decades, we have had some major legislations that have been enacted to safeguard the interests of adivasi and other forest dwelling peoples – arguably the most marginalised populations in the country – such as the Panchayat Extension for Scheduled Areas Act 1996 (PESA), and the Forest Rights Act 2006 (FRA). [88] “Safeguarding” such interests should mean protecting forests and lands in which such communities live or on which they depend, from industrial and corporate interests, and giving such communities a central role in their governance.

Unfortunately, commercial-industrial, not community, interests have been supported by the state quite openly, especially in the last three decades of economic globalisation. Examples are coal mining in northern Chhattisgarh, bauxite mining in Odisha, granite quarries in Andhra Pradesh, hydro projects in the western and eastern Himalaya, industrial leases in Jharkhand, economic-industrial corridors in western India, and many more. More than one observer of adivasi affairs in central India has

traced the cause of their alienation and the ongoing insurgency in much of that region to the callousness of the Indian state when dealing with the adivasi people. Similar discontent, though remarkably not yet violent, has been brewing amongst non-adivasi forest-dependent people in other parts of India, such as nomadic pastoralists in Uttarakhand, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

Despite provisions in the law, and the use of the Right to Information Act 2005, the government has paid insignificant attention to the interests and the well-being of the forest peoples of the country. A 2010 Government of India committee exposed a serious lack of implementation of the FRA. Six years later, a civil society (Human Rights Law Network) review of both the PESA and the FRA in New Delhi, revealed that a mere 3% of the potential of the FRA had been achieved ten years after its enactment. Annual reports of the Community Forest Rights Learning and Advocacy Network have shown state-wise neglect or obstructions in implementation.

The PESA had been violated time and again, with cases still pending in court about gram panchayats being declared as nagar panchayats to make the PESA Act invalid. One such instance was in the Surajpur district of Chhattisgarh, where the predominantly adivasi population



protested against the IFFCO power plant, and the chief minister Raman Singh announced the change to bypass panchayat powers!

If the government actually meant what it said by “building on our rich cultural heritage” and “participatory”, would it not seriously review why the FRA, which is meant to correct an unimaginable historical violation of almost 10% of our people, and PESA, meant to give adivasis the self-governing space they need as a special section of India’s population, are not being implemented? State after state has lagged behind, with some of them openly opposed to the FRA as it prevents the opening up land for investments.

Proper implementation of the FRA, especially of its community forest resource rights provisions, has the potential of addressing the twin issues of conservation as well as livelihoods. But even as communities are filing their community claims, or struggling to get themselves recognised, the state comes along with new plans, such as the CAMPA (Compensatory Afforestation) Fund to compensate for forest lands that have been diverted for non-forestry purposes with plantations.

These plans contradict completely the rights that ought to be recognised (or have been granted) under the FRA. Lands claimed by adivasi people have been forcibly taken over for reforestation through the CAMPA scheme, creating conflicts in Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and elsewhere. The CAMPA bill does not even mention the FRA and the adivasi lands that it may impinge upon. The draft Forest Policy, however, mentions the FRA in passing (“As far as community forest resources management under Forest rights Act is concerned, the new policy will address the same under participatory forest management and the same will be addressed through the proposed community forest management mission”), without any analysis or remark on the kind of problems and conflicts that such an approach is likely to create.

## Water-guzzling commercial plantations

Another major obstacle to sustaining forests and forest rights is the proposed plan to cover one million ha (hectare) of land under oil palm plantations by 2030, from about one lakh ha today. [89] 12 states (133 districts) have been earmarked for it, much of it in the adivasi and water-deficit belts – a single palm requires about 250 litres of water per day – even though we as a nation have the lowest productivity among the various oil palm producing nations.

In April 2017, Narendra Modi chaired a Union cabinet meeting to approve some of the measures to increase oil palm production in the country. These measures include the relaxation of the land ceiling limit for oil palm cultivation, and subsidies for planting materials, maintenance, inter-cropping and bore-wells. Here too the corporate sector is being encouraged with lands and subsidies for them to invest in.

At present there are 19 states where this programme is being implemented, of which seven are northeast states which are supposedly to be protected according to the draft Forest Policy. Despite the policy admitting that “.....forests in North-East have vital impact on climate, agriculture production, and mitigation of floods in the plain areas of North-East..,” Arunachal Pradesh alone has sanctioned a total of 25,000 ha of land in four of its districts for oil palm. [90]

Some of the areas where this experiment is being tried, especially in Telangana and Tamil Nadu, are severely drought-prone. Field surveys showed that many farmers felt duped by the initial subsidies and promises but have now uprooted their plants and gone back to their original crops. [91] The environmental, social and cultural havoc caused by large oil palm plantations in Indonesia, Malaysia and several parts of southeast Asia should be a warning to India.

The track record of the government with regard to ensuring that its laws are implemented in the right spirit – especially those that are meant for the well-being of marginalised peoples and the environment – is dismal at best, and insidiously anti-people in specific circumstances. Blatant examples include Ghatbharra, Chhattisgarh, where the granted Community Forest Resource rights were withdrawn to accommodate private interests in the coal found in the area!

It is unlikely that the prime motivation stated for the policy (low quality and low productivity of our natural forests, etc.) can be solved “through new technological advancements” and investment in new models of public-private partnerships (PPPs). The Policy says, “Public private participation models will be developed for undertaking afforestation and reforestation activities in degraded forest areas and forest areas available with Forest Development Corporations and outside forests”.

Is not a ministry, with an annual budget of Rs 2675 crores, ashamed to confess that the “productivity of the forest plantations are poor in most of the States” and that “this will be addressed by intensive scientific management of forest plantations of commercially important species like teak, sal, sisham, poplar, gmelina, eucalyptus, casuarina, bamboo etc?” Is it not unusual that among the hundreds of native plant species that are valuable and can be easily grown (Xylia, Grewia, Syzigium, Cleistanthus, Bridelia, etc.) we have to again pick on teak, which does not yield a crop before three decades, or sal, which has almost never had a successful plantation for more than a few years? We do not need PPPs for this but common sense and forest peoples who know the species, their growth and utility. Over the last few years, we have visited large nurseries of the forest department in some states that have shown a mere 10% survival of the saplings they have tried to grow.

## A flawed model of development

India also has a long tradition, and many new practices, of community based forest conservation and management. Many continue from the ancient past, as in sacred groves. Some are from the colonial times, as in van panchayats in Uttarakhand. Some are post-Independence, as in the community forests across Odisha, or the Chipko Movement protected forests in Uttarakhand. In parts of India like Nagaland there is even a new wave of forest (and wildlife) protection.

Hundreds of 'community conserved areas' (CCAs) have been documented across the country by groups like Kalpavriksh, TERI, Foundation for Ecological Security, and Vasundhara. It is also well established that communities will regenerate, protect, govern and manage forests, given adequate policy and other support, at costs far less than what the forest department or corporations can do. There are even examples where exceptional forest officers have stuck their necks out to provide such support. And many places where communities have rebuilt their lives towards livelihood and food security,

based on sustainable use of forest produce. The track record of these successful models is visible, but the government refuses to put its faith in communities, preferring instead to believe in the claims of corporate houses, whose credibility with regard to ecological sensitivity in India is virtually zero.

At least thrice in the last three decades, the central government has tried changing the forest policy or laws, to enable industrial take-over of forest lands. At the root of this repeated move is a deeply flawed model of 'development' and of political governance. Relying on economic growth, spurred by industrial investments and clever financial jugglery, has proven to be blindly foolish, as it has done little to pull people out of poverty and create livelihoods at the mass scale we need. If poverty is about deprivation from basic needs, over 70% of India's population remains stuck below the line; and indeed millions have been added to the impoverished by being displaced from lands needed for dams, mines, highways, and the like. Though we call ourselves a democracy, meaningful decision-making has still been kept out of the reach of people, as the state still controls financial and legal matters.

Democracy is not about elections, it is about enabling and empowering people to be part of decisions that affect their lives, on a day to day basis. We have some amazing examples of direct or radical democracy on the ground, with communities showing themselves capable of self-provisioning for basic needs and being responsible custodians of nature and natural resources, but the state simply does not build on these examples. It does not want to give over its power, as is evident in the way that even the FRA, which can enable communities to govern surrounding forests, or PESA that can enable significant autonomy for adivasi areas, have been repeatedly subverted. And so we have movements such as the latest one in Jharkhand where several hundred villages, tired of the state's neglect and heavy-handedness, have declared autonomy as 'Patthargarh'. [92]

On every occasion that the state has tried to hand over forest lands to corporates, widespread national protest has forced it to withdrawal. Hopefully this latest cynical move will receive the same outrage, and the state will be forced or guided to look at democratically and ecologically meaningful alternatives based on the wisdom, knowledge, capacities and interests of forest communities.

## Repeal the eighth! Defend the Right to Choose! Separate Church and State!

20 May 2018, by **Socialist Democracy**

We can't see the future, however we are confident that the youth and energy of the repeal campaign will overcome the reactionaries defending the amendment and bring about a yes vote. We also believe that the single focus on repeal means that the opportunity to build a more radical movement of socialists and feminists has not been taken up fully and as a result there is a long and arduous struggle still to be fought for this

central democratic right at issue - the right to choose - the right of women to control their own bodies free of the constraints of Church and State.

The pictures of groups of up to 50 volunteers gathering to leaflet and lobby are signs of a constricted campaign that needs to burst the bounds of the existing movement and find new channels for their energy. As long as the core of the campaign is

limited simply to repeal, then poster and leaflet will be the main activities.

### What difference would a Right to

## Choose campaign make?

Right to Choose would be a mass campaign on the streets. It would demand a united and democratic campaign rather than the national paper unity and local fragmentation that we have. It would refer back to the terrible history of servitude and death in the Magdalene Laundries and in the orphanages that faced many young women and their children and which were enforced by the alliance of Church and State. It would connect up with current events, saying how even today the care of women threatened by cancer is subordinate in a health service geared for profit and policed

by the clergy.

The dangers come after the vote. The removal of the Eighth Amendment will be a terrible blow to the Church. However this is a blow they have long prepared for. The momentum of the repeal campaign, run largely within constituency boundaries, is towards the Dail, and this is a terrain where reactionary forces have the advantage. The strategy will be to fight on the issue of a 12 week window for abortion, to tie in chains a million other restrictions beyond that and to build in a freedom of conscience clause for medical staff that will lead to a long guerrilla war in the health service where working class women will be the casualties.

Many believe that Ireland is now a post Catholic society. It's true that the church has retreated in the face of widespread hatred as the more savage elements of their role were exposed. However they remain a central pillar of the gombeen society we live in. The state carried the can on the limited reparations and the Church walked away scot-free. Today the clerics are ensconced in our legal system, our education system and in the health system. In the aftermath of the repeal vote we will need to mobilise to insist on the right to choose and to link that right to the more general restriction of workers' rights caused by the influence of the Catholic Church in Irish society.

[Socialist Democracy](#)

# The Direction of the South Korean Labor Movement since the 2016 Candlelight Vigils

20 May 2018, by **Song Ho-joon**

Song Ho-joon

## The reappearance of the controversy between “reform” and “revolution”

Although capitalism's fundamental contradictions that stem from its socially created but privately owned production processes have variously manifested themselves in different times and spaces, every capitalist society witnessed the emergence of workers' struggles not only for their livelihood but also for their liberation from the capitalist system itself. But when working-class hegemony got weaker and when socialism seemed not to be able to become an alternative to capitalism, there had appeared a tendency among workers that they should gain some material benefits within the system, rather than

fight for fundamental systemic changes. The tendency appeared more in advanced capitalist societies where the accumulation of capital made it possible for some material gains to relatively easily trickle down to the workers. Many workers in advanced capitalist countries thus may seem to think that the goal of the labor movement is to expand reforms within the system.

However, in Third World countries where capitalist accumulation was not large enough to offer some material benefits to the working class, workers' demands for even a limited range of reforms were brutally repressed. Like in many other Third World countries, capitalism in Korea developed rapidly and both capital and the state ruthlessly suppressed either reformist or revolutionary labor revolts. Moreover, since the Korean War and the division of the nation, the state and capital used anti-communist ideologies as a strong weapon to put down workers' movements.

Furthermore, in the late 1980s the labor movement revived its revolutionary tradition and spirit, took a leading role in the liberation movement of the oppressed people, and developed more militant and radical strategies than its counterparts in many other countries. Admittedly, a tendency to settle within the system grew stronger, as capitalism advanced further. Nevertheless, social structural changes have remained as a goal for many labor activists, regardless of how differently they defined the path to revolution.

## The limitation of Moon Jae-in's liberal reform policies

Although candlelight vigils were triggered by the disclosure of the

ultra-right wing government's corruption, depravity, and violation of democracy and human rights, the revolt was fundamentally grounded upon the grievances of people whose lives were destroyed and who had been driven to the edge by neo-liberal policies for the past twenty years. Whereas an extremely small number of people at the top had accumulated wealth, a majority of people had suffered from poverty, an expansion of precarious and irregular jobs and contracting-out systems, and the deepening of chronic economic recession and crises. These realities, accompanied by the corruption of the Park administration, caused an explosion of the people's anger, which was expressed in the vigils.

The Moon administration, which owes its successful seizure of power to people's struggles, styled itself as a "vigil government" and proclaimed that it would make reforms to live up to people's demands and expectations. It has penalized those who participated in the Park administration's corruption and restored some of the democratic mechanisms in society as well as inside the government. It began to make an effort to improve its relationship with the North Korean government in order to ease military tensions. Its policies that could advance people's lives, such as regularization of public sector jobs, increase in minimum wages and social welfare, and stabilization of the real estate market, got public support. Nevertheless, as time went by, the limitation of the Moon Jae-in administration, whose philosophy is based on liberalism, became clear.

Turning regular jobs into irregular ones by changing pay from salaries to wages and eliminating benefits or by hiring contracted-out workers had been one of the responses by capital and the state to the 1997-98 financial crisis and to the ensuing pressure from the IMF to restructure the Korean political economy. By 2005 irregular workers constituted more than 50 percent of the workforce in Korea. During the last twenty years, their precarious working and employment conditions had created one of the most egregious economic and social problems and had been a

focal point that the labor movement tried to challenge. Even some liberals began to argue that converting the irregular workforce to regular work would be one effective strategy for overcoming the economy's problems. Because of pressure from the labor movement but also because Moon Jae-in was in line with these liberals, the current administration announced that it would begin switching irregulars workers to regular work in the public sector.

In regard to the public sector in Korea, companies in the infrastructure industry, such as electricity, communication, and transportation, had been owned or operated by the state since soon after the birth of the republic in order to promote a rapid development of capitalism. Since the late 1990s when the IMF forced it to restructure the political economy, the government has attempted to privatize these companies. However, due to several complex factors, including fierce resistance from the labor movement against privatization, a lot of these companies remain publicly owned and have an impact on the nation's economy. Policies regulating companies in the public sector have tended to be expanded to companies in the private sector. Therefore, a plan to promote the regularization of irregular jobs in the public sector could be an important step toward economic recovery.

However, the hollowness of Moon's plan was soon revealed when the government allowed public sector companies to use various ways to avoid regularization of their workers. For example, instead of directly rehiring their existing irregular or contracted-out workers, companies created subsidiary companies and rehired them in the latter. Although hired as regulars these workers could be paid less and forced to work in worse conditions than their counterparts in the parent company. Moreover, even when companies directly hired workers as regulars, they classified them differently from existing regulars. By doing so, companies could avoid paying them as much as regulars and maintain unequal treatment among workers. The government's policy not only failed to eliminate discrepancies

between regular and irregular workforces but created new inequalities within the working class and thus generated tension and competition among workers.

How companies dealt with people's demand for a \$10 per hour minimum wage is another example of the limitations of the government's reform policies. Moon raised the minimum wage by a larger percentage than previous administrations and announced his plan to increase the minimum wage each year until it reaches \$10 by year 2020. However, capital responded by using various methods to contain or reduce real wages or by firing workers in large numbers. For instance, one company used wage increases as a pretext to fire its workers and then contracted out the work or mechanized the tasks. Some others began to include food expenses or holiday bonuses in calculating wages, which had previously been excluded. Other companies reduced official work hours by giving workers more break times, although workers did not or could not actually use the breaks. Some companies forced their workers to take their vacation times, while requiring them to finish their tasks within the reduced work hours.

Although the administration declared that it would break with past practices and expand democracy throughout society, those who had been imprisoned as a result of their fierce struggles against the corrupt government, as well as prisoners of conscience, still remain behind bars. For example, Moon hasn't released Han Sang-gyun, who is the president of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, and who has been in jail for years for his labor activism. The national security laws suppressing civil liberties have no prospect to be reformed and the Korean Government Employees' Union and the Korean Teachers and Education Workers Union are still prevented from enjoying their legal right to form a union. Over the past several years, hundreds of mail delivery workers in the Woo-jung post office have been killed by their excessively long work hours. Surviving workers and family members are still fighting to obtain justice and fair work conditions by



occupying the street, living in tents, protesting in elevated places, such as on factory roofs, steel towers, and billboards, and organizing hunger strikes. Workers in the GM factory in Gun-san were recently locked out due to its closing, and Kumho Tires workers are currently facing a large-scale lay-off because the company was forced to restructure itself before its sale.

The administration stated that it would forge peace with the North Korean government by reducing military tensions. However, it pushed ahead the U.S. government's additional THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) placement on Korean soil — an action that intensified the military confrontation and put all people on the Korean peninsula in danger. The relationship between the North and South Korean governments began to thaw slightly when they exchanged special envoys and communicated with each other to form joint teams for the 2018 Winter Olympics. Since then, the South Korean government has seemed to be exercising its voice in its relationship with the North. However, it is doubtful that the Moon administration's position will move away from the U.S.-centered strategy, according to which the United States and her allies maintain nuclear weapons, while suppressing by any means possible the possession of nuclear weapons by Third World countries that are not under the U.S. military umbrella. The U.S. government still holds the ultimate power to create long-term peaceful conditions on the peninsula. The Moon government, as a junior partner of the United States, shares Trump's view.

## **“Déjà vu” of the Kim and Roh liberal reform administrations in the early 21st century**

Forgetting past experiences and lessons is one of the reasons a social

movement fails. Before Moon's ascendancy, Korean workers had already experienced liberal governments' inconsistencies in their reform efforts as well as their betrayal of the people's will. When masses of Koreans overthrew military rule in 1987, when they elected Kim Dae-jung in 1998 as president, hoping that his administration would fight the late 1990s' financial crisis for their benefit, and when in 2003 they put in power Roh Moo-hyun who had had a long relationship with the labor movement, their expectations and hopes turned into disappointment not long after.

President Kim and President Roh (in leadership from 1998-2007), like Moon today, owed their rise to power to people's struggles for democracy. During the initial period, they carried out some policies that were auspicious for the oppressed: They reinstated those who had been punished by the state and those who had been fired while fighting for workers' rights. As a result, people's expectations for and illusions about the government grew. Many labor union officers believed that the labor movement should change its direction toward cooperating with the government and gaining material benefits as a result. They retreated from organizing militant struggles. Some even decided to work within the government by abandoning the belief that political independence was necessary for the labor movement.

However, the Kim-Roh administrations began to reveal their true identities when an increasing number of workers in individual workplaces fought for their rights. At first, the government acted as a mediator, but as time passed, it often sided with capital (or acted as capital in the public sector). The administrations were thoroughly won over by neo-liberalism and rapidly and openly showed their anti-labor stance. It was during this period that the irregular workforce was enormously expanded.

Moon stated that this time would be different. What should be our current attitude toward the Moon administration that has been promising a wide range of reforms? Should we rely on him for social reforms or reject all reforms by

asserting that any expanded democratic spaces within the system have limitations?

## **The praxis of the South Korean labor movement toward a fundamental social change**

During the Kim-Roh era, many union officers retreated from organizing a fight and cooperated with the government; however, irregular workers began to organize militant and historic struggles, in fact, leading the labor movement. This experience showed that having a liberal and seemingly reform-minded government was not necessarily beneficial to people at the bottom and that the labor movement needed to continue to fight to improve workers' working and living conditions on their own without relying on the government. And as examined above, Moon's reform policies so far have not satisfied people's demands pouring out like a stream from a broken dam.

The labor movement thus needs to move beyond the liberals' limitation. It should go beyond criticizing the administration's reform policies as deceptive and develop its own political capabilities to expand reforms that can advance class struggles. In the process, the labor movement ought to strengthen political independence and assume a leading role in the Korean progressive movement. It must fight to gain substantive reforms and expand real democracy through its own struggles.

In order to do this, we need to recognize the power of workers who constitute an overwhelming majority of Korean people. We are already witnessing conflicts and tensions widening the gap between Moon Jae-in, who attempts to limit the achievement of the candlelight-vigil revolution within the framework of liberal reform, and workers, who struggle to expand the revolution into social structural changes.

Song, Ho-joon, is a railway worker who has participated in the Korean labor movement and railway workers' organizing struggles for the last three decades. He has been imprisoned twice due to his involvement in

railway workers' strikes. In 2015, the union members of KCTU Seoul Region elected him as General Secretary of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) Seoul Regional

Council. After his two-year term was over, he went back to his workplace in 2017 where his job is to maintain and repair facilities and train cars.

May 4, 2018

## Is abortion a workplace issue?

**19 May 2018, by Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8th**

Upon posing the question 'is abortion a workplace issue?' the response is usually one of a puzzlement - the reactions include 'why would it be', 'it's not something I have ever thought of', writes Dr Fiona Bloomer, Ulster University, author of *Abortion as a Trade Union Issue*.

A ground-breaking study, funded by UNITE the Union, Unison, Mandate Trade Union, the CWU Ireland and the GMB set out to explore if abortion was indeed a workplace issue. The study, led by these unions and activist groups the Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8th and Alliance for Choice, also sought to gather union members' views on legislative reform in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Over 3000 trade union members took part in the study, which was carried out by a team of researchers at Ulster University. Participants indicated

broad support for legal reform, with 80% supporting the view that women's health should be the priority in any legal reform. The vast majority, 87%, believed that a woman who had an abortion should not be criminalised.

Of those surveyed, 20% had direct experience of abortion as workplace issue. This included cases such as women unable to get time off due to precarious employment, stigma in the workplace, and a lack of support from employers.

"...my case was very complicated due to fatal foetal abnormality...I just told management I lost my baby when I was put under a lot of pressure to return to work...their response was what I expected. They told me they would get help and support for me but nobody to this day ever contacted me."

An online discussion forum that formed part of the study allowed participants to discuss their views and

share their experiences. Hostile views on abortion were expressed by some participants, however after engaging with those with direct experience, changes were evident.

"Personally...although I abhor abortion itself, I think the woman worker is entitled to full union protection after she has finished her deed. There is no point in compounding a difficult scenario."

This perspective, highlights how recognition that abortion was a workplace issue led to the conclusion that unions had a role to play in providing policies to support workers who have taken the decision to have an abortion.

The study, the first of its kind in the world, provides clear evidence that unions can play a pivotal role in campaigning for reform and can lead the way in supporting those directly affected.

## African Americans and Immigrant Workers

**18 May 2018, by Malik Miah**

At the same time, their attitude toward older immigrants in undocumented status "those working in "blue collar"

manufacturing jobs " is not so simple. These immigrants are viewed as job competitors.

Anyone who has worked in a factory or a job site knows that this tension exists. The mitigating factor is a strong union or leaders on the job who

practice job solidarity.

Historically it's been whites versus Blacks in these jobs. Today as the size of the immigration population has grown, it can be Blacks versus the undocumented. Even as unemployment overall has declined, the number of high paying blue-collar jobs has significantly fallen.

Although Black unemployment is at its lowest level in decades (still double that of whites), the numbers can be deceptive. Participation in the workforce is lower than in the 1970s when many racial barriers were busted. African Americans were able to cross the color line and get higher paying skilled jobs in construction, auto, steel and the airlines.

Black male labor participation is only 68%. In 1973 it was 78% according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Since more jobs are now in technology and service jobs, the participation rate for Black men is expected to drop to 61% by 2026.

Today's lower participation also reflects mass incarceration and fewer opportunities. Workers are not counted unless they register at state employment offices.

## Job Competition and Tensions

Conflicts between white and Black workers have a long history. The backlash by the white working class against African American job gains accelerated in the 1980s under President Reagan. Affirmative action programs and consent decrees that forced employers and unions to end discrimination on the job were fiercely opposed.

All ethnic minorities had benefitted from these fights for equality on the job. Black and Brown workers were natural allies and fought together. This struggle has generally been the framework to win full equality for all workers.

The tensions between undocumented immigrant workers and Blacks is more recent, beginning with the reform of restrictive immigration law in 1965

and the end of legal segregation in the late 1960s.

Millions of legal and undocumented people came to the country. These social changes, coupled with the technological revolution that wiped out hundreds of thousands of mining, steel, auto and manufacturing jobs in the 1980s, brought a new ethnic dynamic into the once white-dominated workforce. African Americans had held many of these jobs, and were rarely retrained with plant closures.

Demagogues like Trump and his racist base focus on "illegal" immigrants because most whites see the immigration issue as one of violating the law. The undocumented are "illegal aliens" who should be deported.

Black workers see the racism of this argument and don't accept its lack of humanity. Yet many African Americans see opportunities to get better jobs if blue collar undocumented workers are eliminated as competitors.

The reality in big cities is fewer high-wage jobs for Black high school graduates. Some African American workers say, "Why not, if it gives us more jobs." Civil rights leaders have said little about this conflict.

A January Harvard-Harris poll found that a clear majority of African Americans support a major reduction of legal immigration. Some 85% want the number to be less than one million people per year.

The Justice Department is also targeting legal residents and naturalized citizens if it can find errors in applications. Trump openly says his goal is to reduce the number of immigrants, including international students, living in the United States.

A March 16, 2018 article in The Los Angeles Times, "Liberals say immigration enforcement is racist, but the group most likely to benefit from it is black men," discussed the issue. The Times has had extensive coverage of undocumented agricultural workers in the Central Valley of California. Many farm workers have faced ICE raids and deportations. Farm bosses

have had difficulty getting non-Latinos, whites and Blacks, to take those jobs even at higher pay.

The Midwest and South have seen immigrant labor take jobs in the former unionized meatpacking industry and in urban centers. Deportations have become an issue for these employers who seek more temporary visas for workers from Mexico.

The issue of immigration is complex and not simply "legal" versus "illegal." It is about actual jobs and who gets them. For the African-American communities, the concern is the lack of decent paying jobs and who their competitors are. It is why these tensions and conflicts are important to recognize.

## Chicago Bakery Example

An article in the Chicago Sun Times ("At major Northwest Side bakery, labor issues pit blacks vs. Hispanics," February 16, 2018) shows what can happen without leadership, weak or nonexistent unions and a fight for jobs between Blacks and immigrants.

"They're being pitted against each other, so they don't get along," says Dan Giloth, a community organizer on the West Side. "We believe this is a divide-and-conquer strategy.

"Unfortunately, in Chicago, there is a widespread segregationist employment model to contract out most of your production work through temporary agencies and look the other way when they target employees by race or immigration status," says Giloth, a former union organizer who is project manager for the group Coalition Against Segregation of Employees. "The goal is to create a very vulnerable workforce and keep the wages low."

The Sun Times added:

"Aryzta [a conglomerate in Switzerland] bought Cloverhill in 2014. At the time, according to bakery employees and community organizers, most of the employees were natives of Mexico, who'd been hired through

Labor Network, a temporary-employment agency.

“But many of those workers weren’t temporary in the dictionary sense of the word. Most were so-called ‘permatemps’ temp workers who were permanently employed at Cloverhill. Most had been there for years, at least, and some for decades.”

After an audit of the three bakeries in 2017, a total of 800 workers, mainly from Mexico, lost their jobs. The Cloverhill Bakery had to hire new workers. Some 80 to 100% are African Americans.

It was the Obama administration in 2015 that sent the Labor Network a request for documentation of the 800 immigrant bakery workers. Nothing happened until 2017 when the Trump Justice Department stepped up enforcement. The undocumented immigrants left before immigration raided the factory.

“Those Hispanic employees didn’t return to work,” reported the Sun Times, leaving the bakery desperate to fill their jobs. The company turned to another placement agency, Metro Staff Inc., which provided Cloverhill with workers screened through the government’s “E-Verification” program.

The new wage was increased to \$14 per hour, \$4 an hour more than the undocumented Mexican workers. It is not uncommon that undocumented workers can’t complain even when bosses refuse to pay them Federal labor rates for overtime.

Most of the new employees are African American. The Latino workers still there were paid \$1 an hour premium to train the higher paid African American new workers.

“One of the facts of the case” and a reality in America is that the immigrants do the work for less than an American will,” says [former consultant Felix] Okwusa’s lawyer, George Oparanozie. “It shows the dynamics of immigration in this country. Many of these Hispanic workers have been here a long time, pay taxes in a lot of instances, and many of them could now be kicked out

of the country.”

## Black Workers Made Call

Another unusual twist to the story is that the factory was unionized. The Swiss company tore up the contract even though the union is still formally present.

Lynne Lane, according to the Sun Times, was a union steward at Cloverhill. She said there were tensions as the two groups work side by side. Lane, who is Black, says it was Black workers who called a government hotline to report the Mexican workers to immigration authorities.

“It was [African American] workers in the plant that saw, you know, like I said, that had been treated unfairly and treated like secondary-class citizens by Hispanic workers,” Lane says.

“So, it was a whole lot of employees in the company. Well, they were given a number, as far as I know. They were given a number to call ... to call Immigration.”

Lane, who started in 2015, said then the workforce was 90% Latino; now the workforce is 90% African American.

One Latina former employee at Cloverhill said her husband was fired. “The ICE audit was devastating, she says: “We knew we could not prove he had authorization to work. We felt disappointed. Seventeen years working there, and suddenly they tell you this?”

Chicago Alderman Gilbert Villegas says Blacks have been pitted against Hispanics in the day-labor world “for quite some time. African Americans were discriminated against because day-labor agencies knew they could take advantage of the undocumented workers. Everybody who wants to work should have a fair opportunity and not be taken advantage of.”

Ironically, the E-Verify system that many unions have criticized can benefit African Americans. Most

employers assume Blacks are citizens.

Labor unions (down to 6.4% in the private sector, according to a 2016 Bureau of Labor Statistics report) are so weak, even in cities like Chicago, that these segregated temp-agencies can set labor policies.

## Broader Context

What occurred at the Chicago bakery should not be a surprise. Community organizers and academics have reported and analyzed the reasons for the conflicts.

Vernon M. Briggs, Jr. in a 2008 testimony before the U.S. Commission for Civil Rights explained:

“Because most illegal immigrants overwhelmingly seek work in the low skilled labor market and because the black American labor force is so disproportionately concentrated in this same low wage sector, there is little doubt that there is significant overlap in competition for jobs in this sector of the labor market. Given the inordinately high unemployment rates for low skilled black workers (the highest for all racial and ethnic groups for whom data is collected), it is obvious that the major loser in this competition are low skilled black workers. This is not surprising, since if employers have an opportunity to hire illegal immigrant workers, they will always give them preference over legal workers of any race or ethnic background. This is because illegal immigrant workers view low skilled jobs in the American economy as being highly preferable to the job opportunities in their homelands that they have left.”

In a 2014 paper on “neoliberal economic policies and their impact on African Americans,” Stephen Steinberg from the University of Notre Dame wrote that thanks to the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, “African Americans found themselves in the proverbial position of being ‘last hired.’”

Steinberg went on “Once again, African Americans found themselves in the proverbial position of being ‘last hired,’ even though their new



competitors in the labor market were mostly “people of color.” To make matters worse, in both popular and academic discourses, immigrants have been cited as proof that African Americans lack the pluck and determination that have allowed millions of immigrants from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean to pursue the American dream.”

Many African-American workers are thus pitted against natural allies instead of their employers. Throughout U.S. history, under slavery and then the segregated Jim

Crow era, those in power convinced poorer whites to “blame” Blacks for their economic plight.

Many whites are Trump supporters for the same reason. They see all immigrants as well as Blacks as their competitors for jobs. The bosses are let off the hook since it is easier to keep “the others” below them, especially when unions are nonexistent or weak.

The struggle of African-American men and women to get jobs is the result of structural racism. White racism is easier to recognize because of 400

years of oppression and exploitation. But building solidarity with undocumented immigrants is not so obvious. They are the newcomers. Divide and rule tactics will fail when working-class people are in unity against the common enemy “the employers, police forces and government protectors. Standing up and resisting the bosses is how solidarity is built between Blacks and undocumented immigrants, as well as between African Americans and anti-racist whites.

May-June 2018, ATC 194

# New creditors and new forms of debt peonage

17 May 2018, by **Nathan Legrand**

This workshop was not just a CADTM workshop: it would not have been made possible without the active participation and financial support of the Sri Lankan Law & Society Trust (LST) and Movement for Land and Agricultural Reform (MONLAR). As participants came mostly from Sri Lanka and the two main national groups - Sinhalese and Tamil - were represented, the whole meeting could be held in three languages (Sinhala, Tamil, English) thanks to a hard-working team of simultaneous interpreters.

## Sri Lanka in a political crisis

The meeting took place amidst a political crisis which has been unfolding in Sri Lanka since February 2018, as the liberal coalition made of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the United National Party (UNP), which is currently holding office in the national government, was largely defeated in the local elections. The right-wing Sinhalese nationalist Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) was able to win a majority in 249 local councils out of 340, allowing former president and strongman of SLPP

Mahinda Rajapaksa to come back to the forefront of national politics in the country while staying in the national parliamentary opposition.

After ten years in power, Mahinda Rajapaksa was defeated in the 2015 presidential election as his regime was taking an increasingly authoritarian turn after the final crushing (drawing on war crimes) of the insurrection led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tamil Tigers) and against a backdrop of nepotism and corruption. Since then, his former ally Maithripala Sirisena has been holding the presidential office. While he was elected as he had promised to implement democratic reforms and to put an end to corruption, he did neither the former nor the latter. Rather, he continued implementing a neoliberal agenda which mainly took the shape of developing public-private partnerships - a common ground between the SLFP (which has a social-democratic façade) and the UNP (which is aggressively neoliberal), where both camps can claim to have secured their respective ideologies.

President Maithripala Sirisena now has to cope with a weakened government alliance as the SLFP and the UNP shift the blame on each other

for their failure. In the meanwhile, far right groups organised around Buddhist fundamentalism felt encouraged enough by the SLPP victory to organise targeted attacks against Muslim communities.

## Sri Lanka's public debt policies

The workshop started with a presentation of some outlines of Sri Lanka's public debt policies. [93] Sri Lanka's total public debt now represents 81.6% of its GDP and amounts to around 7 trillion rupees (or US\$ 47 bn.), forcing the country to spend most of its revenue for debt servicing. The external public debt amounts to 36% of the country's GDP, with multilateral and bilateral debt representing almost two third of it. With the private external debt (mostly owed by private corporations), the total external debt amounts to 57% of GDP, causing concern over the capacity to repay it given the relatively low income of Sri Lanka and its regular currency depreciation.

As far as multilateral creditors are concerned, Sri Lanka is a member of the IMF, the World Bank and the

Asian Development Bank, thus accepting to contract loans in exchange for implementing the structural adjustment required by the IMF. In accordance with the IMF requirements, Sri Lanka developed an export-led economic model and is pushed to privatise its state-owned enterprises. Implementing public-private partnerships is part of the privatisation process. Despite these measures, Sri Lanka has highly negative balances of trade and payments and is hence being caught in a debt trap. Sri Lanka has been unable to attract enough investments to develop its economy and cope with its high level of public debt. So far, the main element which keeps the economy floating is the remittances sent by Sri Lankan nationals working abroad, which now exceed yearly US\$ 7 bn.

The IMF signed a first loan agreement with Sri Lanka in 2009. The Mahinda Rajapaksa government initially did not want to take a loan with the IMF because of the conditions attached to it. Not because he was against these conditions at such, but because implementing them would have shrunk the state sector, hence diminishing the corrupt government's ability to fund and support its followers. Eventually, the Mahinda Rajapaksa government accepted the loan as it needed some funds for the military expenditure to finally crush the Tamil Tigers' resistance in 2009 - the IMF loan may not have been used directly to fund the military expenditure, but it allowed the Rajapaksa government to at least use its other sources of income for military expenditure. Such debt policies were not only led by the precedent regime - in 2016, Maithripala Sirisena's government signed another loan contract with the IMF for nearly US\$ 1.5 bn.

Historically, Sri Lanka took loans mostly from the World Bank, from Britain and from the Netherlands. In the last ten years, there has been a shift from the traditional creditors towards new ones. Sri Lanka started to borrow funds from the financial markets and corporate banks. This entails risks as the interest rates are higher and the repayment periods are shorter. China, India and Russia

became bilateral creditors of Sri Lanka under the Mahinda Rajapaksa government. Not only do these emerging powers not impose the conditions of macroeconomic adjustment that are being pushed by powers from the Global North in accordance with the IMF criteria, but they were also less demanding than Britain or the Netherlands regarding Sri Lankan accountability for human rights' violations (however purely esthetical such demands may be). Within ten years, China became the top bilateral creditor of the country. This dependency enables China to get a foothold in the Sri Lankan economy in order to push forward its own strategic interests.

The new loans are mostly used to repay previous ones. As far as investments are concerned, the government mostly uses the public debt to develop infrastructure, which allows for high returns to the top bureaucrats through the payment of commissions - something a school or a hospital can't do. The repayment of Sri Lanka's public debt and the implementation of IMF-backed policies cause serious damage to the Sri Lankan economy and population as it prevents the state to invest in the productive sectors in order to develop an import substitution model and modernise the country's economy (where 80% of the population is rural, yet agriculture accounts for 8% of the GDP). It also prevents the state from funding correctly the public education and health sectors. Hence these sectors rely more and more on private funds from the service users.

## **Chinese loans and investments in South Asia**

The participants in the workshop discussed the aggressive lending policies and foreign direct investments of China in South Asia (Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal, with India being less affected by such predatory policies because of the cautious aspect of its relations with China, which is its major rival as an emerging power in the region and former enemy). On the contrary to the

lending policies of the international financial institutions such as the IMF or the World Bank, the Chinese loans do not entail conditions of structural adjustment policies. However, they generally come with Chinese direct investments in the debtor countries. These investments, targeting in priority the sectors of energy and natural resources, are often criticised because of the labour rights violations and negative environmental consequences they imply. Chinese companies use a Chinese labour force organised in a barracks-like workplace, hence these investments do not benefit much the recipient countries. What's more, the loans are more than often backed to national assets such as natural resources, which would enable China to grab even more sovereign resources of debtor countries if the latter declare a default of payment.

China's current development strategy reaches far beyond South Asia as it is being implemented in the broad framework of the One Belt, One Road project (OBOR, also called Belt and Road initiative). Hong-Kong based social activist Robin Lee describes OBOR in the following way: "OBOR comprises the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), linking China and Europe through Central Asia and the Middle East, and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR) to Africa and the Pacific. The aim is to build trade and infrastructure networks, taking advantage of international transport routes, core cities and ports." Robin Lee adds: "Key areas of construction and investment are in ports, power stations, oil and gas pipelines, railway lines, roads, bridges, internet networks and agriculture." [94]

China is aggressively exporting capitals on a global scale with the objectives of building and/or controlling major trade routes and gaining strong footholds in as many domestic markets as possible. This raises concerns over the social and environmental impacts of the project as well as over the relations of domination that this will create over less developed countries.

Within the South Asian region, Pakistan is the country where the OBOR framework has been the most

developed until now, because the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is part of the OBOR framework, predates the latter. The CPEC is one of the six economic corridors (all six of them running through Asia and Europe) included in the OBOR project and “runs for 3,000 kilometres from Kashgar in western China to the port of Gwadar in Pakistan. Along the corridor huge infrastructure projects, including roads, railways, and power plants and an optical fibre network are either being built or planned to be built, and are largely funded by Chinese capital and loans.” [95] Gwadar is a deep water sea port with direct access to the Arabian-Persian Gulf, whose access to and control represents a geostrategic asset in order to gain an easy access towards the Arabic peninsula and Africa. The port is now operated by a Chinese state-owned enterprise. The CPEC is heavily burdening Pakistan with external debt from China, at a time when Pakistan’s public debt is causing high concern – the country recently had to mortgage national assets such as highways and airports to raise loans from various international financial institutions. [96] Chinese companies working on the CPEC project do not team up with Pakistani companies and bring their labour force from China. At the same time, they benefit from tax exemptions and from violations of market procurement rules, with China blackmailing Pakistan over the latter’s liabilities towards China in order for Chinese companies to get contracts.

One of the recent infamous cases of China’s predatory policies in South Asia was related to Sri Lankan infrastructures in Hambantota, a town in the South of Sri Lanka. Chinese state-owned enterprises built a deep water sea port in this town and renovated an airport nearby. As both have been barely used until now, they have provided heavy losses for the Sri Lankan authorities running these infrastructures, as they had to repay the debt they owe for the constructions. In 2017, China and Sri Lanka signed an US\$ 8 bn. debt-to-equity swap, giving a Chinese state-owned enterprise a share of 70% in the harbour to operate it on a 99-year lease! When announced in 2016, this debt conversion sparked a wave of

protests in Sri Lanka over China impinging on the island’s sovereignty. However, the protests only succeeded in making the Chinese stake in the port operating lower than the initial 80% share which was planned. There is no doubt that China will be able to develop the port in order to use it as much as possible in its OBOR strategy... without much benefit for Sri Lanka.

## Corporate debt and the banking sector

Before the participants went on to discuss the issue of private debts, the – not so positive – prospects about the global financial situation of corporate debt – and the risks it entails for the real economy – were discussed. [97] Since 2010, the policies of low interest rates implemented by the central banks have allowed the big corporations to strongly increase their borrowings from the financial markets through the issuance of corporate bonds. In the United States, the debt of non-financial corporations has increased by US\$ 7,800 bn. (this represents around seven times the total Indian public debt)! These huge debts do not create any real value as they are not invested in productive activities. The big companies use this borrowed money to buy back their own shares. In this way, they can remunerate their shareholders without them being taxed on an income. This also helps increase the price of these companies’ shares.

Thus the companies’ value on the stock markets increases artificially, without any relation to their situation in the real economy. A huge stock market bubble has been developing over the recent years. What’s more, these big corporations also use the borrowed money to buy the debt bonds issued by other actors (other corporate bonds, derivative products such as asset-backed and mortgage-backed securities, public actors’ bonds such as municipalities’) on a very large scale: the thirty main US non-financial corporations that act on the debt markets hold a total of US\$ 423 bn. of corporate debt and commercial

paper securities, US\$ 369 bn. in public debt and US\$ 40 bn. in structured products such as asset-backed and mortgage-backed securities. Big corporations are seeking high returns and thus have a tendency to invest in fragile companies’ debts. If these smaller companies were to default, this could easily create a chain reaction leading some big corporations to default as well. This corporate bond market bubble could explode quickly if the central banks decide to increase their interest rates.

The case of India illustrated the risks linked to the big corporations’ debt. [98] The recent Punjab National Bank scam, where a diamond tycoon, Nirav Modi, in collusion with bank officials, was able to defraud India’s second largest bank of US\$ 1.77 bn. This highlighted the lack of control exerted by the governmental regulatory agencies. This scam was not an isolated case, and the current situation of non-performing loans (NPLs, also known as non-performing assets) in Indian banks is revealing of the abusive behaviour of big corporations. The NPLs now stand at US\$ 145.6 bn. or 12.6% of the total loans. These NPLs are largely due from large business conglomerates. In India, the public banking sector dominates the banking industry, and it is the most concerned with these NPLs. The top capitalists and central government right-wing leaders use this opportunity to denounce the supposed inefficiency of the public banks and advocate for the privatisation of these public banks. In truth, these NPLs are largely due to crony capitalism in the country, where important loans were distributed unabatedly to politicians and business conglomerates supported by those in power.

Some of the big borrowing corporations are now willingly defaulting because they know they can get away with it and the government, which supports these wilful defaulters, will recapitalise the banks with public money, hence socialising private losses. The way forward is not the privatisation of these public banks, but their transformation from private-like managed banks into real public banks taking upon themselves the delivery of



a service given to the public. The controls and regulatory powers of the public authorities should be increased and respected. Furthermore, we should struggle towards the socialisation of the banking sector, where the citizens, public authorities and the banks' employees would decide together on the banks' policies.

## Microcredit in Sri Lanka

The situation related to the microfinance in Sri Lanka is extremely alarming, displaying the most perverse effects of microcredit loans. In the North and East of the country (Tamil-majority areas which were the most affected by the long civil war), microfinance did not exist until the end of the war in 2009. In these areas where many households' breadwinners died and where people lost their homes and lands because of forced displacement and destructions, microfinance developed rapidly after the end of the war (while it continued its development in the rest of the country), making its effects particularly felt and visible. Similar to the rest of the world and in particular the Global South, microcredit loans were introduced as the best solution for resilience and development. And as in the rest of the world, microcredit loans actually brought more despair and marginalisation.

While microcredit loans were advertised for as small loans enabling poor people to become entrepreneurs, manage some small businesses and get out of poverty, it is clear that microcredit borrowers in Sri Lanka take the loans to finance basic needs such as consumption necessities, health and education expenditure, or paying their rent. As in the rest of the world, the outstanding majority of the borrowers are women who work in the informal sector, thus having little or no revenue. Many of them did not have access to the terms and conditions of the loans when they signed the contracts; most of them do not know what are the interest rates of their loans, and are only aware of the amounts they are supposed to pay

back on a regular basis. Even when they are told about the interests they are supposed to pay, the microfinance agencies tell them about the official interest rates, which stand around 20 to 28%. Such rates are abusive, but the real interest rates are even much higher.

Average real interest rates are clearly abusive as they stand around 60 to 70% (the rate can be more than 100% in some cases). This can only lead to borrowers being caught in a debt trap, even more so given their lack of income. In order to repay their debts, the victims of microcredit have to contract numerous additional loans from other microfinance agencies, from neighbours or from usurious money-lenders ("loan sharks"). One argument which was used to promote microcredit was that it would put an end to the existence of such loan sharks. In fact, it gave birth to whole networks of these.

Given the harassment of the creditors and the social pressure of the borrowers' families, friends and neighbours, default rates are very low. In order not to default, the victims make huge sacrifices which endanger their lives and their families' lives, such as mortgaging or selling their houses or their lands (on which vegetables can be cultivated) when they have some, or not feeding themselves.

In Jaffna, the main city in the North of Sri Lanka, women victims of the microcredit scam organised a demonstration which gathered more than 2,000 protesters. They demanded the implementation of a moratorium over their loans, or even their cancellation, as well as the introduction and expansion of other forms of just and regulated credit. Some of the victims try to build alternatives to microcredit through the creation of cooperatives. The microcredit resistance movement does not yet have an important momentum, but it brings hopes for the future as the discredit of microfinance seems to be more and more widespread in Sri Lanka.

## Perspectives for debt resistance in the region

Other themes were presented and discussed during this workshop, such as the precarious situation in which peasants from Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan find themselves because of neoliberal policies which led to their indebtedness; the concerns caused by current multilateral development banks and the shape that a real development bank could take; or the issue of student debt in Japan.

Perspectives of concrete actions against illegitimate debts were brought out. On the scale of Sri Lanka, a network is going to be set up to work on these issues, and in particular against microcredit. CADTM members highlighted the perspective of victims of the debt scam and of activists coming together to audit public and private debts, including microcredit, in order to suspend the payment and repudiate illegitimate debts. This would require strong organising in order to face the creditors and the public authorities, and we hope this workshop was a step towards this objective.

The fact that multiple activists, coming from different countries and engaged in various struggles towards peoples' emancipation, came together to discuss debt policies during three days, is a success in itself. Capitalism and the debt system it entails know no borders - it is therefore necessary to unite on an international level to fight them!

This text is mostly based on inputs made by various participants - in particular Sushovan Dhar, Niyanthini Kadirgamar, Abdul Khaliq, B. Skanthakumar, Éric Toussaint - to the 7th CADTM South Asia workshop from April 6 to April 8, 2018, as well as on discussions we had with Sri Lankan women victims of microcredit on April 11, 2018. Many thanks to all of them.

17 April 2018

CADTM

# Assassination in Brazil unmasks the deadly racism of a country that would rather ignore it

16 May 2018, by **Ana Maria dos Santos Carvalho Carinhonha**

Protesters took to the street in New York, Paris, Buenos Aires and elsewhere, pledging to continue Franco's fight against racism, poverty, inequality and violence. [99]

Elected in 2016 after serving 10 years on Rio's human rights commission, Franco was proud to be a black lesbian born in one of the city's poor neighborhoods, or favelas. She used her power as an elected official - her "collective mandate," she called it - to hold Rio's conservative government accountable to its most marginalized residents.

Franco was particularly critical of the city's ineffective response to a surge of murders and police shootings in Rio's mostly black favelas. [100] Local activists have deemed these killings "black genocide" [101]

As a black Brazilian lawyer, I can see that Franco's assassination - a recognized political crime that remains unsolved - has ruptured the dangerous silence surrounding race in this country. [102] [103]

That seems to be making some powerful people unhappy. On April 9, a Rio city councilman's aide was also murdered. His boss had recently testified to police in Franco's murder investigation. [104]

Witnesses say the shooters told 37-year-old Carlos Alexandre Pereira Maria, who is black, that he should "shut his mouth."

## Brazil's racist history

Brazil, where 54 percent of the population is black, has famously portrayed itself as a racial democracy - a society so diverse that racism simply cannot exist. [105]

That's a myth.

Black Brazilians earn, on average, 57 percent less than white Brazilians. [106] They make up 64 percent of the prison population. [107] Brazil's Congress is 71 percent white.

Racism here goes back centuries. Brazil was not just a colonial slave empire- it was actually the last country in the Western Hemisphere to abolish slavery, in 1888. [108] [109] Before that, Brazil's penal code imposed harsh punishment on enslaved people, including execution. [110]

And when Afro-Brazilians finally gained legal rights in 1888, the government offered no reparations or financial support after 450 years of bondage. [111]

In the 1910s, eugenics societies cropped up in São Paulo and Rio. Inspired by racist pseudoscience from the United States and Great Britain, these groups spurred a national movement to "improve the human race" by cleansing Brazil of "undesirable" blood. [112]

Black people were top among the Brazilians that eugenicists proposed segregating from society, barring from entering the country or deeming

"mentally defective." [113]

The racist underpinnings of the eugenicist movement would justify discriminatory practices in Brazil for decades to come. [114] Brazil outlawed capoeira, an Afro-Brazilian martial art and dance, until the 1950s. [115] It also made vagrancy illegal, which criminalized homeless and unemployed black people. [116]

## Efforts at equality

Brazil passed its first anti-discrimination policy in 1951, prohibiting businesses from refusing to serve customers based on race, a typical practice of that era. [117]

Four decades later, in 1989, the black congressman Carlos Alberto de Oliveira pushed through stronger legislation that actually punished discriminatory business practices. It also extended legal protections to people based on ethnicity, religion and national origin. [118]

The Brazilian government has since made several more attempts to promote racial equality.

A 2010 law aimed at redressing the wrongs of slavery ushered in a mild suite of affirmative actions. [119] Today, Brazilian universities give some priority to black applicants and the government actively recruits black candidates for public sector jobs. [120] [121]

But racial bias remains potent. A 1988 survey in São Paulo, Brazil's biggest city, found that 97 percent of respondents said they were not



prejudiced. [122] But 98 percent of people said they knew someone who was.

That impossible finding inspired the historian Lilia Moritz Schwarcz to coin the celebrated saying that, "All Brazilians see themselves as an island of racial democracy surrounded on all sides by racism."

In 1995, 89 percent of survey respondents said they believed that racial bias existed in Brazil. [123] Only 10 percent admitted that they held racist views. Results were similar in 2009. [124]

## Lethal racism

This is "racismo À brasileira" – racism, Brazil style. Race is still a taboo subject. Nonetheless, as Marielle Franco exposed in her work, skin color dramatically impacts safety in Brazil. [125]

Nationwide, 71 percent of the more than 60,000 people murdered in Brazil in 2017 were black, according to the think tank the Brazilian Security Forum. [126]

Young black men in Rio's poor favelas are far more likely to be among the hundreds shot each year by law enforcement. [127] According to a report by Amnesty International, 79 percent of the 1,275 recorded killings by on-duty police officers in Rio between 2010 and 2013 were black.

Black women also live in a more dangerous world than white women. The number of black Brazilian women murdered increased 54 percent between 2003 and 2013. [128] This happened despite a 2006 anti-domestic violence law credited with a 10 percent reduction in violence against white women. [129]

So much for "racial democracy." In purely legal terms, black Brazilians are equal to white Brazilians. But, in real economic, political and criminal justice terms, evidence confirms, they are not. [130]

## Breaking the taboo

Still, the myth of racial democracy has endured.

A main culprit, in my opinion, is the country's myopic focus on class. Brazilian policymakers and scholars consistently point to poverty and economic inequality as Brazil's main social problems. [131] [132]

The predominant debate on class ignores race, gender and other salient factors that impact life in Brazil. It overlooks the fact that the majority of people facing poverty-related problems like gang violence, food insecurity, unemployment, limited access to education and homelessness are also black. [133]

In my experience, Brazil's strong emphasis on economic mobility also

contributes to racism. As in the United States, many Brazilians believe that they live in a meritocracy. [134] When black people struggle, white people may well think they just aren't working hard enough.

Brazil's conservative current president, Michel Temer, has done little to promote racial equality. Quite the contrary, in fact.

Temer assumed office in 2016 after the controversial impeachment of the left-wing female leader Dilma Rousseff. [135] One of his first acts as president was to shutter Brazil's Ministry of Women, Racial Equality and Human Rights. [136] Then he appointed an all-white, all-male cabinet. [137]

On April 6, Temer's government repealed legislation from the 1990s and 2000s that had recognized and legally protected Afro-Brazilian and indigenous culture and history. [138]

This, in part, is how Brazilian structures of oppression remain invisible, largely unchallenged and – for white people, at least – easy to ignore.

Marielle Franco talked openly about race, violence and gender. [139] It may be what got her killed. [140]

But, in death, Franco's message of equality has only grown louder.

[The Conversation](#)

# Solidarity with the Palestinians against Israel's crimes!

15 May 2018, by **NPA - Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste**

This bloodbath confirms that the state of Israel does not tolerate any questioning of its colonial policy and that Palestinians who dare to fight for their rights can at any time be killed in cold blood by an army accustomed to carrying out war crimes.

Palestinians have rights and have every right to mobilize to defend them: the NPA reiterates its unconditional support for the national and democratic rights of Palestinians, their right to self-determination and the right of return for refugees.

The NPA is indignant at this new episode of bloody repression, which has increased to more than 100 the number of Palestinians killed in Gaza since the protests of March 30, as well as the complicit silence of the Macron-Philippe government. And we do not

forget that while Palestinians are being abused every day by the state of Israel, Netanyahu has been received twice by Macron in less than a year.

The blockade of Gaza, the colonization of the West Bank and Jerusalem,

discrimination against the Palestinians of Israel, arbitrary detentions, assassinations: Israel's impunity for these outrages must stop! The NPA reiterates its commitment to the Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions (BDS)

campaign and will continue to support it; as long as the State of Israel does not respect international law, it must be punished and made accountable for its crimes.

*Monday, May 14, 2018*

## Those with least suffer most under Ireland's abortion ban

**15 May 2018, by Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8th**

We must end the lie that abortion is not an issue for women living here,

A woman's right to choose, to control her own body, is a fundamental issue of women's rights and a key prerequisite of gender equality. But it is, and always has been, also a class issue.

The truth is, women of the upper classes, women with the money, could always get abortions.

This is of enormous importance in this referendum campaign and we cannot lose sight of it. We should never forget that every restriction, every obstacle, put in the way of accessing abortion

has a disproportionate effect on women who are working class, in poverty or marginalised. It also leads to later abortions because the procedure is not accessible through the health service.

If you have to travel to the UK or elsewhere it is so much easier if you are well off and have the money and connections. If you are a terrified young working class girl, or a migrant worker, or in direct provision it's much more difficult - or impossible.

In my own experience being exiled out of one's own country to access abortion carries with it stigma and

loneliness that no woman should have to go through. We must end the lie that abortion is not an issue for women living here. It absolutely is. Just not in Ireland because we exile our women or we hold the threat of criminalisation and a 14-year sentence for those who procure the abortion pill here.

Winning repeal on May 25th is an absolute necessity and I appeal to every voter to do their best at work and in their communities to get out the Yes vote. But it is also a staging post in the overall struggle for choice, for a new Ireland where every child is a wanted child with a decent chance in life.

## "We need a Balkan socialist movement"

**14 May 2018**

**LeftEast: It is interesting to think if, to what extent and how the left in each country has influenced the left in the other. The Greek left has had a formative impact on the Macedonian left- how, if at all, has the fall from grace of Syriza impacted on the Macedonian left? Is that so, and if yes, how is this influence reflected in your**

**conversations, strategies and ways of organising?**

**Alek Atevik:** It is necessary to distinguish the left-wing movement in both countries in the recent period. The Macedonian left was formed after the nightmare of the breakup of Yugoslavia with the full restoration of capitalism. In this process, the former

League of Communists of Yugoslavia played a major role, not as catalyst but as promoter of "free market", thus beheading the working class of authentic political organization of the masses. The left-wing in Macedonia is still in its germination phase with an absence of a mass labour party and with de facto powerless trade union organizations. The formation of Levica

is a positive step only as it stirred the pretty much slimy circumstances and made provocation to depressed activists. It also had negative effect as it showed the degree of strength i.e. weakness of left wing ideologies and detachment from the masses, both with objective and subjective causes. The connection to the Greek left wing is second to none, as much as working class is influencing each other. The party Levica and the left-wing movement in general is left alone or is surviving despite the foreign influences.

**LE: Recently, the dispute over the name "Macedonia" has re-emerged. We have been informed of squats being burnt down in Thessaloniki following/as part of the nationalist rally; tens of thousands gathered at a nationalist rally in Athens last Sunday. What is behind this re-emergence of nationalism and why do you think it happens now?**

**A.A:** The recent formal trigger is obviously the Macedonian side (the new regime of social democrats of Zaev) that are eager to join NATO. In order to achieve this goal they have to reach an agreement with Greece on the "name issue". And Zaev is willing to give great concession to Greek nationalists and Western powers just to stay in power.

**LE: How are different Left groups in your countries dealing with the renewed spread of nationalism and the absorption of neo-nazi and fascist tendencies into the current nationalist wave on the name-issue?**

**A.A:** It would not be accurate to say that there is a spread of nationalism in Macedonia. Nationalism spread its wings from the violent dissolution of Socialist Yugoslavia and remains an active force in the establishment of all political parties. I would even say that nationalists are in decline and people are fed up by their rhetorics. Of course, the declining VMRO-DPMNE is pushing some nationalist line as one resort of gaining popular support, but their socio-economic policies in the past 11 years have shown in full light their servile attitude towards Western imperialism and their ultimate

cronyism. We should not be alarmed by the sectarian fascist or clero-fascist groups as they have existed for 30 years. They are not organized enough to be able to grow into a serious societal power. Needless to say, the way to combat them (the nationalist and other deformations) is to form stronger disciplined working class party.

**LE: What is (if any) the spectrum of divergences within the Left in the interpretation/responses to the "Macedonian name" issue?**

**A.A:** The Macedonian side of left-wing politics is opposing any kind of name change as of the principle of self-determination of nations. Those that accept the ultimatum of Greek and Western powers are influenced by the ruling social-democrats, and the reasoning that there is no alternative to EU integration and the state and nation has to obey.

**LE: There have been multiple solidarity actions across the borders- in the theory and praxis of shaping a left critique of neoliberal capitalism, in its application in relation to the Greek austerity crisis, in the interpretation and response to the refugee crisis, and anti-mining struggles across the borders most recently. What is the level of interaction (if any) between the left on the two sides of the border in relation to the name dispute?**

**A.A:** You are giving very good examples of interaction between activists. The result of this interaction is very weak and mainly isolated from the population. This just follows from the weakness of our movement. I would like to stress the objective factor of our mutual non-cooperation. The Macedonian left has more connection with more distant Slovenia as we shared the same history. Also, the countries from former almost socialist states have much more in common. In this, I would not exclude the future collaboration of Macedonian and Greek socialists or communists.

**LE: What do you see as the central problem behind the name problem, and what is your position on its**

**"resolution"? What would qualify as a positive outcome in your view?**

**A.A:** The central problem behind the name dispute is capitalism i.e. the Greek weak capitalist class and its petty-imperialist ambitions, the remnants from the Greek Civil Wars, the Counter-revolutionary victory and unsolved national questions on the Balkans. The party Levica would expect from left-wing activists to continue their struggle against capitalism and nationalism.

**LE: How do you see the socio-political situations in the two countries evolving?**

**A.A:** Macedonia has developed the capitalism of the periphery to the highest degree - forming deep class antagonisms, mass unemployment, constant flux of immigrants, decline in public education and collapse of public health care system. This frustration have toppled down the authoritarian regime of Gruevski and great expectations are on the table with the new or almost new Government. The trade unions are in lull. The main Parliamentary opposition VMRO-DPMNE is experiencing serious losing of ground, although it will remain the greatest party in opposition. Zaev's Government, on the other hand, is promoting almost the same economic policies as the predecessors and their absence of strategy is evident. The new Government, even though it won the voters with left-wingish propaganda, it is from day to day proving to be pro-capitalist and their initial support is in decline.

**LE: What do you see as the future of the left in the region?**

**A.A:** Capitalism will bring new challenges for political activists - eventually the new crisis will provoke people to enter politics. The Balkan region will not be passed by. The democratic capacities of left wing organization will be tested as much as their correct strategy towards the masses. The only ones that will survive and grow will be the ones that are dedicated to the formation of political cadres and organizational networks or branches. In this respect, with huge exception in Greece, the Balkan region is lagging behind. We need mass

internationalist labour parties in all countries of the region and we need them now. The slogans for Balkan

socialist movement should be changed towards "For socialist federation of the Balkans, for a European socialist

union".

Source *LeftEast* 12 February 2018.

# Corbyn under fire

14 May 2018, by **Daniel Finn**

The dominant narrative in the British media about Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour Party, and antisemitism is false and defamatory. Labour does not have a leadership that tolerates or encourages prejudice against Jews. It is not a safe haven for bigots. There is no evidence that antisemitic views are more prevalent in Labour than in other parties, or in British society as a whole. [141]

Anyone making those elementary points is likely to face an indignant response. Hasn't Corbyn himself admitted that Labour has a problem? How can you deny the evidence staring you in the face? [142]

The question "does Labour have a problem with antisemitism?" has been posed incessantly to Labour politicians and to ordinary party members. It should be seen for what it is: a rhetorical trap with a built-in conclusion.

If they answer "no," they will be ridiculed for suggesting that Labour is entirely free of antisemitic prejudice. If the party has even a single member with antisemitic views, that's a problem. Only a fool would claim that Labour has managed to eliminate every last trace of bigotry from its ranks.

But if they answer "yes," that will be taken as an admission that the prevailing narrative is correct.

Take, for example, Corbyn's recent interview with *Jewish News*. [143] After speaking at length about his opposition to antisemitism and the steps that would be taken to root it out, he was urged to "call on your supporters to stop calling allegations of antisemitism smears." For some,

any talk of "smears" is itself a form of antisemitism and should be sanctioned by the party.

In other words: if some allegations are valid, then every allegation must be valid. When put as bluntly as that, the absurdity of the argument becomes obvious, but some variation on that faulty logic has been ubiquitous in the British media over recent weeks.

So let's be clear. The charge against Corbyn's Labour Party is not that some party members have expressed antisemitic views, or that internal disciplinary procedures are not up to scratch, or that the leadership itself has been guilty of some failings on the issue.

Measured, proportional criticism of that kind is not a "smear," and the vast majority of Corbyn supporters would have responded to it in good faith, if that was the main thrust of the argument.

Instead, they have been bombarded with hysterical claims that Labour under Corbyn is "a cold house for Jews," riddled with antisemitism from top to bottom. It is said to have become a party "for the many, not the Jew," with a leader who winks approvingly at bullies and bigots.

That is the smear, propagated tirelessly by a wide range of political actors united by their hostility to Corbyn's project. [144]

The effect of this defamatory campaign has been to make it harder for the Labour Party to solve the problems which do exist, since its supporters have been encouraged to look on all claims about "Labour antisemitism" with intense distrust

and not by the party leadership, but by its most implacable critics. This attitude is not healthy and has produced its own set of issues. But it is the predictable result of a malicious onslaught. When you're in a bunker, you develop a bunker mentality.

## "Reliable, Empirical Evidence"

If Labour faces such intense criticism for its record on antisemitism today, it is not because of some drastic transformation in the party's character since Corbyn became leader. The main thing that has changed in comparison with past leaderships is the degree of scrutiny.

In October 2016, the UK Parliament's Home Affairs Committee published a report which found "no reliable, empirical evidence to support the notion that there is a higher prevalence of anti-semitic attitudes within the Labour Party than any other political party." [145] With delicate understatement, the committee members declared themselves "unaware whether efforts to identify anti-semitic social-media content within the Labour Party were applied equally to members and activists from other political parties." But having identified a disproportionate focus on Labour, they proceeded to replicate it by concentrating overwhelmingly on the party's shortcomings, real or imagined.

Richard Kuper, in a meticulous response, found it "impossible to read the report without being struck by its

all-too-often snide and judgmental tone, its cavalier use of evidence, its cherry-picking of statements made by witnesses to it, [and] its failure to challenge and test the assertions made” by critics of the Labour Party. [146] The same criticisms could be applied to media coverage of the issue in general.

“Cavalier use of evidence”? Take Howard Jacobson’s article for the *New York Times* about last year’s Labour Party conference, in which he asserted that “a motion to question the truth of the Holocaust was proposed” from the conference floor. [147] There was no such motion: Jacobson simply made it up.

“Failure to challenge and test the assertions made”? In December 2017, the *Guardian* published an interview with Israel’s public-security minister, Gilad Erdan, highlighting his claim to detect “anti-semitic views in many of the leadership of the current Labour Party.” [148] At no point was Erdan challenged to provide evidence for this claim, and readers were given no information that might shed light on his credibility as a witness.

Erdan is one of the most extreme, hawkish politicians in the most extreme, hawkish government in Israel’s history. He calls openly for the annexation of settlement blocs in the occupied Palestinian Territories (“the time has come to express our Biblical right to the land ... it doesn’t matter what the nations of the world say”), opposes the very idea of a Palestinian state, and engages in racist incitement against Israel’s Palestinian citizens. [149] [150] [151] Erdan is also the principal architect of Israel’s campaign against Palestinian solidarity activists, and rejects any distinction between a boycott of Israel in general and a boycott of goods from illegal settlements in the West Bank — a position that puts him at odds with liberal Zionists like Peter Beinart who oppose the BDS movement. [152] [153] [154] [155] By any objective standard, his slur on the Labour Party should be seen as an outburst from the lunatic fringe, not given pride of place in a liberal newspaper.

There is also the tactic of rhetorical

inflation, where the definition of antisemitism is stretched well past breaking point. Writing in the *Times* recently, Philip Collins gave a list of “recent examples” which “shames the Labour Party.” It included the following transgression: “The filmmaker Ken Loach said that Emily Thornberry, shadow foreign secretary, “didn’t distinguish herself” when she praised Israel as a beacon of freedom.” [156] There you have it: anyone who denies that Israel should be seen as a paragon of democratic virtue is guilty of antisemitism.

## The Chakrabarti Report

Three examples from the past six months, selected more or less at random, that give an accurate flavor of the methodology used by Labour’s critics, from innuendo to outright fabrication. For a true picture of reality, we have to look elsewhere.

Shami Chakrabarti’s 2016 report has been relentlessly trashed by hostile critics, most of whom seem not to have read it. [157] The Labour MP Wes Streeting, whose own record of political achievement should not qualify him to lick the postage stamps on Chakrabarti’s mail, derided it as a “whitewash” last week.

In fact, the report was a model of clarity and good sense. Its opening paragraph insisted that Labour was “not overrun by anti-semitism, Islamophobia or other forms of racism,” but noted that there was “clear evidence (going back some years) of minority hateful or ignorant attitudes and behaviours... I have heard too many Jewish voices express concern that anti-semitism has not been taken seriously enough in the Labour Party and broader left for some years.”

Chakrabarti warned that some forms of antisemitic prejudice — association of Jews with money, suspicions of “dual loyalty,” etc. — could still be found in left-wing circles: “I am not saying that this is endemic, but any seasoned activist who says that they are completely unaware of any such discourse must be wholly

insensitive or completely in denial.” [158] She gave the examples of “a Labour councillor who was told that he would be particularly good at a finance role” and “an MP around whom rumours circulated that she was some kind of agent for Mossad,” in both cases because of their Jewish heritage. The report concluded with a set of recommendations that would improve the organizational climate if acted upon by party activists and officials.

It was precisely because Chakrabarti had delivered such a thoughtful and constructive report that her reputation had to be traduced by those hell-bent on defaming Labour. The Community Support Trust (CST) initially gave the report a cautious welcome, thanking Chakrabarti “for her efforts and for her engagement with the Jewish community,” and emphasizing that the “final verdict” on her work would “depend upon its implementation.” [159] Within months, the CST was describing the inquiry as “wholly compromised,” without ever having explained what was wrong with its findings. And as Richard Kuper pointed out, the Home Affairs Committee went out of its way to malign Chakrabarti on spurious grounds, while discreetly plagiarizing some of her recommendations. [160]

## No More, No Less

Another report, from the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (IJPR), gives some useful data on the prevalence of antisemitic attitudes on the British left, as measured by opinion surveys. [161] It found that “the political left, captured by voting intention or actual voting for Labour, appears in these surveys as a more Jewish-friendly, or neutral, segment of the population.” The IJPR considered “the absence of clear signs of negativity towards Jews” to be “particularly curious in the current context,” since there were “perceptions among some Jews of growing left-wing anti-semitism.”

If we proceed from fact to opinion and not the other way round, it is surely the perceptions of “growing left-wing anti-semitism” that appear curious and in need of explanation, not the



“absence of clear signs of negativity.”

It may be argued that the IJPR report measured the attitudes of Labour voters, not party activists, and thus cannot show whether antisemitic views are more prevalent among paid-up members than the wider left-wing electorate. One answer is to take the people who declare themselves to be “very left-wing” — 3.6 percent — as a rough proxy for the Labour membership, which is about 1 percent of the adult population in Britain.

The IJPR found this hard-left minority to be “indistinguishable from the general population and from the political centre” in their attitudes to Jewish people. The same was true for those who considered themselves “fairly left-wing” or “slightly left-of-centre.” Unless there is a yawning gulf between the Labour membership and every section of left-wing opinion in Britain, which seems most unlikely, the picture of a movement infested with antisemitic attitudes simply cannot be sustained.

It’s worth noting the IJPR’s point that “the very left-wing are, on the whole, no more anti-semitic than the general population, but neither are they *less* anti-semitic ... one might assume that those on the far left of the political spectrum would be more likely to hold anti-racist ideas than the population as a whole, but we do not find this to be the case with anti-semitism”

This warning against complacency in left-wing circles should reinforce the points made by Shami Chakrabarti in her report. Of course, we need to put our own house in order, and shouldn’t be satisfied if Labour’s problem is no worse than that of the society in which it is embedded. As Chakrabarti argued, a left-wing party should hold itself to a higher standard and go the extra mile to create a welcoming space for people from all ethnic backgrounds.

But complacency is hardly the main danger for anyone who relies upon the British press to inform them. Wild exaggeration and bad-faith attacks are the surest way to provoke knee-jerk dismissal by left-wing activists of all concerns about antisemitism — especially when those attacks come

from pundits and politicians who are up to their necks in rancid bigotry. [162]

## Lobbying Power

If the evidence against the prevailing narrative is overwhelming, how has it managed to gain so much traction? For some of Corbyn’s supporters, there’s a simple explanation: the power of the “Israel lobby” in British politics.

This is an argument that needs careful unpacking. There’s no question that the attacks on Corbyn are linked to his support for Palestinian rights. It’s best to see that position as just one strand of his heterodox line on foreign policy, and the ensuing attacks as part of a wider effort to drive Labour back into line. [163]

The concept of the “Israel lobby” has been imported from the US, where it was the subject of a celebrated essay by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt. This is not the place to discuss whether Mearsheimer and Walt’s thesis holds up in the light of subsequent developments. [164] In the British context, we can identify several strands of pro-Israeli opinion whose combined weight is formidable. Whether those strands are best described as a coherent “lobby” is not especially important.

First, you have campaigning groups like BICOM whose explicit purpose is to support Israel. [165] They reinforce the diplomatic efforts of the Israeli state itself, which works tirelessly to influence Britain’s political class in its favor. [166] Then there are organizations like the Board of Deputies and the Jewish Leadership Council (JLC) whose stated purpose is to represent the Jewish community in Britain, but which also campaign in support of Israel.

Finally there is a much wider layer of politicians, journalists, and other people of influence who take a pro-Israeli line, including the Labour and Conservative “Friends of Israel” groups that count so many MPs among their adherents. For people in this cohort, support for Israel is usually not the core of their political identity:

it’s just one element in the mix. Pro-Israel Labour MPs, for example, tend to share a wider set of positions, pro-NATO, pro-Saudi and pro-Trident. They also prefer the economics of George Osborne to those of John McDonnell (or even Gordon Brown).

There’s no reason to doubt people in this third strand would still support Israel even if the first two were marginal or nonexistent. The “Israel lobby” is not a *deus ex machina* forcing British foreign policy onto a completely different path. If Israel had never existed, but all other things were equal, Britain would still pursue an aggressive, militarized, neo-imperial policy in the Middle East as a junior partner to Washington.

The “friends of Israel” at Westminster give the same backing to Turkey in its oppression of the Kurds — or Saudi Arabia in its war on Yemen — as they give to Israel’s occupation of Palestinian land, without any equivalent “Turkish lobby” or “Saudi lobby” to encourage them. Support for Ankara and Riyadh is part of the Atlanticist package, and that is the decisive factor. [167]

## Outriders

What really sets Israel’s British supporters apart is their capacity to smear critics of the foreign-policy consensus at Westminster. This is where they provide an invaluable service for the conservative establishment.

Turkey’s AKP regime routinely accuses its Western critics of Islamophobia and anti-Turkish racism, but if anyone tried to repeat those charges in a British context, it would sound very odd. In any case, there is no particular taboo against Islamophobia in the country’s political culture: the ruling party can run an openly racist campaign against a Muslim candidate without facing any consequences, and the defense secretary can remain in his post after defaming a Muslim cleric as an ISIS supporter. [168] [169]

Charges of antisemitism, on the other hand, are politically toxic. Pro-Israel groups take advantage of this to

slander their opponents, and have their accusations signal-boosted by the right-wing press. To complete the loop, anyone who points this out is bitterly denounced as an apologist for bigotry.

Politicians who support Palestinian rights tend to be left-wing and critical of British foreign policy in general, so defenders of the status quo have every reason to assist the smear campaigns against them.

The alliance with Saudi Arabia is just as vital for Britain's power elite as the alliance with Israel, if not more so. But the attacks on Corbyn for his criticism of Riyadh are strikingly flaccid and ineffectual. There are no pro-Saudi equivalents of Jonathan Arkush, the president of the Board of Deputies. [170]

It was the Board of Deputies and the JLC that called the recent protest against the Labour Party on Parliament Square. When Jonathan Arkush attacked Corbyn, the British media largely accepted his claim to speak on behalf of Britain's Jewish community and denounced any criticism of the protest as an attack on that community, even "or especially " when it came from British Jews. [171]

This is a man who congratulated Donald Trump on his victory, bemoaned Theresa May's lost majority in the 2017 general election, and welcomed her alliance with the far-right Democratic Unionist Party. [172] [173] [174] Arkush is by any standards a deeply conservative, partisan figure, and his hostility towards the Labour leadership must be seen in that light.

With the power to condemn goes the power to absolve. Sometimes this means taking action, as with the message to Trump, glossing over the antisemitic undertones of his campaign. [175] Sometimes it is enough to do nothing. When the *Telegraph* used its front page to promote lurid conspiracy theories about George Soros, Arkush was notably silent. [176]

Soros-mania is one of the main channels for the rehabilitation of

traditional antisemitic tropes in Europe today. The *Telegraph's* endorsement of those tropes was a very alarming development, but an attack on its editor for complicity with antisemitism is not the kind of story Britain's right-wing press is likely to embrace. Leveling the same charge against Jeremy Corbyn is a very different matter.

This is the real value of the "Israel lobby" for Britain's conservative elite: its willingness to serve as a third rail for those who challenge Atlanticist orthodoxy. This ability to smear dissenters hinges on the support it receives from much more powerful interests in British politics and media. Israel's supporters are not an external force that has bent the British ruling class to its will. They are the outriders of that class.

## Cranks and Comrades

Insinuations of antisemitism can be used, not merely to defame critics of Israel, but to discredit any radical critique of capitalism or imperialism in the modern world. That much is clear from reading the sleazy hit-job by two academics published in the *New Statesman*, dressed up in pseudo-Marxist verbiage to conceal its true purpose, like a bank robber in a clown suit. [177] [178] This widely praised article depicted Labour's social-democratic reform program as a quasi-genocidal plan to "identify the guilty parties held to be personally responsible for the current malaise, and to remove them from the organic community of the productive."

The most important thing when faced with such tawdry attacks is to keep our nerve and refuse to be browbeaten. But there are other steps that can be taken too. Shami Chakrabarti's report contained some very sensible recommendations about language: she urged left activists to "use the term "Zionist" advisedly, carefully and never euphemistically or as part of personal abuse," and to "resist the use of Hitler, Nazi and Holocaust metaphors, distortions and comparisons in debates about Israel/Palestine in particular."

If that advice had been taken to heart, some of the controversies of the past two years could have been avoided. In particular, everyone should read the article by David Rosenberg of Jewish Socialist Group about the most virulent of those controversies, which was provoked by the former London mayor Ken Livingstone with his comments about Hitler and Zionism in 2016. [179] [180] Rosenberg shows with great clarity why Livingstone's intervention was wrong, foolish, and politically disastrous. Anyone who wants to make the case for Palestinian solidarity can learn some wider lessons from that fiasco.

There have also been several articles by left-wing writers urging Labour supporters to up their game on antisemitism and learn about the ways it can be expressed in coded form. [181] [182] This is all good advice, and would still be good advice if there had been no media furor to cope with.

But sometimes these arguments are accompanied by loose talk about "cranks" with a "fixation on Israel" who have to be "rooted out" or "marginalized." I've seen this kind of language used by some Corbyn supporters on social media often enough for it to be worth addressing.

The problem with "crankery," like its near-neighbor, "sectarianism," is that it's very much in the eye of the beholder. Any left-wing argument, no matter how thoughtful, persuasive, and well-documented it is, will be derided as a "conspiracy theory" by journalists who nonetheless see the hand of Russia behind everything they dislike, from Black Lives Matter to the Catalan independence movement. [183]

Anyone who has not been involved in Palestine solidarity activism should be very cautious about applying the "crank" label to those that have. There can be few fields of political activity where so much toxic "and highly personalized " abuse is directed at activists whose only motivation is to the support the democratic rights of an oppressed people.

I say this partly because I have some experience of working for the

Palestine Solidarity Campaign in Ireland. The conditions for that work were unusually favorable, as support for Palestinian rights was considered perfectly legitimate in the political mainstream. If we wanted a meeting with politicians from the center-right parties, we just had to ask, and they always gave us a respectful hearing. Even so, Israel's Irish supporters had untrammelled access to the national media whenever they wanted to slander us.

I can only imagine the strains of doing similar work in a country like Britain, where the mainstream consensus is strongly pro-Israel, over a long period of time. It's bound to have a distorting effect on the perspective of many activists. Those distortions should be criticized when necessary, but always with a generous spirit, and a recognition that "tone-deafness" comes in many different forms.

## The Gaza Massacre

Just four days after the anti-Corbyn protest in London, the Israeli army carried out a bloody massacre of Palestinian demonstrators in Gaza. [184] The Board of Deputies rushed to blame the victims for the slaughter, and the Labour MP Stella Creasy, one of Corbyn's most strident critics, gave her own version of the same line. [185] [186]

It is some measure of Creasy's racist myopia that she seemed to think she had condemned the IDF by presenting its butchery as a "response to violence" that may not have been strictly "proportionate."

Corbyn, on the other hand, did condemn the massacre: "The killing and wounding by Israeli forces of civilians demonstrating for Palestinian rights in Gaza is appalling." His statement should have been more robust, and should have been accompanied by clear demands for action by the British government. But

this is still the kind of language Israel's rulers aren't used to hearing from governments in the West.

On paper, Corbyn's position on Israel/Palestine isn't especially radical. His call for a two-state solution is supposed to be the mainstream view in Europe. But most politicians express that view in the most insipid language, refusing to call the occupation by its proper name. They urge the Palestinians to engage with a fraudulent "peace process" whose only purpose is to allow Western governments to support Israel to the hilt while pretending otherwise. And they ignore every statement from Israeli politicians in which they spell out their determination to keep hold of the land that has been occupied since 1967.

A "two-state solution" as envisaged by Israel and its Western allies would really be a "one state, several Bantustans solution," with some pitiful fragments of the West Bank handed over to a supine Palestinian leadership to administer on Israel's behalf. The longer Israel is shielded from any kind of effective pressure by euphemistic phrase-mongering, the more likely this outcome will be. [187]

A politician like Corbyn, who is willing to speak bluntly about "the oppression of the Palestinian people," poses a real challenge to this agenda. [188] There is nobody in such close proximity to power in a major Western state with a comparable record of support for Palestinian rights.

That's why Corbyn and his allies have been slandered so relentlessly for the past two years. The primary goal of this campaign is to destroy Corbyn altogether; the secondary goal is to deter him from talking about Palestine in terms that will discomfort the Israeli elite.

## Decision Time

Corbynism is at a fork in the road. If it

chooses the path of capitulation over Palestinian rights, some "though certainly not all" of the media attacks will abate.

For a taste of what would be required to make that happen, you need only read Emily Thornberry's dreadful speech on the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration last November, stuffed with talking points from Israel's foreign-affairs ministry. [189] [190] Especially notable was her gushing praise for "our friends in the Israeli Labor Party" "an organization whose leader calls illegal West Bank settlements "the most beautiful and devoted face of Zionism" and rules out any withdrawal from occupied Palestinian land. [191]

By hitching her wagon to a party that is uncompromisingly opposed to a just peace settlement, Thornberry tacitly ruled out putting any kind of meaningful pressure on Israel to end its oppression of the Palestinians. [192] The Israeli Labor Party can always be relied upon to denounce such pressure, and if good relations with "friends" like Avi Gabbay are deemed essential, that means real action is off the table.

The movement behind Corbyn hasn't crossed that Rubicon yet. But his supporters should realize this is not just a marginal issue that can be ditched or downplayed for the sake of an easier life. It's a test of the movement's mettle.

If we can't hold the line in defense of Corbyn's eminently moderate stance on Palestine, we certainly won't be in any condition to resist the pressure that is still to come. Across a whole range of issues, from the Saudi war in Yemen to the privatization of the NHS, the ability to hold up under heavy fire will be essential. Things are going to get a lot harder. If we start retreating now, sooner or later there won't be anything left to defend.

[Jacobin](#)

# The 2018 Char Conference of landless people

13 May 2018

5000 landless people across the country participated in the conference starting at 11 a.m. and finishing at 4 p.m. Before its commencement, the landless people from different char participated with processions and chanting slogans.

Some 100 participants joined the conference hailing from different faraway districts throughout the country: north Bengal indigenous groups, Dhaka, (in particular a student group) and various sectors (peasantry, workers...).

At the beginning of the event, both the chief guest and his wife were welcomed with garlands. Then, as a part of showing respect to the departed and wounded activists and leaders of land struggles and movements since 1976 to date, the participant remained silent for one minute. At the end of the conference, the declaration of Char conference of landless people -2018 was approved setting some specific aims and objectives [see below].

One of the most important parts of the declaration was to observe 27 November as ‘National Land Action Day’ in every year. On this particular day in 1991, the occupation of Khasland was declared formally.

The conference was presided over by Badrul Alam, President of Bangladesh Krishok Federation. In the conference, Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, former adviser to Caretaker Government and other participants delivered their valuable speech.

The participants delivering speeches including the organization or location they represent are stated below:

1. Fakruzzaman Badal, Vice-Chairperson of Dashmina Upazila
2. Dr. Samsunnahar Khan Doli, Female Vice Chairperson and

President of Bangladesh Kishani Sabha

3. Md. Nazir Ahammed, Chairperson of Charborhan Union Council

4. AbulKalam Azad, Forest Bit Officer

5. Mukhlesuddin Shahin, Politburo member of Bangladesh Communist Party- ML

6. Subol Sarkar, General Secretary of Bangladesh Bhumiheen Samity

7. Dr Samsul Alam ,Central leader of Bhumihin Samity

8. Omoli Kisku, General Secretary of Bangladesh Adivasi Samity

9. Zayed Iqbal, General Secretary of Bangladesh Krishok Federation

10. Abdus Sattr Hawlader, Assistant General Secretary

11. Naimia Shikdar ,President of Dashmina Upazila

12. Pran Krishna Das, General Secretary of Dashmina

13. Mokaddes Ali Shikdar, General Secretary of Kurigram District

14. Abdur Gaffar Leader of landless movement from Shatkhira

15. Md. Hasan from Faridpur

16. Md. Khalilur Rahman from Laskar Barguna

17. Abdur Malek and Alom, Bachhu Bhola district leaders

18. Shorab Akon, Char Bangla leader

19. Ashraf Shikdar and Shorab Hosain Char Shahjalal

20. Moti Matubar, Charhadi leader

21. Sabina Yasmin, General secretary of Bangladesh Krishani Sabha

22. Rekha Rani, Santal Adivasi leader from Dianjpir

23. Sabiha ,BKS President, Dianjpur District

24. Nehar Parvin Runu, Bangladesh Bhasman Nari Shramik Union President

25. Hosne Ara Begum, Leader of Bangladesh Bhasman Nari Shramik Union

It was a gathering of 5000 people and most of them were the inhabitants of different Chars occupied by the organization. They are entitled to permanent land settlement rights in the Charland. They established their food sovereignty through their development of Charland. They are the proud owner of a piece of land. These landless people who have become the owner of land once were helpless and poverty-stricken part of the society. They lived in the house of other people as client (locally called *Okrait*) and it was a disrespectful life. They had to survive relying on the sympathy of their lord or patron.

Today, their miseries are over. The horizon of opportunity has opened up for them to lead an independent and respectful life. But health and education services are not improved yet. There is no health and education infrastructure nearby their localities. Some landless people still do not get a settlement in Char Khasland. Special measures should be taken to resolve this issue.

The participant leaders of landless people from different Chars pointed out on the multiple challenges they encounter in Chars. They see the negative impact of climate change as a great challenge for them. Climate change induced disaster, to a great extent, has already generated negative impact in their lives and livelihoods. It took many years for



them to recover the losses incurred in SIDR, a severe cyclonic storm that smashed into the coastal belt violently in 2007.

Despite all these challenges, their hope and courage did not weaken. They adopted multiple strategies to cope with the adverse situation. In terms of mitigation, they stressed carrying out social forestry. In 1992 when they start dwelling in the char, it was an uninhabited place without trees. Now it has transformed into a greenish village. The social and cultural bondage and harmony among the char dwellers has also developed. Nevertheless, the Char has distinct geographical and environmental features; this reality with distinctiveness should be reflected in the state's plan and initiative.

A significant number of youths, both male and female, joined in the event. They paid tribute and respect to their previous generation after listening their struggling memories, stories and histories from the senior Char dwellers. They also pledged to carry forward the spirit of struggle.

The chief guest Dr. Hossain Zillur Rahman, in his address pointed out that the development of Char can be possible within the framework of Sustainable Development Goals. He specially stressed "leaving no one behind" in any development agenda and program. He stated that courage and a moral position made them successful. He informed the Char dwellers that he had supported the Char movement from the beginning. So, he was extremely delighted to come and join in the process for the first time.

Bangladesh Krishok Federation President Badrul Alam, in his presiding speech, stated that carrying forward the Char struggle and movement is a painstaking and risky job but it is not impossible. He stated that the movement of landless people is successful through long and hard struggle and fight. According to him, the occupation of KhasChar generates legal base of land entitlement for the landless people.

He emphasized on achieving food sovereignty for the landless people. At

the same time, he focused on environment and ecology friendly agriculture. As a part of promoting a respectful life for the landless peasants, the rights of the peasants should be established. He urged the peasant to encourage their children to engage in agriculture. He stated that agriculture cannot be controlled by corporate solely.

He said: "we have to preserve our local seeds together with traditional agriculture; otherwise the whole agrarian system will be destroyed on account of aggression of corporates". He encouraged the Char dwellers to produce chemical and pesticide-free agro-products. He warned small-scale food producers about using genetically modified seeds.

The other leaders stated that occupied 22 chars, 9 shrimp enclosures, abandoned railway property of the British regime and other waterbodies used in the interest of the landless and fisher folks. They promised to strengthen solidarity among themselves. They also expressed their intent to occupy new Chars in different locations. The leaders also aspired to develop an equality based society. The leaders stressed on strengthening the Adivasi land occupation movement and preserving traditional land rights.

The leaders pledged to move the Char movement forward, combining values and strategies. They urged the mass intellectuals to support land movement. Last of all, they stressed on widening the struggling domination and called on building unity and solidarity among the landless people of the globe.

---

## **Declaration of the "Char Conference" of landless peasants**

Today on 14th April 2018, we, approximately 5000 landless,

peasants, agriculture workers, fisher folk and rural workers across the country have gathered at Charhadi of Dashmina sub-district under Patuakhali District.

We have discussed with regard to different aspects of distribution, settlements and management of Khasland, precisely Char Khasland together with the relentless struggle and movement for land.

We get the opportunity to share our accumulated knowledge and experience in this event. We will be able to integrate the reflections of our thoughts and actions to manoeuvre and devise a trajectory for our future struggle and movement in this process.

As a part of prime demand of the conference, we have called on the government to distribute 5 million acres of Khasland among the real landless people. We have set five objectives in this conference. The objectives are stated below:

1. Declaration of National Land Action Day
2. Documenting and preserving the history of Khasland movement
3. Prepare planning and strategy to settle down in new Khasland
4. Publishing souvenir on the remembrance of activists and leaders departed or wounded in the land struggles
5. Write down and publish the biography of the legendary guide and leader late Abdus Satter Khan

The land struggle we started in 1976, got final shape on 1 January 1992 (in Bengali 16 Poush) through the successful occupation and settlement in land of four Chars of Dashmina. Though we occupied the land on 1 January 1992, we declared the occupation on 27 November by observing historical strike and hunger strike; this particular day from the perspective of occupying Khasland is very significant. So, this day should be remembered. Considering all these aspects, we are declaring 27 November as "National Land Action Day".



We are remembering the departed or wounded activists and leaders who fought for the land rights.

We are firmly declaring our determination along with the declaration:

1. We will continue our struggle to promote the right of landless people in Khasland located in different parts of

the country

2. We will continue our effort to carry forward a comprehensive agrarian reform as well as land reform at the interest of landless and peasants

3. We will carry out our campaign for establishing food sovereignty

4. We demand for introducing ‘agro-ecology’ as a part of promoting environment and ecology friendly agriculture

5. We will carry on our campaign to support the Char dwellers with the provisioned 500 million Taka of national budget

[Essf](#)

## Women’s experience at heart of Yes campaign

**13 May 2018, by Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8th**

Together For Yes is the national civil society campaign to remove the 8th Amendment from the constitution. We are the broadest platform ever assembled to create a more compassionate Ireland that cares for its women by providing abortion services to those who need them. From day one, this movement has been built on the work and dedication of volunteers, and winning this referendum will be no different. It will be a broad, welcoming, inclusive, and fact-based campaign, always respectful of people’s positions and views.

The campaign is co-led by the National Women’s Council of Ireland, the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment, and the Abortion Rights Campaign. Together, with dozens of organisations, including the Irish Family Planning Association, Rape Crisis Network Ireland, Women’s Aid, Parents for Choice, the Union of Students of Ireland, One Family, Doctors for Choice, trade unions and many more, we are focused on achieving laws and services that respond to women’s needs and best medical practice. We have support in every village and town in Ireland, and this is indicative of the fact that the overwhelming majority of Irish people want to change our abortion laws

because they are too restrictive, and they harm women. At the heart of our campaign are the experiences of women and their families.

Extensive evidence given at the Citizens’ Assembly and the Joint Oireachtas Committee was unequivocal: the 8th Amendment harms women and their access to healthcare. On rare occasions, it has caused death, as evidenced by the tragic case of Savita Halappanavar in 2012. Together For Yes represents people who believe that Ireland is a compassionate and contemporary country, and that our laws should support, respect and protect women in their time of greatest need. Removing the 8th Amendment will mean victims of rape who are pregnant, women who learn their pregnancy involves a fatal foetal abnormality, or women whose health is at risk due to their pregnancy will have the choice to access abortion services in their home country. We want to enable women who need abortions to receive compassionate care in appropriate healthcare settings with proper regulation and guidance and without shame, secrecy or stigma. Furthermore, it is important that doctors are able to provide the best care and support possible to women, without fear of prosecution.

We understand that this is a complex and sensitive issue, and we know that talking about abortion can be a tough challenge, that a lot of people still have worries and fears. But we also know, from talking with our own families, friends and neighbours, as well as from the research, that people want to put an end to the suffering and distress. They want to end the lonely journeys women have to make to England, and the bleakness of women taking unregulated abortion pills on their own, without medical supervision, because they can’t get the care they need here in Ireland. People want to put an end to the harm and cruelty of the 8th Amendment, and to ensure that women have the compassionate care and support they need, including regulated access to abortion, here at home in Ireland.

This referendum matters to all of us, men and women. We want a fairer, kinder Ireland, a place where women’s lives and health are truly respected and protected; an Ireland which is a country where we are proud to live, and a good place to raise our children and our grandchildren.

Sometimes a personal and private matter needs public support. Life is not black and white, it is much more complex, and we believe that the

constitution is not the place to address the complexities of a crisis pregnancy. We believe this decision is a personal, private one that a woman should be allowed to make under the care and support of her doctor, and her family. We can, and must, respond with compassion to the reality of women's

lives. Abortions happen here – that is a fact, and we must put laws and services in place to respond compassionately to women's real-life needs.

This referendum is a critical juncture for Ireland and we invite everyone who wishes to create a compassionate

environment for women who need abortions in Ireland to join with us in this campaign. Together we can make a real difference to women's lives, by removing the 8th Amendment we can bring an end to the pain and distress of women shut out by their own country.

# The unspeakable cruelty of El Salvador's abortion laws

## 12 May 2018

In the Americas, the governments of Bolivia, Chile and Mexico City recently lifted total bans on abortion. Other jurisdictions such as Ohio, several states in Mexico and Poland have passed or attempted tighter restrictions.

Even Doug Ford, the leader of Ontario's Progressive Conservative party, has voiced openness to making abortion more difficult to access. [193]

In El Salvador, the clock is ticking towards a May 1, 2018, deadline for reform that would decriminalize abortion in two situations: [194] When the life of the pregnant woman is in danger and when an underage girl (but not an adult woman) becomes pregnant through rape. [195]

The attention of the world's media was recently drawn to this country's extreme abortion regime by the commutations of the 30-year prison sentences of two Salvadoran women. [196] Their crime was to have had a miscarriage. Both innocent women had served over a decade of their sentences.

To understand what is at stake, we need to look at what makes El Salvador probably the worst country on earth to have an unwanted or life-threatening pregnancy, or a complicated miscarriage, especially if you are poor.

I am a sociologist who has researched

health-care policy in El Salvador, including the expansion of health-care services to the poor by the left-of-centre Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) government. [197]

As an admirer of this government's goals and achievements in health care, I am struck by a contradiction: It has made genuine efforts to reduce maternal mortality but during most of its nine years in office, it has failed to challenge a law that may actually increase it.

The problem is not just the abortion ban itself, which El Salvador shares in common with five other Latin American and Caribbean nations. [198]

What has made El Salvador unique on the international stage is the fanatical over-application of the law by police, prosecutors and judges. And the complicity of many doctors fearful of standing on the wrong side of the law.

## An extreme law zealously over-applied

Abortion was made illegal in El Salvador in all circumstances in 1997.

This was reinforced two years later by a Constitutional amendment declaring

that life begins at conception.

Among the small number of countries that maintain a complete ban, only in El Salvador has law enforcement led to women being sent to prison for 30 to 40 years. To date more than 150 women and girls have been prosecuted. [199] More than 28 women are currently serving out cruelly long sentences.

The country's penal code mandates a 12-year sentence for women convicted of having an abortion. But if a miscarried or stillborn fetus is deemed viable by the courts, women are prosecuted for aggravated homicide. [200]

In one case, a 40-year prison term was handed to a woman who miscarried at 18 weeks. [201]

Many women jailed for miscarriages did not even know they were pregnant. [202]

Women have been criminalized for obstetric emergencies because judges accept contradictory or non-existent evidence that they intended to either end the pregnancy or kill an early-term fetus. [203]

It is precisely the flimsiness of these cases that has enabled sentences to eventually be overturned through strenuous efforts of organizations like the Citizens' Coalition for the Decriminalization of Abortion. [204]

## Harms to health

In addition to this clear violation of women's civil rights, the extremist application of the law imposes harms to health and life.

For example, Salvadoran doctors have refused to intervene medically when a pregnancy endangers a woman's life, as in the case of ectopic pregnancy. This is when a fertilized egg becomes lodged in the fallopian tube, leading to rupture and lethal internal bleeding if untreated. In such cases doctors have stood by until the tube ruptures. [205]

There are particular harms for very young girls and teens. Girls as young as nine years old have been denied therapeutic abortion. [206]

For these children, the trauma of sexual violence is compounded by the physical risks that childbirth poses to an immature body and the terror of going through with a dangerous pregnancy.

Three out of every eight maternal deaths in El Salvador are pregnant teens who take their own lives. [207]

It is also known that 13 per cent of maternal deaths in less developed countries are caused by unsafe abortions, which in turn become more frequent when abortion is illegal or unavailable.

Hundreds of clandestine abortions certainly continue to occur each year in El Salvador despite the ban. Health

Ministry officials themselves acknowledge that the law and its application undermine their efforts to reduce the maternal mortality rate. [208]

## Government-employed doctors and poor women

What makes this situation all the more poignant is that it only affects the poor and poorly educated.

These women and girls can't afford care in private hospitals and clinics where doctors maintain patient confidentiality. Nor can they afford good legal counsel.

Hand in hand with this class bias is most prosecutions of women for suspected abortion originate from doctors in state-funded, public hospitals. [209] Since the public system doesn't charge for services, it is the only option for low-income Salvadorans.

It is also where there are more early-career doctors who don't want to jeopardize their futures; these doctors fear that not reporting could be seen as assisting in an abortion, which for health professionals carries a penalty of six to 12 years. [210]

## Prospects for change

Taken together, the deprivations of liberty and the physical and psychological suffering that have resulted from El Salvador's abortion regime have been labelled torture by Amnesty International. [211]

The outcome of the abortion struggle in the political arena is highly uncertain.

On the one hand, almost 60 per cent of Salvadorans now favour loosening the law when a woman's life is in danger, and fully 79 per cent when the fetus is not medically viable. [212]

As well, a tentative coalition emerged among legislators in late 2017 in favour of a bill by a maverick Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) party member proposing abortion be allowed in very limited circumstances. [213]

On the other hand, most of these lawmakers will be replaced on May 1, 2018 and ARENA overall remains staunchly opposed to any liberalization of the law. The party will have a large plurality of seats in the Legislative Assembly, dwarfing all the others.

ARENA, moreover, has used abortion to villainize the FMLN, which has responded at times by sacrificing women's interests for success at the polls. [214]

But whatever legislators decide in the coming days, a broad social movement for fundamental justice on this issue has created momentum for change that will not likely subside. [215]

## Council election results reveal polarised situation

12 May 2018, by **Andy Stowe**

The council election result in Kensington and Chelsea is a good indicator of how polarised the political situation is in Britain. The Conservative-controlled council there

was responsible for the completely avoidable deaths of 71 people in the Grenfell fire. [216] They then ran on manifesto promises of twice weekly bin collections and lower council tax,

and lost only one seat. Tory voters think saving a few quid on their council tax is more important the lives of the people of Grenfell Tower. That is what class hatred and racist

indifference look like.

As soon as the results started coming in, the story was that they were a setback for the Corbyn leadership. BBC reporters were repeating the weird phrase “peak Corbyn” from 6am onwards as though they had all developed the same nervous tic. This was the line of attack also pursued by the Labour right with the ever reliable Jess Philips, probably the only MP in her party willing to defend Amber Rudd’s handling of the Home Office’s racist treatment of the Windrush generation, and similarly rightwing Labour MP Chuka Umunna. [217]

Yet the figures tell a different story. Labour control 74 councils nationally, the Tories 46; Labour won 2350 seats, a gain of 77 and the Tories won 1332, a loss of 33. In a context where Tory voters are so loyal they do not stop voting for the party even when it is responsible for 71 deaths in their own neighbourhood (as in Kensington and Chelsea) that is not a negligible gain.

Labour knocked the Tories out of Manchester borough Trafford, an all the more remarkable result given the lack of support given to leftist Steve Longden in Brooklands ward by the party apparatus. The left mobilised for Steve, including a high-profile campaigning visit by Owen Jones, and succeeded in taking Brooklands, as well as the official target seats. [218] Labour took Plymouth, winning four seats previously held by the Tories.

There were other places where Labour took seats they had not held for decades: Blenheim Park in Southend for example.

Much of the Tory crowing and the Labour right’s carping has been over the results in Wandsworth and Westminster. Many Labour supporters in London had convinced themselves that these former Tory bastions would fall. It was a close-run thing. In Wandsworth, Labour won 38.7% of the vote and the Tories 38.%, with the Conservatives managing to win more seats and in Westminster, a Tory flagship, Labour won 41.1% of the vote against the Tories’ 42.%.

Every dirty trick in the book was thrown at the Corbyn leadership in the weeks before the election. He was a Czech agent. Moscow had helped his election campaign. He had waited three hours before sending a message about the birth of a royal baby. He is responsible for “rampant antisemitism” in his party.

This nonsense filled the TV and radio. Some of the mud probably stuck, but as Jewish socialist activist David Rosenberg observed, in Redbridge, a borough with a large Jewish population, Labour increased its number of councillors from 36 to 51 and in Barnet, another area with a significant Jewish community, Labour’s vote went up by 2.7%.

Ukip voters are now the Tories’ electoral lifeline. The racist, xenophobic organisation is now dead, but the nearly 4 million people who voted for it in 2015 in full knowledge of what it was, now largely vote Tory. Many of them want a racist, xenophobic version of Brexit and see the Tories as their best chance of getting it. Labour under previous leaders more than dabbled with trying to win that racist vote on its own terms and the section of the party that supported that is the one which is most hostile to the Corbyn leadership. [219]

These local government elections were a modest victory for Labour. Results can be very idiosyncratic when politics are fought at the parochial level and we’ve all seen candidates barely capable of expressing a political idea do surprisingly well while more impressive women and men don’t even make the shortlist.

The general election will not be fought over potholes and streetlights. The last one showed that with a radical programme Labour can turn the tide against the Tories and few council candidates were able to fight on that type of platform. Nevertheless, in many parts of England there are now more left councillors than there have been in a generation. Socialists in the party need to work with them to break the passivity and defeatism that has been the hallmark of Labour in local government for a decade.

# Intersectionality and Divergence - My Life in the LGBT and Labor Movements

11 May 2018, by **Donna Cartwright**

I went to work in my first union shop as a copy editor trainee at the *Baltimore Sun* in May 1969, barely a month before the Stonewall uprising that launched the queer activist movement into mainstream attention. At the time I didn’t identify as gay, but I understood that I had a gender issue;

I thought even then that there was a relationship between gay/lesbian people and those who were gender nonconforming, although I would have been hard put to explain it. I know I felt a sense of satisfaction when I read about Stonewall.

However, my attention, as a convinced socialist, was largely focused on becoming a rank and file labor activist; a few months later, at the age of 22, I was a founding member of International Socialists (I.S.), a group best known for its focus on working in labor to build a radical rank-and-file

movement from below.

In those days, the beginnings of labor's long retreat were barely apparent - more a matter of slowed growth than serious defeats, or so it seemed at the time. In January 1970, when the Pressmen's union went on strike against *The Sun* and Baltimore's other local daily, the *News American*, all of the half dozen or so other unions (including my own, the Newspaper Guild) honored the Pressmen's picket lines as a matter of course. We were out for almost 11 weeks, and neither paper tried to publish. The strike was settled in March, and all of the unions won hefty pay increases.

While I wanted to become a rank-and-file leader, I was handicapped by the deep uncertainty and guardedness that came from having what seemed an unspeakable secret. Shame, stigma and isolation prevented me from developing any real confidence and held me back as an activist.

I'm sure there were gay people at *The Sun*, and perhaps even other gender-nonconforming people, but if so they were as deep in the closet as I was. I had a few close calls, but I was never outed. I compartmentalized my queerness and was too afraid to try to connect with the growing queer movement. That was probably just as well - by the mid-70's the organized gay and lesbian movement was increasingly unfriendly to gender-different people ("transgender" had not yet emerged as a widely accepted label). Gay men regarded trans women as an embarrassment, and lesbians often reviled transmasculine queer people as traitors who were seeking straight privilege.

With both my queer self and my labor activist self blocked, I let those dreams fade away. I was embarrassed that while my I.S. comrades were going into industry to build rank-and-file struggle, I really wasn't doing very much at all. I resigned from I.S. in 1976, figuring I just wasn't up to it.

## Becoming a Rank

## and File Activist

But life has a way of changing unexpectedly. In early 1977, almost on a dare, I applied for a copy-editing job at *The New York Times*, and much to my surprise, I was hired. What I found there was a much more promising environment for an activist. Guild Local 3, in New York, was much more highly politicized than Local 35 in Washington-Baltimore, with distinct left and right wings. Labor's crisis in the mid-1970's was intensifying, and the newspaper industry was in the thick of it. In 1975-76, the *Washington Post* broke the Pressmen's union, and reduced the remaining unions there to a weakened state that has persisted ever since.

Elsewhere, publishers were emboldened and became more aggressive in demanding concessions from the unions. In New York, the *Daily News* forced a strike in June 1978 by the Newspaper Guild over the company's demand for two-tier pay scales. Most of the unions honored the Guild's picket lines, but crucially, the mobbed-up independent News and Mail Deliverers' Union (NMDU), which organized the delivery truck drivers, scabbed. For two nights, there were wild, chaotic and violent confrontations on the picket lines, and a parked delivery truck was firebombed. The drivers stopped crossing the lines, but the strike was settled with major concessions by the Guild, including two-tier. This, in turn, sparked much anger in the ranks, and splits in the local leadership.

I quickly got involved with the left wing of the New York Guild, and was elected shop steward on the *Times'* Foreign News Desk in 1979. For most of the next 15 years, left-leaning reformers fought to oust the local's conservative, business unionist leadership, with only limited success. The Membership Slate (later to be reincarnated as the Rank and File Caucus), won shop-level and local elections in 1979 and 1980, but soon broke up and was forced from office. We fought on for more than a decade but were not able to mount another serious challenge for power in Local 3, the largest in the international union. I became a chief steward, shop vice

chairperson and local Executive Board member, shedding some of my guilty feelings and rebuilding my self-esteem. Despite the defeats in bargaining and in union elections, I felt I had begun to vindicate my earlier dreams of playing a significant part in a revitalized working-class movement. But my trans side was still hungry, and was not fed.

## First Steps

My first tentative steps to connect with that part of me took the form of reading. In the mid-80's, I devoured Renee Richards's autobiography, and saw enough similarities there that I decided I was probably transsexual. But I quickly decided to keep that secret locked up. I was too afraid of the consequences of coming out, and those fears were well founded.

In the 1980's, transgender people (a term that didn't come into widespread use until around the end of the decade) were perhaps at their lowest point as a community and a movement. We were shunned by gay and lesbian organizations striving for respectability, excluded from Pride celebrations and parades, and denounced by many second wave feminists and gender normative gay men.

As I grappled with the impulse to let my trans self out of its rigidly guarded cage, bolder spirits were beginning to pull together a movement. They coined the term transgender to cover transsexuals, cross-dressers and others who challenged rigid gender lines. They protested our exclusion from the larger queer community, denounced hate crimes like the killing of Brandon Teena, began to press state and local legislatures for anti-discrimination legislation, and even went to Washington to lobby Congress for federal protection.

## An Interesting Paradox

Nearing my 50th birthday, I began taking tentative steps into this strange new world. I found an interesting paradox - I had been active for most of



my adult life in the organized labor movement, which had potentially great social power, but enormous inertia. Trans organizing, still in its infancy, had almost no social power, but far fewer restraints. In the late 90's, we made it up as we went along.

Unions had dues-funded offices and staff that allowed them to survive in hard times, and to deliver gains to their members, although these were badly reduced. Their democratic structures allowed members at least the possibility of influencing the direction of the organization. But their history and relationships with employers and the state seriously crimped the possibility of genuine rank and file control.

While relatively small volunteer-run LGBT groups were usually ultra-democratic, with few officers and no money or staff, they lacked social weight. The larger LGBT organizations followed the board-and-staff NGO model, in which "members" donated money or took part in events but had no say in setting policy or priorities. Boards of directors were generally self-perpetuating, and priorities and direction were heavily influenced by the foundations that provided much of the money. This remains a key factor in skewing activism away from confronting employers and the super-rich.

Those differences mirrored another divergence - labor, although powerful, was (and is) under growing attack from employers, well-funded right-wing politicians, and even its supposed friends in the Democratic Party. Union membership and strike activity fell, and struggles were overwhelmingly defensive. Identity-based movements (women's, LGBT etc.) also faced powerful enemies, but the overwhelming power of capital was not focused on destroying them. Instead, these movements increasingly

focused on a narrowly defined liberal interest-group politics, striving to win inclusion within a competitive, hierarchical society. Demands became more focused on individual rights (reproductive autonomy, marriage equality, etc.) and less on economic equality and gains in the workplace. The needs of working-class women and queers were tacitly, but effectively, given lower priority.

## **Bridging Labor and Transgender Organizing**

While I found all of this unfamiliar and sometimes disorienting, I managed to adjust, and spent much of the last 15 years or so fighting for transgender rights and inclusion.

Sometimes there was overlap - in the early 1990's, a few years before I came out, gay and lesbian workers at *The New York Times* began to organize for domestic partner benefits and protection against discrimination. Union contract negotiations were beginning, and some of them came to me for advice (by that time I was well known as a union activist). I helped them write and circulate petitions for their demands to be included in the bargaining; somewhat to my surprise, this was accomplished without much difficulty. About 10 years later, I pressed for inclusion of transgender people in the nondiscrimination clause of the union contract, again successfully.

I was also able to combine union and LGBT activism on a more sustained basis outside the workplace. I became the first transgender board member of Pride at Work, the LGBT constituency group of the AFL-CIO, in 2002, and worked with queer brothers and sisters to make sure that the labor movement threw its weight behind

those insisting on local, state and federal anti-discrimination legislation that is fully inclusive of trans people. From 2009 through 2012, I was Pride at Work's first transgender co-President.

Looking back across this long arc, I see that social justice movements from below have opened undreamt-of hopes and possibilities, but at the price of a shady and corrupt bargain. The billionaire class offers a future in which all kinds of marginalized groups can believe that everyone, regardless of race, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, gender identity, etc., should have an equal opportunity to serve the moneyed elite. In return, the ruling class requires that we accept subordination, seek the favor of our "betters" to compete for scarce perks, and avoid raising demands for systemic change.

The "bargain" we are offered is a fraud. Trans people, along with other oppressed sectors, are far from achieving this promise of identity-based equality. With those others, we remain subject to economic discrimination and state and private violence. While some marginalized groups may see one or another of their own in a position of power, the elite reproduces itself and its general system of political and economic domination, while changing its internal composition only slowly, if at all. What do we need? The social power of the working class, the energy and innovation of long marginalized groups, in movements that demand wholesale systemic change, not piecemeal adjustments.

Donna Cartwright is a member of Solidarity in Baltimore; she is active in labor, single payer and LGBT rights campaigns.

*April 8, 2018*

[Against the Current](#)

# **Never Again!**

## 11 May 2018, by **Trade Union Campaign to Repeal the 8th**

On the morning of October 21, 2012 Savita Halappanavar, a 31-year-old dentist, in her first pregnancy attended the University Hospital Galway with a backache and lower abdominal pain at 17 weeks of her pregnancy. Later that day she was admitted to the hospital for management of inevitable miscarriage. Her membranes spontaneously ruptured on October 22. As the fetal heartbeat was present, the consultant continued to observe her condition and delayed terminating the pregnancy. The patient's condition rapidly deteriorated and she went into septic shock followed by multi-organ failure, and died on Sunday, October 28, 2012.

The investigation into Ms Halappanavar's death, which I chaired, found an over-emphasis on the need not to intervene until the fetal heart stopped together with an under-emphasis on the need to monitor and manage the risk of infection and sepsis in the patient. In other words, the reason for the delay in terminating the pregnancy despite threat of severe illness and possible

death - and the hopeless situation of the fetus - was the presence of the fetal heartbeat.

We considered the interpretation of the law related to lawful termination in Ireland to have been a material contributory factor in this regard. It was clear that the legal issue delayed the doctors from intervening to terminate, as any doctor in another country would have advised.

I was pleased to be invited to address the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the 8th Amendment and clarify that if a termination had been carried out when Savita and her husband requested, she would not have had sepsis and she would be alive today.

Best medical practice is to terminate the pregnancy if an infection is found to be present. From a purely medical point of view, infection represents a major risk to the health of the woman and her health could be jeopardised by delay in treatment. If Savita had survived, the delay in intervention could have resulted in serious health issues, including pelvic inflammatory

disease, tubal blockage and subfertility.

Infections can escalate rapidly, particularly in pregnancy: one moment, there can be no threat to life, but the patient can take a bad turn within an hour. Medical decisions should be made based on medical need to save lives and promote health. Requiring doctors to wait until a risk to the health of a pregnant woman has unequivocally deteriorated to a point where her life is at risk is clinically unworkable. It is poor patient care and ethically wrong. It is a violation of the right of the pregnant woman to the highest attainable standard of health.

Five-and-a-half years after Savita Halappanavar's death, people in Ireland have the opportunity to change the harmful law that cost her life. By repealing the 8th Amendment, you have an opportunity to uphold women's basic human rights. There is an urgent need to do so and to begin to provide all possible care to preserve women's health and protect their lives in pregnancy.

## **Trump's Road to War - Why?**

### 10 May 2018, by **Solidarity Steering Committee**

Nonetheless, the course now is set toward intensified regional tensions, potential nuclear proliferation, growing conflicts between Israel and Iranian forces in Syria, and ultimately a U.S. military confrontation with Iran with incalculable consequences for the world. Beyond condemning this reckless adventurism, the question to ask is: Why?

This is not a war that the U.S. population wants - the big twit

campaigns, after all, on the pretense that he opposed the disastrous invasion of Iraq. It is not a war that most of the U.S. capitalist class seems to want, and certainly not what the United States' imperialist allies in Europe want.

In immediate terms, Trump's blowing up the deal is a gift to Vladimir Putin as the price of oil increases. It also benefits Iran's hard-right enemies of president Rouhani — reactionaries,

fundamentalists and Revolutionary Guards officials who control much of Iran's sclerotic economy, and happily profit from the lucrative activities of sanctions-busting. Iran's people pay the price in a falling currency, consumer shortages and higher prices, increasingly dangerous aircraft deprived of spare parts, and other hardships along with harsh political repression.

Trump's action sets up a tussle with

the European Union and its member states, over whether U.S. financial muscle can coerce European companies to withdraw from economic deals with Iran – on top of the conflict over his protectionist tariffs and pending European counter-measures. If this U.S. coercion succeeds, as is possible given the huge extent of U.S. power over international banking and the EU's weaknesses, Iran's return to uranium enrichment becomes all the more likely.

What then lies behind Trump's effort to unilaterally cancel the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the formal title of the agreement with Iran negotiated in 2015 by the United States, Britain, France, Russia, China and Germany)? Partly, no doubt, it's to satisfy the twit's egotistical drive to cancel anything that Barack Obama worked to achieve — health care, financial regulation, consumer protection, action on climate change, protection for immigrant youth, and everything else. And it appeals to part of his political base at a time when he's swamped in corruption, sex and collusion scandals.

But Trump's destructive personal agenda is not a sufficient explanation. Secondly, he has the enthusiastic approval of the Israeli and Saudi Arabian regimes. Benjamin Netanyahu has been agitating for years for a U.S. attack on Iran, which Israel can't do on its own. And the Saudi kingdom's agenda is driven by hostility to Iran's growing regional power – an agenda that includes the Saudi-U.S. war in Yemen that is destroying the population of that country by starvation, epidemic and indiscriminate bombing. And it undoubtedly encourages Israel's wanton shooting of Palestinian civilians at the Gaza border fence, and the escalating Israeli bombing of Syria.

Third and probably most important, the Trump regime is now stuffed with the neoconservative militarists who still think that the Iraq invasion was a good idea, and want to double down on it – arguing that extreme sanctions will weaken the Iranian economy to the point of collapse and set the stage

for “regime change.” It's an ideological mission. For these types, gambling with the lives of literally hundreds of millions of people is playing with house money. The fact that the U.S. capitalist class lets them do so testifies to its cynicism, the absence of a serious Democratic Party opposition to military adventurism, and the general dysfunction of bourgeois politics in this country.

What about the argument that the JCPOA was “flawed” to begin with? What about Iran's role in Syria and “promoting terrorism”? What about those “sunset clauses” that Trump complains about in the agreement? We have to go back to what the agreement was, what it wasn't, and what it couldn't be.

To begin with a basic truth: In the long run, nuclear weapons will be globally eliminated – as over 120 member states of the United Nations have demanded – or they will proliferate, whether in the Middle East or the Korean peninsula or anywhere else. Iran's initial nuclear development began in the 1970s under the Shah, with U.S. approval.

The Iranian rulers halted that program following the 1979 revolution, but resumed it in the 1980s – directed not against the United States or Israel, but against Saddam Hussein's Iraq, which invaded Iran in 1981 to begin a hideous eight-year war where both sides worked to develop chemical, biological and nuclear “weapons of mass destruction.” The Reagan administration encouraged Iraq to launch that war and worked to prolong it (while also secretly selling weapons to Iran to finance the U.S. illegal contra war against Nicaragua's revolution.)

Following the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, which toppled Saddam's rule and made Iran the strongest state in the area, the Iranian regime offered a comprehensive regional agreement with the United States. Washington dismissed the idea — as its grand plan was to move on from its great Iraq victory to overthrowing the Islamic Republic. We know how that turned out.

Against that backdrop and Iran's subsequent advances in uranium enrichment, the 2015 JCPOA had one objective – to block one flashpoint of proliferation, Iran's potential path to nuclear weapons capability and by extension the nuclearization of its regional rivals. In exchange, crippling economic sanctions on Iran were lifted. The United States never fully even honored that commitment, and now Trump claims that unilateral “maximum economic sanctions” will squeeze more concessions from Iran, including a permanent cessation of nuclear enrichment. Whether or not the big bully actually believes that, the logic of that position leads toward forced “regime change,” or war – or both.

The nuclear deal did not change the hideous character of the Iranian regime, or any other – not Saudi Arabia, not Egypt, not the Gulf kingdoms. Nor did it curb the malicious mischief perpetrated in Syria by Iran or any other state – not Saudi Arabia, not Russia or Turkey, not Israel and certainly not the United States. Any fiction that the deal would change the nature of any regime, or prevent any states and ruling elites from acting in their own state interests (real or perceived), was delusional.

Even more delusional and dangerous is the idea that U.S. withdrawal from this agreement will bring stability or progress to the Middle East, fresh negotiations for “a better deal,” or any progressive reform or regime change in Iran. Regime change in Iran can only be accomplished by its own people, not from outside – any more than political change in the United States could come about through bombing or invasion from the outside. As for ending the threat of war and ultimately the nuclear destruction of human civilization, that requires a global “true revolution of values” – Martin Luther King's memorable prophetic phrase – and an international movement to end imperialism for good.

*Detroit*

10 May 2018

# The war in Syria only benefits the counter revolutionaries

10 May 2018, by **Joseph Daher**

However, in the anti-war movement against the Syrian war, the hegemonic narrative within the Left has an approach to anti-imperialism, which, more or less, limits the position of imperialist exclusively to the United States. This view, which is an important analytical tool for interpreting the world outside of the West, takes one geopolitical character that neglects the social element as a factor of change, and on the other hand it implies a structural orientation in the way the Left treats politics, when talking about “others”.

Trying to shed more light on the debate, which is obscured rather than clarified by *ad hoc* confrontations, Lina Theodorou and Antonis Faras asked Joseph Daher to answer a series of more comprehensive questions about the Syrian civil war. Daher is a Swiss-Syrian Marxist and scholar, whose books have been published in English, such as “Hezbollah: Political Economy of the Party of God” (2016, Pluto Press).

**We want to take a closer look at what have happened these seven years. Briefly: What led to the uprising specifically in Syria? What were Assad’s relations with the Syrian left and anarchist space before the uprising? What was his relationship with sectarian extremism? Can you describe how the rebels organized during the first years of the uprising and what went wrong? How islamists prevailed, if they have, in the rebel groups?**

Syria was a despotic regime, ruled for the past 40 years by one family, and it is also a bourgeois patrimonial regime that went through a process of neoliberalization and privatization, accelerated considerably after Bashar al-Assad’s arrival to power. Sixty

percent of the population was living under or just above the poverty line in 2011. Syria was subjected to the same form of crony capitalism that is prevalent in the region. For example, in Egypt it was the Mubarak family that benefitted mostly from the privatization and neoliberalization; in Tunis it was the Trabelsi family, of the wife of the dictator Ben Ali; and in Syria it is Makhoul, the cousin of Assad. In the end, what we have are neoliberal and authoritarian systems, and Syria is no different in this regard.

The absence of democracy and the growing impoverishment of important sections of Syrian society, in a climate of corruption and growing social inequality, has paved the way for the popular uprising, which has been waiting for nothing more than a spark. This was initially external with the fall of the dictators in Tunisia and Egypt and then internal with the torture of the children of Dar’a. These elements will trigger the process.

At first, the Syrian grassroots civilian opposition was the primary engine of the popular uprising against the Assad regime. They sustained the popular uprising for many 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. A number of progressive and democratic youth networks and groups emerged throughout the country. 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.

From the first days of the revolutionary process, the regime dealt with demonstrations with great violence and this increased with the massive interventions of Iran, Russia and Hezbollah. This situation led to a rising number of defections among conscript soldiers and officers refusing to shoot on peaceful protesters, while at the same time initially unorganized and punctual armed resistance against the security services was starting to emerge towards the end of May and beginning of June 2011 in some localities. In the following months, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) was established, as well as a myriad of other brigades. Armed resistance against the regime was almost generalized by the end of 2011, creating new dynamics in the uprising. The militarization was mainly the result of the violent repression of the local Syrian population opposing the regime; sections resorted to weapons to defend themselves. The first constituted armed opposition groups often had a purely local dynamic and served to defend their hometowns and areas from aggressions by the armed security services. The FSA was never a single and united institution, but rather a network of independent military groups fighting under its umbrella. The various forces of the Free Syrian Army have been increasingly and considerably weakened throughout the years.

Members of FSA units generally originated from the majority component of the uprising: marginalized (informal and formal) workers from the cities and countryside, members of the popular classes who had suffered from the acceleration of neo-liberal economic policies since Bashar al-Assad’s coming to power and the repression of the regime security forces. The armed opposition was partly made up



of soldiers who defected from the Syrian army, but the vast majority were civilians who had decided to take up arms. Some brigades were loosely gathered under some common umbrella, such as the FSA, but most were locally organized and only active in their hometowns. Lacking unity and centralization, they coordinated on specific battlefields, but rarely on political and strategic decisions. They were generally gathered along village or extended family lines, with little ideological cohesion.

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 domination of 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 discourse and behavior, 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 by large sections of the middle class in Damascus and Aleppo. They attacked and continue to attack democratic activists and often tried to impose their authority on the institutions developed by local people, often bringing resistance from the population against their authoritarian behavior.

**Why we should continue talking about revolution in Syria - isn't it an old flame that went out? Which forms of struggle and organization evidence the continuity of revolutionary subjects? Could you elaborate on the self-governing local councils across Syria?**

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.

However, these conditions are not enough to transform them into political opportunities, particularly after more than seven years of a destructive and murderous war accompanied by **a general and important fatigue in the Syrian population, just seeking for its great majority to return the stability in the country.** The effects of the war and its destruction will most probably weigh for years. Alongside this situation, no structured opposition body with a significant size and following offered an inclusive and democratic project that could appeal to large sectors of society was present, while the failures of the opposition bodies in exile and armed opposition groups left important frustrations and bitterness in people who participated and/or sympathized with the uprising.

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.

They are however still some pockets of isolated resistance in some areas, but they are very much weakened, in addition some attempts in exile are

being worked to build democratic and progressive networks.

Regarding the number of local councils, they have diminished considerably after the fall of Eastern Aleppo in December 2016 and of Eastern Ghouta in March/April of this year 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 civilian 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, over-representation 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.

**Is the rise of ISIS a fundamental element of the counter-revolution in the Middle East? If so, which are the other political and economic factors enabling the growth of fascist and fundamentalist forces. What role does religion play in Syria?**

Explanations that try to find the reasons for the phenomena of ISIS in

the Quran and in Islam are wrong, but above all reinforce racist and Islamophobic amalgams while wanting to characterize an intrinsic violent nature to Islam and Muslims more generally. Although ISIS claims to act in the name of Islam, the religion does not explain their behavior and actions. These groups and individuals take their source in the present time and not 1400 years ago, just as their actions.

Do we analyze the US invasion of Iraq by the religious beliefs of Bush (who had reported hearing God in a dream telling him that he had a mission and had to invade Iraq) or according to imperialist motives (political and economic reasons)? Will we find the reasons for the US invasion in the Bible? Will we analyze the US invasion based on the behavior of Christians 2000 years ago? Similarly, during the massacre perpetrated in Norway on July 22, 2011 by Anders Breivik, who claimed to act to preserve Christianity against multiculturalism, have we sought the reasons for his act in Christianity or the Bible?

The Arab writer Aziz Al-Azmeh, stated that "the understanding of Islamic political phenomena requires the normal equipment of the social and human sciences, not their denial" Not acting in this ways, will lead us to an essentialisation of "the Other", in much of the current cases today of the "Muslim".

Each religion does not exist indeed autonomously of people, in the same way that God does not exist outside of the field of intellectual action of man.

On the contrary religion, as the supernatural power of God, is a mystic popular expression of the contradictions and material realities in which people live.

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.

In this perspective, 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.

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.

**There's a leading leftist narrative regarding the war in Syria suggesting that given the recent developments, the bombing of military bases in Damascus, the cause of anti-imperialism call us to support Syria people, and consequently Bashar al Assad's regime. What do you think about that?**

It is important to remember that, even though conflicting interests exist between international and regional powers that are intervening in Syria, none of these actors care about the uprising or the revolutionaries. Instead, they have attempted to undermine the popular movement against Assad and successfully worked to strengthen sectarian and ethnic tensions in the country. These intervening forces have, for example, helped stabilize the Assad regime in order to oppose Kurdish autonomy (in Turkey's case) and to defeat extremist groups such as ISIS (in the case of the United States).

The intervening powers are united in their opposition to popular struggle. They seek to impose the status quo at the expense of the interests of the working and popular classes. This is precisely why viewing the Syrian revolution only through the lens of imperialist competition and geopolitical dynamics will not suffice.

This lens inherently obscures the political and socio-economic frustrations endured by the Syrian population that sparked the uprising.

We need to rebuild anti-war movements, true ones, by starting a critical assessment of the past experiences, an honest one. This in the perspective of building an internationalist and progressive alternative for all that oppose all forms of authoritarian regimes and all foreign interventions while clearly supporting the self-determination of popular masses and their struggles.

In other words revolutionary humanism.

Some sections of the Left and the anti-war movements have refused to act in solidarity with the Syrian uprising under the pretext that "the main enemy is at home." In other words, it is more important to defeat the imperialists and bourgeoisie in our own societies, even if that means implicitly supporting the Assad regime or the Russian state.

Among these sections of the Left, communist thinker Karl Liebknecht is frequently cited. Liebknecht is famous for his 1915 declaration that "the enemy is at home," a statement made in condemnation of imperialist aggression against Russia led by his native Austria-Germany. In quoting Liebknecht, many have decontextualized his views. From his perspective, fighting against the enemy at home did not mean ignoring foreign regimes repressing their own people or failing to show solidarity with the oppressed.

Indeed, Liebknecht believed we must oppose our own ruling class's push for war by "cooperating with the proletariat of other countries whose struggle is against their own imperialists."

Among many Western leftists, there has been neither cooperation with the Syrian people nor collaboration with like-minded anti-war movements. They also have failed to oppose the policies of their own bourgeois states in crushing the revolution in Syria.

The Left must do better. Solidarity with the international proletariat means supporting Syrian revolutionaries against various international and regional imperialist forces, as well as the Assad regime, all of which are trying to put an end to a popular revolution for freedom and dignity.

No leftist organizations or anti-war movements today can ignore the necessity of supporting people in struggle, while opposing all foreign interventions (international and regional), especially from our own governments....

As Liebknecht said: "Ally yourselves with the international class struggle against the conspiracies of secret diplomacy, against imperialism, against war, for peace within the socialist spirit." We can exclude none of these elements from our struggle to build a progressive leftist platform on the Syrian conflict.

**Do you believe that the above mentioned narratives and the inability to comprehend an active political and emancipatory struggle, succumb to perception suffering from orientalism, or maybe even racism and islamophobia? Is there a paternalistic approach which we simply cannot get rid of?**

I think reasons are multiple and sometimes interlinked, whether specific leftist in heritage (stalinism, campism, "Third Worldism") yes forms of racisms and orientalism, etc...

But moreover and more generally there is a skepticism of the possibility of mass collective action to achieve the goals of the people, of **power from below**. This concept, which is at the heart of revolutionary politics, faces profound skepticism from some sections of the left. This should not prevent us, however, from building

our solidarity on this basis.

Following the same narrative, we have witnessed a call to unite under the lesser evil pragmatism of the coalition between Putin, Assad and Iran in order to ensure stability. What is the outcome of this alliance during the recent years and against whom it has been forged?

This perception of these sections of the left is completely wrong and destructive of the "lesser evil". The solution does not lie in the collaboration with authoritarian regimes like the Assad regime or collaboration with regional powers and international imperialist powers such as Russia, quite the opposite.

I believe that we should analyse a State on its class basis and policies as rightly put by Pierre Frank, a French Trotskyist that wrote that: "Let us note that the greatest theoreticians of Marxism did not at all define the political nature of a bourgeois regime by the positions which the latter held in the field of foreign policy but solely and simply by the position it occupied in relation to the classes composing the nation". On this basis Syria, Russia and Iran are clearly not allies of working class people. We can see their destructive and murderous role in Syria.

The "lesser evil" is actually the road of defeat and the maintenance of an unjust system in which the popular classes in the region live. The role of revolutionaries is not to choose between different imperialist and regional powers. Our role is to oppose the different counter revolutionary forces and build an independent front from these two forms of reactions and basing it on democratic, social, anti-imperialist basis and opposing all forms of discrimination and working for the radical change of society in a dynamic from below in which the working classes the agent of change.

In conclusion, given the clashes or collaboration between the forces of reaction, let's not choose one form of the reaction, but support, build and organize a popular and radical alternative for the original objectives of the revolutions: democracy social justice and equality.

We should oppose all foreign interventions. In addition, we must not imagine that the imperialist rivalries at the global level between the United States, China and Russia would be insurmountable for these powers, to the extent that these powers are in reality in relations of interdependence on many issues. All these regimes are bourgeois regimes that are and always will be the enemies of popular revolutions, seeking to impose or strengthen a stable political context allowing them to accumulate and develop their political and economic capital in defiance of the popular classes. No regional or international power is a friend of the Syrian revolution as we have shown, just as it is not the imperialist contradictions that have been the source of the uprising in Syria or elsewhere as well in the region, but the political and socio-economic frustrations endured by the popular classes.

**The regime's refusal of any kind of opposition and the violence it has committed demonstrates that it has fascist tendencies. Were those evident and existing before the uprising and how did they interacted with the characteristics of the Syrian state and society?**

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.

**Given the example of Libya, Iraq and Afghanistan some time ago, the USA intervention is more than catastrophic. Invasions became synonymous with US, it went to war against communism and now it leads war against islamist extremists. What is their goal in the region? How did the election of Trump affect US policies in the region, if it did? What should we expect and prepare for?**

Let's be clear we should oppose as well all the interventions of Washington in the region that are not made in the interest of the popular classes. The recent wars you mentioned or its support for different dictatorships in the region and their actions demonstrate this.

American policy is mired in a host of contradictions that flow from its weakened position after its setback in Iraq and the contradictory foreign policy objectives between Trump and some sectors of US foreign affairs administration. Of course, the U.S. remains the most important power in the world, but it has witnessed a relative decline against international and regional rivals, particularly in the Middle East.

The failure of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the global economic and financial crisis of 2007 and 2008 were severe blows to the hegemony of the U.S. This left more space for other imperialist powers like China and Russia, but also benefited regional powers throughout the world. The relative decline of the U.S. allowed all of these states to act more autonomously and even at times contrary to U.S. interests.

This is particularly visible in the Middle East. Russia has been able to increase its influence and play a significant role in Syria in saving the Assad regime, while various regional states like Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Israel have played a growing role in the region, intervening

in the revolutionary processes in support of various actors in conflict with popular demands for democracy, social justice and equality.

The main policies of the US in the Middle East are to defeat ISIS military and oppose Iranian influence in the region. At the same time, they want to return to a form of stability in the region while undermining forces like Iran.

Like other imperialist and regional powers they want an end to the revolutionary processes in the region.

**We are facing a complex situation but we jump easily to conclusions and taking sides. How can we serve the main struggle, in terms of internationalist solidarity, which is rather obvious: opposition to all imperialist and authoritarian actors intervening in Syria?**

Yes, I agree with this conclusion.

Multiple things can be done. I think progressives 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 as refugees. The war only benefits the counter-revolutionary 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 counter-revolution: 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, leftists 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 for migrants
- against all forms of Islamophobia and racism
- against all cooperation by 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."

We must be clear on one thing, the impunity given to the continuous murderous crimes of Assad's despotic regime 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.

[Babylonia](#)



# Defending “Our Democracy”

9 May 2018, by **Against the Current** Editors

Even more important is how democracy is being defended, and hopefully extended “by teachers in West Virginia, Oklahoma and Kentucky, by the magnificent youth upsurge in the wake of the Parkland massacre; by the resistance against Trump’s brutal immigration policies; by the new movement fighting back against sexual harassment and rape culture.

The victorious strike of the West Virginia teachers erupted in a state where they don’t have legal collective bargaining rights, where their union leadership was essentially swept up in the tide of militant action organized at the rank-and-file base, and where the teachers stayed out against the leadership’s wishes until their five percent pay raise (for all state employees) was delivered and signed into law.

It may be premature to proclaim the much-awaited dawn of a “new labor upsurge.” But we might be seeing the future of public sector worker activism in the face of an anticipated Supreme Court’s Janus decision to cripple their unions by outlawing the collection of non-member “agency fees” for services that unions are required to provide. West Virginia teachers, like many public sector workers across the country, are at the mercy of their state legislature “which is how they wound up close to the national bottom in wages and benefits.

Their statewide unauthorized (i.e. “wildcat”) strike instead put the legislature and the governor at the teachers’ mercy. Why did it happen? Skyrocketing health care costs, and the denial of the respect and dignity the teachers deserve, was the last straw. Importantly, they didn’t think only of themselves. Recognizing that many of their students in deeply distressed communities depend on free school lunch programs, teachers organized food deliveries on their own

to bridge the gap while the schools were shut down.

Respect, dignity and solidarity “those values are essential to keep in mind, because they fuelled not only the West Virginia and other teachers’ actions, but other manifestations of labor unrest, notably the Fight for \$15. And yes, they’re also driving forces for the youth movement that the Parkland, Florida high school students have spearheaded.

In the wake of yet another unspeakable school massacre, mourning their 17 classmates, teachers and coaches sacrificed on the altar of the unrestricted “right” to sell and buy semi-automatic assault rifles, the students were confronted by yet another wave of politicians’ boilerplate “thoughts and prayers” and the gun manufacturer lobby’s cynical proposal to turn schools across the country into locked-down armed fortresses.

The Parkland students’ response is remarkable, not only for its eloquence in the face of unimaginable pain. First, they spoke up for themselves, not letting politicians usurp the platform “and the students’ voices were what stood out, both at Parkland and at the huge March for Our Lives in Washington on March 24. (“I trained to be a teacher, not a sharpshooter” was one notable sign among many.)

Second, while the Marjory Stoneman Douglas students are relatively middle class and “privileged,” they recognized immediately that other young people, in communities of color particularly, face deadlier daily threats “not so much from mass school shootings as from risking violence and death on the way to and from school, or just walking on the street and playing basketball in the neighborhood. And placing armed police in every school automatically means disproportionately kids of color

arrested, suspended and expelled for minor infractions or for nothing at all.

Because they understand what’s at stake not only for themselves but their entire generation, these students will not let the issue fade out as usual “per the gun manufacturer lobby’s strategy “until the next mass shooting. It’s not a question of fine-tuning one or another particular piece of gun control legislation. (Surely, people can responsibly own guns for protection and hunting without having millions of AR-15s all over the place?) It’s a matter of confronting the realities of this brutally violent, chaotic and unequal society and getting to the race, class and gendered roots of our condition.

Those values of respect, dignity and solidarity are also on the table when the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients “from teenagers to young adults, these are Americans who lack citizenship because their parents brought them as children without documents “are not only fighting for their own lives. [220]

They’re refusing to sell their families and communities down the river by accepting relief for themselves in exchange for supporting Trump’s border wall and stepped-up immigration raids. Their courage is what’s impelled many cities to defy the immigration police’s “right” to grab and deport folks who are in local custody for traffic or minor misdemeanor violations.

## Trump Going Down?

It’s naturally tempting to fantasize that Donald Trump will be removed by indictment, impeachment or implosion from the combined weight of scandals, investigations and revelations of the

criminal conduct of his enterprise before and during his occupancy of the White House — as if the prospect of the creepy Christian-supremacist Mike Pence were an improvement. Unfortunately, it's necessary to put some sobering realities on the table.

Reality: Donald Trump is not going to be brought down by sex scandals. His filthy contempt for women was no secret to anyone, including his voting base, before the November 2016 election. And while we fully believe the accounts by women who have come forward, and while America loves "celebrity sleaze" beyond all other forms of infotainment, those revelations with more to come aren't going to turn the ruling corporate elites against "their President" and useful tool.

Reality: Trump isn't going to be impeached by popular demand or through the initiative of Congressional Democrats. By its nature, impeachment is a long and grinding affair, which is instigated by elites when the president no longer meets their needs, or when his behavior actually threatens the institutions that guarantee the "stability" they crave. In Richard Nixon's case, that was the 1973 "Saturday night massacre" firing of special prosecutor Archibald Cox. For Trump, it would be firing Robert Mueller, which is why he hasn't done it. (The impeachment of Bill Clinton was an opportunist Republican stunt, which fizzled in the Senate and backfired.)

Reality: If and when the big twit is brought down, it will be either because his antics are dragging the Republican Party into the electoral abyss, or because his incoherent economic nationalism and policy zigzags threaten to generate a recession or global slump.

It appears that ruling class intervention has pulled the Trump team back from its brinksmanship NAFTA demands that would cripple the North American auto industry. Fears of economic chaos also led to an exemption for the European Union from his much-touted steel and aluminum tariff scheme, and no one yet knows where the threats of anti-Chinese measures and China's

retaliation might lead.

Reality: Behind all the wild and weird doings in Washington, much business as usual continues. Donald Trump grumpily signed the \$1.3 trillion "bipartisan" spending bill that didn't fund his border wall or some of the savage budget cuts he'd trumpeted, but did allocate \$700 billion to the military — while leaving in the lurch the DACA youth and "Dreamers" whom the Democrats had pledged to defend. Another day, another betrayal.

Hundreds of thousands of families — parents who risked everything to find a place where they hoped their children would be safe and secure, and the young people who have grown up as American as anyone else in this country — are left to be collateral damage of Trump's blatant appeal to racism, along with Haitian and Salvadoran refugees losing Temporary Protected Status and facing deportation to countries that U.S. policies have shattered.

All this was punctuated by the April 14 bombing of the Syrian regime's suspected chemical weapons facilities, which changes effectively nothing in that country's catastrophe — but did give Trump the opportunity to tweet "Mission Accomplished." That this strike was not only meaningless in substance, but illegal under both U.S. domestic and international law, hardly registers in the news cycle.

## Rights Under Attack

So where are the threats to democracy coming from? Elsewhere in this issue of *Against the Current*, we're publishing several pieces exploring the left's response to the rise of open, sometimes violent racism and ominous far-right militancy that Trump's presidency has enabled. We refer our readers to that important discussion of strategy and principle.

But what about Russian meddling with all the fake-news campaign ads targeted at gullible U.S. voters? In fact, if the Russians are guilty of everything they're accused of, it barely rates in fourth place among the

attacks on democratic rights in the United States.

First, there's the electoral system rigged by racist voter suppression laws, extreme gerrymandering, and now a pending "citizenship" question on the 2020 census that's specifically designed to depress participation and thereby reduce political representation and budgets for cities with communities of immigrants and people of color.

The disenfranchisement of prisoners and in many states, lifetime disqualification of convicted felons — in the context of mass incarceration in America — also reduces the voter base of working class and people of color. Of course, there's the anachronism of the Electoral College that enabled the 2000 election to be stolen in Florida for George W. Bush and put Trump in the White House in the 2016 election.

Second, in a country that's so grossly unequal to begin with, elections and legislatures can be bought with the dark money of the Koch Brothers, the likes of the Mercer and DeVos family fortunes, and the other operations detailed in Nancy McLean's *Democracy in Chains*. [221] It's not so much a deep conspiracy as a heist in broad daylight, designed to make democracy itself meaningless.

Third, in a relatively short time the Trump swamp creatures and Republican Congress have done substantial damage, some of it difficult to reverse (with or without a 2018 midterm "blue wave," given that the Democrats won't fight for much of anything).

Climate change not only isn't reversing, it's accelerating — and the administration is committed to extracting every bit of the fossil fuels that so desperately need to be left in the ground. Puerto Rico remains in a devastating crisis after Hurricane Maria, with the next hurricane season now months away. Arctic sea ice has reached all-time lows, with winter temperatures reaching up to 45 degrees Fahrenheit above normal — while the U.S. east coast and northern Europe suffered a series of monstrous storms, and the west coast burns up

and then floods.

Raids and deportations terrorize immigrant communities. The “tax reform” bill, Trump’s major legislative “achievement,” stuffs hundreds of billions of dollars into corporate coffers and the fortunes of the super-rich, and puts the country firmly on the road to bankruptcy “deliberately, so that Paul Ryan can claim the “necessity” to privatize and gut Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.

Those are the real live threats to

what’s called “our democracy” “along with the reactionary Supreme Court majority that may be getting ready to strip away what remains of workers’ right to organize unions, women’s right to abortion, Muslims’ right to enter the country, and people’s right to elect their representatives without crippling voter suppression and other election-rigging techniques.

The Democrats’ feeble resistance will barely slow down these attacks, let alone stop them “no matter how long or short the big twit’s

presidential tenure may be. It will be now, as it always has been, the power of mass movements that change the tide and the political equation.

Substantive democratic rights, more important than the purely formal ones, are always hard won and subject to being lost if not continually defended and renewed. That’s where the West Virginia teachers, the students of Parkland and the nation, and all the communities of resistance large and small, are showing the way.

May-June 2018, ATC 194

## Are We on the Eve of Another Nicaraguan Revolution?

8 May 2018, by **Dan La Botz**

The government of former revolutionary and Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega has in the last few days killed at least 24 protestors who were demonstrating against sudden and drastic alterations in a new pension law, changes that would have adversely affected the incomes and lives of tens of thousands. Some 200 were arrested and 20 are missing, according to the National Human Rights Commission. Other protestors, many of them university students, were beaten by the police or by goons armed with pipes sent by President Ortega’s party, the Sandinista Front for the Liberation of Nicaragua (FSLN).

Ortega’s administration also shut down the Noticias news channel and Channel 12 to prevent both coverage of the events and criticism of his government. Sandinista thugs beat reporters and destroyed TV video cameras as well. Angel Gahona, a journalist with the show “Onda Local” on Facebook Live, was reporting on the protests when was shot and killed in the midst of his broadcast. His murder, the censorship and the repression led in turn to more protests and to looting in Managua markets.

Students have called for a strike on all college campuses and remarkably farmers have called for a strike until the students’ demands are met. Large protest marches of thousands have taken place in Managua and other cities. U.S. diplomats have been ordered to leave the country as soon as possible. The Catholic Cardinal Leopoldo Brenes is attempting to set up a meeting between the National Council of Businesspeople (COSEP) and the Ortega government. While it is too soon to say what will happen, the current upheaval has all the earmarks of a revolutionary movement “though so far without a leadership.

Ortega’s pension law follows the same neoliberal logic as that of other similar legislation in countries around the world; that is, the imposition of austerity on the working class and the poor. The new law would have increased both employer and worker contributions while at the same time lowering overall benefits. Nicaragua, with a population of six million, is one of Latin America’s poorest countries, with over a third of the country living in poverty and half in rural areas in extreme poverty. There the average

income is about \$2.00 per day.

The protests led Ortega to announce that he is cancelling the pension reform law and will negotiate, but it is not clear with whom he will negotiate or whether or not he is prepared to make meaningful concessions. Some opponents, raising the slogan “We are not afraid,” are demanding that Ortega, now in his third consecutive term as president (his fourth term altogether), must resign.

### What Went Wrong?

How did a political party and a government born in a popular revolution in 1979 go so wrong? And wrong in so many ways? For, while this is the worst repression in post-revolutionary Nicaraguan history, it is not unique. Since 2014 farmers and environmentalists have demonstrated against Ortega’s plans for a Chinese-financed inter-oceanic canal across Nicaragua, and police have frequently used violence against those protestors. The government, which is allied with the Catholic Church, has

also harassed the feminist movement that seeks to overturn the country's laws against abortion.

Huge billboards throughout Managua, bear smiling portraits of Ortega and his wife and virtual co-president Rosario Murillo, proclaiming, "Cristiana, Socialista, Solidaria!" But the regime would better be described as authoritarian, pro-business, and anti-worker. The Ortega Sandinista government is a product of both the ideology that inspired its revolutionary past and of the deals that constituted its practice since 1990. As I argue in my book *What Went Wrong? The Nicaraguan Revolution: A Marxist Analysis*, that the central problem is that the Sandinistas have never held democracy as a core value, neither in their revolutionary past nor in their post-revolutionary and quite reactionary present.

Yet at one time the Sandinistas had inspired the left around the world. From 1936 to 1979 Nicaragua was run by the Somoza family, a brutal dynastic dictatorship, supported by the United States, that in alliances with sections of both the Liberal and Conservative parties used the state to protect the landlords, to modernize the economy, and to repress its opponents. The Sandinistas, founded in 1961 by a small group of former Stalinist Communists (members of the Nicaraguan Socialist Party) who had become admirers of Fidel Castro and Ernesto "Che" Guevara, adopted a guerrilla strategy.

After almost fifteen years operating as tiny guerrilla bands in the mountains as well as the organizers of some spectacular kidnappings and killings of government officials, the Sandinista's revolutionary movement stalled. The guerrilla war was a failure. What was to be done?

The frustrated Sandinista leaders divided into three rival factions, one led by Daniel Ortega and writer Sergio Ramírez, called the "Third Tendency," which eventually won out, called for a new strategy based on a moderate program, an alliance with the progressive bourgeoisie, support from other Latin American governments, and an armed military invasion from Costa Rica combined

with a national uprising. Bolstered by thousands of Latin American foreign fighters, the Sandinistas took power in 1979.

Inspired by *el triunfo*, thousands of foreigners flocked, myself among them, traveled to Nicaragua to learn or to help, some stayed for days or weeks, others for years or even decades. The revolution would turn out to be different than they imagined.

## In Power and at War

While there was briefly an ostensibly coalition government, in fact the Sandinistas dominated the country from day one of the revolution, their coalition partners gradually resigning. The revolution was founded on deception. In a post-revolution secret three-day meeting, the Sandinista directorate, the collective leadership, proclaimed that the party would be Marxist-Leninist, would establish "the dictatorship of the proletariat," and would become part of the Communist camp with the Soviet Union, the Eastern Bloc, and Cuba. Ortega and other FSLN leaders, however, told the Nicaraguan people and the world that they would establish a democratic government, a mixed economy, and a non-aligned foreign policy.

Unconcerned with democracy or honesty but deeply committed to social equality, the Sandinistas carried out remarkable national literacy and health campaigns. The FSLN created a series of party-led mass organization of workers, women, and youth through which it could both mobilize and constrain the population. And with the aid of the Soviet Union and Cuba, it created a new state, an army and a police force. Meanwhile, President Ronald Reagan decided he would destroy the revolution.

The U.S. State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency took responsibility to organize and to arm former *Somocistas* and new opponents into the *Contras*, counter-revolutionaries. But the FSLN's political mistakes also contributed to the growth of the *Contras*. The FSLN's refusal to distribute land to the

peasants and its heavy-handed treatment of the indigenous population on the Caribbean Coast created a large-scale rural opposition and led to what became a genuine civil war. Unable to rely on a volunteer army, the Sandinistas turned to conscription, and lost more support, some opponents going over to the *Contras*.

After a decade of war, though not defeated, the population was exhausted and demoralized. Daniel Ortega, who had been elected president in the first post-revolutionary elections in 1985, was challenged in 1990 by Violeta Chamorro, widow of a popular newspaper publisher who had been assassinated by Somoza. With a broad opposition from Communists to the far right, but principally running against the war with lots of help from the United States, Chamorro won and became president.

## Daniel Ortega Turns to Politics, the Church, and Business

Chamorro's coalition fell apart immediately after her election, while the Nicaraguan National Assembly was dominated by her opponent Ortega's FSLN. Antonio Lacayo, the power behind Chamorro's throne, secretly entered into a relationship with Ortega, still head of the FSLN, and his brother Humberto Ortega, and together the triumvirs ran Nicaragua. Ortega and the FSLN transferred real estate and other wealth from the government to themselves—the famous *piñata* for safe keeping they explained at the beginning. And began to enter into relationships with former Somoza figures and the old landlord class. Ortega and his girlfriend, Rosario, married in the Catholic Church, and proclaimed themselves believers.

Ortega's complicated involvement in corrupt politics and crooked business deals, which I have discussed at greater length elsewhere, is too complicated to go into here, but



suffice it to say that through such machinations he continued to be a king-maker and king-breaker from 1996 to 2006 under presidents Arnaldo Alemán and Enrique Bolaños. [222] During those years Ortega and Murillo took absolute control of the FSLN and transformed it into a political machine, led by old Sandinista cadres and filled with a post-revolutionary rank and file, apolitical but willing to get out the vote for cap and a t-shirt, for a handout and a few meals.

Today Ortega controls not only the presidency, but also the National Assembly, and the Supreme Court. Like a monarch—he and like Donald Trump—he has bestowed great power on his wife and his children.

Ortega has had a lot of "left cover" as he has become a thoroughly reactionary dictator. Over the last couple of decades, Ortega can be found in smiling photographs with Fidel and Raúl Castro in Cuba, or alongside Evo Morales of Bolivia or Hugo Chávez of Venezuela. ALBA

(*Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América*), a financial alliance created by Castro and Chávez, provided millions of dollars to Nicaragua, money personally controlled by Ortega. The Foro de São Paulo, the regular congress of Latin America's leftwing political parties, which I attended in the summer of 2016, treats the Sandinistas as if they were a socialist government. [223] And in the United States the Alliance for Global Justice, which publishes *NicaNotes*, has until now been uncritical of the Sandinista government. [224] It's time the left quit providing covering for a dictator.

Ortega has attributed his country's problems to unidentified political enemies. At the moment the Cuban government argues that the upheaval in Nicaragua is an attempt at regime change by the Nicaraguan business class and the U.S. government. [225]

Today Ortega and his friends and family own a variety of businesses, control most of the country's television stations, and cut deals with

the old bourgeoisie. Nicaraguan workers in maquiladoras or in agriculture have no real unions to defend them, and resistance can lead to being fired. Hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans have had to go abroad to find employment in other Latin American nations and in the United States. For years the country's intellectuals have compared Ortega to the Somozas. Now the people are doing so as well.

When I finished my book *What Went Wrong* in 2016, I speculated about the prospects of Nicaragua's small and beleaguered opposition movement. I predicted that one day a new opposition would arise to challenge Ortega's corrupt regime. I had not expected the opposition to rise as powerfully and as quickly as it has. But now Nicaragua has put the dictator on notice. Nothing frightens a dictator more than their slogan: "We are not afraid."

April 24, 2018

[New Politics](#)

## Rudd goes - oppose racist immigration regime

8 May 2018, by **Susan Moore**

Amber Rudd's resignation as Home Secretary is perhaps the most significant ministerial departure for racism since Enoch Powell's. [226] She oversaw a racist deportation policy and denied knowing that it was happening. This has torn away the protective shield from her predecessor in the role and current Prime Minister, Theresa May.

This is a very significant victory for Diane Abbott, Rudd's Labour shadow minister and David Lammy. [227] And while many readers of *Socialist Resistance* will have frequently been furious with the *Guardian* since Corbyn's election as Labour leader, its journalist Amelia Gentleman has been

absolutely tenacious in bringing this scandal to public attention.

More and more horror stories have emerged about the treatment of people from the "Windrush generation". People have been arrested and held in detention camps, dismissed from jobs, been refused admission to the country when returning from family events abroad, denied access to the NHS and had benefits withdrawn.

All of this has created a climate of fear for people who came here as British citizens. And it is a consequence of the regulations introduced with the 2014 Immigration Act, piloted by Theresa

May, which introduced this new regime of documentation. The same Act removed protection from longstanding residents in Britain, who had not achieved "settled status". This left groups like the Windrush migrants vulnerable, especially when the setting of targets for deportations led them to be seen as "easy pickings".

And the Windrush migrants are far from the only group to have received inhuman and unacceptable treatment at the hands of the immigration regime. We reject the notion of "good migrants" and "bad migrants", pointing for example to the horrors suffered by thousands, including children, in immigration detention.

The outrage that has been generated over the Windrush scandal, as well as the concerns about increasing racist attacks in the wake of the Brexit referendum and the ability of people from across the globe to continue to come to take up vital roles in our public service, should be used to challenge the racism at the heart of immigration controls in Britain.

May, who sent immigration enforcement vans onto the streets of Britain in the run up to 2015 General election, was the architect of the "hostile environment" approach. [228] In October 2017, the *Guardian* reported that "one in five stopped by immigration enforcement is a UK citizen." [229] Lawyers and MPs raised concern that this was leading to "illegal racial profiling." Nor was this the first expression of concern. Jeremy Corbyn, from the back benches, had raised the issue of immigrations swoops at public transport hubs in 2013, following a letter from the Equality and Human Rights Commission to the Home Office. [230]

Corbyn, Shadow Home Secretary Dianne Abbott and other members of Labour's front bench have a long record of taking up these issues - including when Labour itself was in office. And Tottenham MP David Lammy, one of Rudd's most persistent critics, has proved himself a worthy successor to Bernie Grant, the first black MP for the constituency - something most on the left doubted when he was first selected.

It was no surprise that former Labour Home Secretary David Blunkett told the media that Amber Rudd should not resign. That's why Dianne Abbott pointed out on the *Today* programme on 30 April that Labour was under new management. [231]

Lammy, Abbott and others have insistently pointed out that Rudd's "promises" to the Windrush generation have been sorely lacking in detail. Newly appointed Home Secretary, Sajid Javid, will rightly be under pressure to spell out what compensation will be offered and how

it will be ensured that access to benefits and services are swiftly reinstated. And demands that May address the House as soon as possible must be supported.

There are also other issues that need unpicking. For example, Labour's Stephen Doughty pointed to the way that cuts in legal aid have impacted on people needing to challenge immigration decisions on the *Today* programme on 30 April.

Most significantly, Black Activists Rising Against the Cuts spokesperson Zita Holbourne, has been pointing out on social media that there is a charter flight scheduled to leave Britain for Jamaica any time after Thursday. Holbourne has seen the removal notice for one woman currently in Yarlwood detention centre.

Holbourne strongly cautions against falling into the divide and rule trap of "good migrants" and "bad migrants". She puts it like this:

*Those flights include people who have been criminalised by definition of their immigration status, people who if British would have been able to serve their time for minor crimes, be rehabilitated and get on with their lives, instead they face double punishment and banishment to countries they don't know, they also include young people, some in teens, who because of institutional racism have been stopped and searched disproportionately and by virtue of the number of stops are deemed to be criminals and likely to have committed an offence even though never been arrested, charged, gone to trial, found guilty of anything. So that could be your child so when you want to say 'only Windrush' bear in mind that the children and grandchildren also being forcibly removed would not be in the UK if their kin were not part of the generation who came from Commonwealth countries to the so-called 'mother country' many of whom were invited here to come and work to do essential jobs in post war Britain. Sign and share the petition now and follow @Barac on twitter for further*

*up dates.* [232]

Rudd's resignation comes at the beginning of the week where there will be local elections in large parts of England [Thursday 3 May], elections in which Labour under Corbyn is expected to make significant gains. Last year, as May unexpectedly called a snap General election, the slogan for many campaigners was "Let June be the end of May". Despite a huge effort and a positive showing that exceeded everyone's expectations, Corbyn didn't quite make it to Number 10.

Eleven months later, the Tories are in even greater turmoil. The *Telegraph*, no friend of Corbyn, announces the appointment of Thatcherite and former banker Javid appointment thus: "Sajid Javid promises 'fair' immigration policy as new Home Secretary while pressure mounts on Theresa May."

May has insisted that Rudd's resignation was over giving Parliament information that was not correct - trying but failing to divert attention from the policy issues themselves. [233] Dianne Abbott is absolutely right to demand both that May takes responsibility and that the pernicious "hostile environment" policy ends.

Javid, whom May demoted to communities secretary from Business, Innovation and Skills, has clashed many times with the Prime Minister. While he supported Remain during the referendum, this was somewhat of a surprise as he had been seen as being hostile to the European Union. Now commentators predict that May is likely to have a further problem at this week's Cabinet meeting, as Javid's appointment and Rudd's departure is likely to see the blocking of her proposed hybrid customs arrangement.

All this means that the need to keep up the pressure on May and her fragile administration could not be greater.

Republished from **Socialist Resistance**.

# 5-Star Movement: Significant but insufficient growth

7 May 2018, by **Antonio Moscato**

In fact, although the M5S has contradicted many forecasts, it is at a dead end, far from the victory it took for granted.

However, given the inexperience of almost all new elected representatives, the modest political culture of the leaders themselves and the unanimous hostility of the political class of all parties, its record of the last legislature is relatively positive, at least from the point of view of voter consent.

## A vote against the government and the PD

On 4 March the M5S won 2,006,588 votes more than in 2013 (+ 23%) and 4,905,129 more votes than in the 2014 European elections (+ 85%). This is, in absolute numbers, a number of votes very similar to those lost by the Democratic Party (PD), reflecting the fact that the M5S has largely gained substantial shares of the centre left and left electorate. The DP, which since the replacement of Berlusconi by Monti in autumn 2011 has played a central role in the machinery of government and in support of austerity policies, has dropped from 12,095,306 votes obtained by Walter Veltroni in 2008 (when he was beaten by the centre-right) and 8,646,034 votes won by Bersani in 2013, to 6,134,727 votes collected by Renzi last Sunday. The 2,511,307 missing votes (and the 5,038,134 missing if the comparison is made with the 2014 European elections) were mostly taken by the M5S.

Probably there were also cross-transfers between the different orientations. Further studies indicate that, especially in the South, many

traditionally centre-right voters voted for the M5S, while in the north the PD votes that went to M5S partially offset the losses of M5S to the Lega. [234] Naturally, the criteria for verifying these flows may vary, but the level of "mobility" between orientations and between the parties has a dimension with few historical precedents.

The suburbs of the metropolis, statistically populated by the social sectors that have suffered the most from austerity policies, have massively rewarded Lega and M5S. In the north, the suburbs have chosen the Lega of Matteo Salvini, while maintaining, though with significant decreases, important votes for the 5 Stars. In the south, on the other hand, the suburbs produced almost plebiscitary results for the M5S. However, it must not be forgotten that the Lega, by symbolically abandoning its qualifier "Northern for the independence of Padania" and throwing the veil over its territorial roots, managed to win the consensus of the popular sectors from the south most fascinated by reactionary impulses, probably catalysing votes that would otherwise have gone to the Brothers of Italy or explicitly fascist lists. [235].

Precisely because these massive shifts of the electorate are unprecedented and have often been decided at the last minute, it is likely that these are not electorates that have been won forever. In the 2013 general election, the 5-Star Movement won just under 9 million votes (exactly 8,704,809 votes), or 25.5% of valid votes, an extraordinary result for the first national election, especially as it outstripped the one obtained, also for the first time, by Forza Italia in 1994 (21.0%), which had then allowed Berlusconi to form his first government.

Since then, many failures have highlighted the difficulties of consolidating the 5-Star electorate. Suffice it to say that in 2014, during its second national electoral test (the election for the European Parliament), the Movement suffered a decline of about 3 million votes, mainly because of the abstention rate of 43%. The 2018 general election, however, confirms that, in recent years, the M5S electorate has not only consolidated but has risen from 25.5% to 32.7%, contrary to the predictions of most political commentators. .

It is surprising that this happened despite the authoritarian criteria for the management of its parliamentary groups and the repeated expulsions of deputies and senators for dissensions or (not very serious) offences of all kinds. While the media has amplified each crisis and presented it as the beginning of the end, it turned out that of the forty or so deputies and senators elected on the M5S lists, who had joined other parliamentary groups only one was re-elected (the only one who went to the right, joining the Brothers of Italy, while all the others had chosen the PD or related lists, without success).

## Hostility, proof of merits

In the run-up to the elections of March 4 2018, the attacks on the M5S dramatized the problems of the city of Rome, forgetting that Virginia Raggi, a young 5-Star mayor, had inherited a city ruined by the very bad right and centre-left administrations that have alternated over the last twenty years. Even insignificant episodes, such as a purely procedural transgression in the presentation of signatures on the list of candidates in Palermo, were

presented by the media - but also by a partisan justice system - as a crime. The movement has been constantly blamed for all this ... with the unexpected result of reinforcing the electorate's belief that such hostility could only be proof of its merits.

The last episode was perhaps the one that had a decisive effect on the vote: it took place a few weeks before the election and was supposed to be a decisive blow to the credibility of the M5S. A television investigation by one of Berlusconi's channels wanted to prove that many 5-Star MPs were not paying part of the fund's allocation to subsidize the opening of small businesses. The goal was to undermine the credibility of the movement. In fact, out of a dozen cases, the unpaid portion was almost always modest and justified as an error or a delay in the transfer. But all the media hammered the news and the PD secretary, Matteo Renzi himself, used it in the election campaign, accusing the M5S aggressively.

The result was a deadly boomerang. The difference was clear between the M5S's immediate suspension of offenders, and the PD's tolerance of many of its supporters indicted for much more serious crimes. It was also easy to respond to the attacks by recalling that the fault of the suspended was to touch only too high a part of the wages that the parliamentarians of all other groups quietly put in their pockets. An excellent propagandist effect, because these small deductions from parliamentary fees affect the level of employment insignificantly and it is a very modest aid that is distributed only to certain entrepreneurs, usually to those who have long been part of Confederation of Italian SMEs (Confapri), which includes only a minority of SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises).

However, as the lists were already filed, the suspended were standing. Nine of them were elected ... thanks to the bad electoral law imposing single-member candidatures, wanted and imposed by Renzi. The most striking case was that of the traditionally left-wing Pesaro constituency, which was considered safe by Renzi. One of the suspended candidates, an unknown ,

Andrea Cecconi, who had even given up campaigning actively, defeated the centre-left candidate, minister of the interior and rising star in the PD, Marco Minniti.

In the first commentary on the results, Matteo Renzi spoke in this connection of an absurdity that discredits and delegitimizes the elections, without realizing that this is proof that the electoral mode he imposed is not seen as an opportunity to choose the best candidate, but as a vote for or against the government and the PD.

It must be said that the electoral law is fundamentally ridiculous: apart from single-member constituencies where one more vote is enough to win, voters cannot indicate their preferences and members of partisan lists are automatically elected following a complex calculation of results at the regional level for the Senate and national for the Chamber. The openly avowed purpose of this law was to reduce the parliamentary presence of the M5S - an obvious missed goal - but also to remove from the electorate any possibility of personal choice, making the candidates elected on the basis of the order in which they are placed on the lists by the leadership of their party.

Renzi, his government and the leadership of the DP did not want to see the extent of the electorate's disappointment. Disappointment provoked by the striking contrast between the ceaseless optimistic announcements of so-called conquests and the reality of a country in crisis: its effects on employment, public health, the public school defined as "good" by propaganda, but with a growing malaise of the teaching profession. New military spending - the purchase of F35 fighter-bombers and the so-called "humanitarian" interventions, first in Iraq and then in Niger, without even agreeing with the country's authorities, were deemed incomprehensible and unjustifiable. In addition, there was not the slightest reflection on the resounding failure of the 4 December 2016 referendum, aimed at the suppression of the Senate and several other institutions, which Renzi thought he could win using anti-elite arguments borrowed from the worse repertoire of the first

Beppe Grillo.

In a word, they did not understand that the opposition was strengthened directly in proportion to the repulsive force of the government. The latter could only be maintained by abusing the question of trust in parliament, that is to say only because a large section of elected representatives from all camps were terrified by the idea that its fall would provoke early elections, fearing that they would not be re-elected or even not chosen as candidates.

## **M5S: from 2013 to 2018**

Since its appearance on the political scene in 2013, the M5S has undoubtedly experienced several changes: Beppe Grillo is less present in the foreground, his right arm Gianroberto Casaleggio is dead and was replaced in the role of guarantor by his son David (he controls the Rousseau association and the internet platform for the selection of candidates and votes on possible differences, but seems less present and obviously less prestigious than his father). And new leaders without much experience have appeared. The staggering increase in the number of elected representatives, selected with less stringent criteria than in the past and often almost unknown, has caused unprecedented problems: for example, it is only after the presentation of the candidates that some cases of incompatibility with the regulations have been discovered: membership in Freemasonry or participation, in the past, in municipal councils of various colours.

To guide the 250 new deputies and senators (out of a total of 339 elected) "parliamentary technical courses" are planned, and especially the restoration of the norm which, in 2013, imposed not only silence in front of journalists, but also before colleagues from other parties.

This rule - as was obvious - quickly proved impossible to apply in normal parliamentary life, especially in committee activities. And the ease with which several middle-level



representatives of the movement have become accustomed to communicating their thoughts to the press has ultimately made it difficult to control elected officials. On the other hand, faced with the general imprudence of some turbulent parliamentarians, the group feared incursions of emissaries from other parties with a real "buying campaign", like the one that, in the last legislature, saw the centre-left, or the DP directly, absorb almost all the dissident or punished representatives.

But Grillo's frequent public polemics aiming to change a decision already made by the parliamentary groups have set a dangerous precedent. Moreover, they have prevented the movement from having a coherent tactic against the centre-left, in crisis. For example, during the election of the President of the Republic, the M5S proposed (or made available through its not very transparent computer network), a list of candidates including dignified and undoubtedly left-wing people, such as Gino Strada, the founder of Emergency, the TV journalist Milena Gabanelli, author of many serious investigations, and the lawyer Stefano Rodotà, who has been president of the PDS [Democratic Party of the Left, forerunner of the PD] during his later years. Regarding the latter, Grillo had some illusions, overestimating his radicalism and his distance from the PD. But on the whole it was an intelligent initiative, momentarily defeated by the absolute control by Renzi's supporters of the Democratic Party leadership, which cynically prepared the coup de force of the re-election of Giorgio Napolitano. The initiative had gathered support that could have been used in a next phase.

Instead, shortly thereafter, a modest criticism of Rodotà's M5S in an interview immediately provoked a quick break: it was the first months of the legislature and Grillo's elected officials were more distinguished by their divisions than by their parliamentary activities. In this interview Rodotà suggested to Grillo "a change of pace" to get out of this "click democracy" that does not work when it comes to making decisions in parliament. Words that were not appreciated by the comedian, who took revenge on the internet without

mercy: "Rodotà is a miraculous octogenarian of the Net, thawed from the mausoleum where he was confined by his family, to whom we wish to refund the left". It is obvious that in this way it is difficult to build a stable area of potential allies. Especially if the tactic is only to swing from one position to another, as has happened several times on various issues, and when the polemic of the parliamentary groups against the government and the presidencies of the chambers too often focuses on particular or formal aspects, failing to focus on the heart of the issues and giving undue attention to form (which was typical at the Parliamentary Regulation Seminar).

In recent times - behind the image of "political leader" Luigi Di Maio, who won his Neapolitan constituency swiftly and who has established himself as a "good guy" popular personality repeating reassuring banalities - the M5S has absorbed a number of personalities, who are anything but virgins in politics.

For example, journalist Emilio Carelli, who for twenty years was Director and Information Manager of Silvio Berlusconi's Fininvest, then of a Sky Italy satellite channel, directed by Robert Murdoch. He is also professor of "Information Technology" at the Catholic University of Milan, as well as vice-president of the Italy-USA Foundation and Radio-TV Confindustria [236], etc. In short, he is certainly not only a useful "independent" contributor, so much so that today he appears one of the most strongly tipped to take on the presidency of the Chamber of Deputies. Nothing is decided, but obviously his election would provide a bridge to Berlusconi, worried by the rise of Matteo Salvini and the downsizing of his precious disciple Matteo Renzi.

The Venetian entrepreneur Massimo Colomban (who was an councillor in Rome with Virginia Raggi), and MEP David Borrelli, are also part of the lobby pushing for an agreement with the centre right. They were both linked to founder Gianroberto Casaleggio and are currently being courted by Donald Trump's former advisor, Steve Bannon, who would like to build a right-wing bloc in Europe.

But an agreement between the M5S and the Lega will not be easy, although many would like it (including a large part of the majority of PDs). The programme of the M5S, despite the ambiguity of certain points and the difficulty of putting them into practice, is more to the left, even if it is confused. The formulations on immigration are very different from those of the Lega. It brings together those of the PD on the need to attack the "the migration business" and that of "international cooperation also aiming at the conclusion of repatriation treaties", with the target of "10,000 new recruits in the territorial commissions to decide, in one month, like in other European countries, whether a migrant has the right to stay in Italy or not".

There were also exchanges of courtesies with several prelates of the Vatican, including Cardinal Gualtiero Bassetti, president of the Italian Episcopal Conference, who with his usual diplomacy showed an openness to a government that would take care that "in social doctrine of the Church we call the common good," as well as the poor. In fact, this was for him an M5S government supported by a part of the PD. While the electoral campaign was in full swing, the candidate for the post of Prime Minister of M5S, Luigi Di Maio, as a good Neapolitan, had been photographed while kissing the reliquary with the liquefied blood of San Gennaro carried by the cardinal Crescenzo Sepe, while many Catholic leaders openly expressed their dissatisfaction at the ostentatious oath of Matteo Salvini with a rosary ... [237] But Di Maio did not only ask for help to San Gennaro. As they say in Rome, he made "the tour of the seven churches" - meeting with Confindustria, the City of London, the European Union ... - offering them guarantees and obtaining a benevolent expectation.

And he also made a sign to NATO. At a press conference on 13 March at the Foreign Press Association, Di Maio answered an Egyptian journalist who was questioning him about foreign policy, especially the Palestinian question, relations with Libya, Syria and the United States. Egypt: "[Our] line does not tend to isolate Italy, our

country has strong international relations with its allies, Italy will remain allied with the West, within NATO and in the EU, with the ambition to change some things that do not work." [238]

## A government, to do what?

It is too early to know if the half-victory won on March 4 will allow the M5S to form a government. [239] Having not gathered the necessary seats to govern alone, it will have to rely on others, whose votes will obviously weigh in the parliamentary debate on the DEF (the economic and financial document that summarizes the government's economic plans for the next three years), which will set the lines for the future government.

After an election campaign under the banner of the possibility of governing and the "end of the era of opposition", the movement must try everything to form a government, because if it did not succeed, it would run the risk of becoming unconvincing and not benefit from its best moment.

But a possible government of Maio would anyway be "provisional": within a year there will be the dangerous step of verification by the European elections, which means a year of permanent electoral campaign, with many enemies on the warpath, ready to seize on the slightest mistake. And who will all benefit from a likely disappointment of many who hope for the guaranteed income promised by M5S - the main driving force of its success in the southern regions affected by long-term unemployment.

The precedent is the true media guerrilla campaign that harassed Virginia Raggi M5S mayor of Rome, at every step from her election for her modest or non-existent mistakes. This has already led to a limited drop in M5S votes during the renewal of the council of one of the Roman municipalities, as well as in the 4

March elections in most of the capital's urban territory.

Faced with such a close election, the M5S could lose the votes of those who believe that the realization of its guaranteed income proposal will be quick and easy. [240] In addition, this promise was formulated ambiguously, forgetting to explain in the propaganda that the 780 euros promised as "citizen income" would be removed in case of refusal of the first three job offers ... And without mentioning that such an income would face the European dictates and the resistance of the state apparatus.

The same goes for the "400 useless laws" to be eliminated. How could even one tenth be abrogated in a single year? In addition, it was already a propaganda theme of the Lega: one of its representatives, Roberto Calderoli, Minister of "bureaucratic simplification" in a Berlusconi government, was filmed by television while he threw in the fire of entire collections of laws ... but they all survived this symbolic pyre!

After a long silence, Beppe Grillo intervened on his blog giving movement a mischievous but effective definition: "The species that survives is not the strongest, but the one that adapts better. Then we will be like Christian democracy, a little right, a little left and a little centre, able to adapt to everything, so we will always win the climate, the environment, on earth." Grillo thus defined the political strategy that led the 5-Star movement to become the party for which Italians voted the most in the 4 March elections.

But to be able to govern, it must think about who will give it the necessary votes. It is logical to think of the DP, because of the greater affinity of the programs which propose widely propagandist objectives and without precise indications on how to finance them. Indeed, the extreme generality of the M5S program in terms of taxation ("Less taxes, more quality of life", without even indicating the

reduction of income tax rates) and even more in terms of reducing wastage and costs, suggests that all the beautiful statements are unachievable in a short time.

This is particularly the case with health care "who cares for you" and "an increase in resources for public health and a substantial reduction in waiting lists for all medical examinations". The deliberate abandoning of the public health service, afflicted among others by a serious lack of medical staff, means that even the best solution requires not only a long period of implementation, but serious funding problems.

The same is true for "quick, just and effective justice", which should take the form of a "reducing the length of trials" and at the same time be based on "the certainty of trial and punishment". This is impossible without a radical reform that cancels some of the sentences that unnecessarily fill the prisons and without substantial increase in judicial jobs and courts.

And there is a problem: who can create in a single year a force able to mobilize in defence of the the first achievements that, if they affect specific interests, will trigger strong opposition? Unlike the Lega and the PD, the M5S has no territorial structure and there is a dramatic lack of competent staff (it recruits quickly in all directions with often counterproductive results). It must absolutely conclude something in a short period of time, otherwise it will not be able to govern its electorate and will face the unleashing of hostile media campaigns (and judicial), similar to the one that paralysed day after day the Raggi mayoralty in Rome.

This could lead to a serious decline in just one year, in the European elections.

*Recanati,*

13 March 2018

# Women challenge religious power

**7 May 2018, by Socialist Solidarity with Iranian Workers**

According to the legislation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the judge can inflict on a woman appearing in public without a hijab a symbolic fine of the order of 10 euros, or a prison sentence ranging from ten days to two months.

The 31-year-old mother of a 19-month-old child was arrested immediately and transferred to Evin Prison. She was finally released a month later as a result of the efforts of human rights activist Nasrin Sotoudeh, who herself spent three years in prison between 2010 and 2013. But she had to pay a bail bond of an amount equivalent to 50 times the minimum monthly salary.

This heroic act was taken up by other women in the capital, then in other cities.

The second woman who dared to remove her veil is called Nargues Hosseini. Aged 32, and originally from central Iran, she is a master student in sociology. She was also arrested and imprisoned in Ghartchak Prison, which is well known for its poor sanitary conditions. The same lawyer agreed to defend her and in particular stated that, even if she had the means to do so, her client would refuse to pay the bail bond of an amount equivalent to 90,000 euros which was demanded from her. According to her lawyer, Nargues Hosseini is accused of drug

use and "incitement to corruption", which in Iran is equivalent to the opening of a brothel! The invention of accusations of this kind is not new, because the regime is expert in this domain.

Other women in Tehran and other cities have broken the same ban. They also appeared in public without a headscarf, and with a white cloth at the end of a pole. According to the Iranian police, by February 1st 29 women had been arrested (information confirmed by Amnesty International).

A Persian-speaking radio station based in the Netherlands interviewed one of the participants in this movement: "When I came out of my house to get up on this bench, my heart was beating very hard. Of course I was scared, because I did not know what would happen to me. When I arrived, I put my headscarf on the pole and the moment was very strong. On January 29th, she stayed on the bench for 30 minutes. She says, among other things, "My act is not just about taking off my veil. When I think carefully, I find that a state that does not respect the way I want to dress and intervenes in all our personal choices, public, social and political, is a dictatorship, the worst of dictatorships."

This bold new way of publicly defying the regime is not limited to young women. For example, although the temperature was freezing, we saw a very old woman with a hunched back hoist herself up with her cane and make the same gesture.

All these courageous acts are a symbol of the refusal of many Iranian women to continue to endure what women have suffered for nearly 40 years.

Just before the gesture of Vida Movahed, this previously unknown woman, the white flag was certainly the sign and symbol of peace, but also of surrender and capitulation. From now on, it also means insubordination, challenge, disobedience and daring.

It should be noted that abroad, attempts have of course been made to attempt to appropriate such heroic deeds. This is particularly the case of a journalist of Iranian origin, formerly a "reformer", who campaigns on Voice of America [241] for the restoration of the Shah monarchy, swept away by the revolution of 1979.

This article was published in French by *L'Anticapitaliste*, weekly paper of the NPA in France, issue 648, February 2018, taken from the site [Socialist Solidarity with Iranian Workers](#).

# An Indigenous Reconstruction in Brazil

**6 May 2018, by Sonia Guajajara**

518 years ago, the territory now known as Brazil was invaded by a Portuguese fleet and colonized. Many of the indigenous peoples who

inhabited the land died from diseases, were killed, or enslaved. The indigenous population was reduced to less than a million, and their land was

taken away and exploited. These land seizures didn't just effect insurmountable damage to the native ecosystem; they also, by concentrating

property in the hands of a very few, wrote inequality into the foundations of modern Brazil.

This is why, more than five centuries later, Sônia Guajajara, a Guajajara indigenous woman from northeast Brazil's Arariboia region, says her pre-candidacy for the presidency in this year's elections represents a paradigm shift. Brazil's indigenous population may number less than a million in a population of over two hundred million, but their political struggle has reached a strength and visibility in recent years that makes it hard to deny their importance in struggles over class, imperialism, and financial capital. Their struggle is an urgent one; in 2016 alone, 118 indigenous people were murdered. These assassinations tend to be connected to the continued attempts by agribusiness to push onto indigenous land, though they are also rooted in racism.

Guajajara, who has been a member of the Socialism and Freedom Party (PSOL) since 2011, will formally run as PSOL's vice-presidential candidate alongside Guilherme Boulos of the Homeless Workers' Movement (MTST). However, the party and the campaign have pushed for a "co-candidacy" arrangement in place of the traditional presidential/vice-presidential ticket. In this way, they're hoping to dispute the hierarchy of the traditional ticket and promote an equal, three-way alliance between the PSOL, indigenous peoples, and the MTST.

A specialist in linguistics, a mother of three, and the best-known indigenous leader at home and abroad, she forms part of the coordination of Brazil's most notable indigenous organization, the National Articulation of the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (APIB).

Both Guajajara and Boulos present a leftist political project that is distinct from the one carried out by Workers' Party (PT) presidents Lula and Dilma Rousseff; in fact, they formed the leftist opposition during the PT governments. Nevertheless, in today's climate, they have stood in solidarity against the political-judicial persecution of Lula and the increasingly violent expressions of

"(anti-petismo}" (anti-PT sentiment) in Brazil.

In this exclusive interview with Jacobin, Guajajara speaks about the current state of indigenous struggles in Brazil, the state of environmental politics, the relationship between indigenous organizing and the Left, and the meaning of her presidential candidacy with PSOL.

**SF: Today, a central part of the indigenous struggle in Brazil is about land rights. But you often place this struggle in the context of the fight against racism, and as part of a centuries-old struggle for indigenous people's right to exist. Can you speak more about that?**

SG :Yes, we're also fighting racism, especially institutional racism. In recent years, it's proliferated, and become more visible. For us, if we overcome these [barriers] we can finally enter other spaces too. If we have our lands, we'll have a fulfilled life, because it's through the land that you can exercise your citizenship as an indigenous people. To be able to live together with our people and with nature itself guarantees our culture, our traditions, our rituals.

[Today's] violence has arisen from the conflicts over land. The agribusiness sectors, animal farming, land and housing speculation; they want to access indigenous territories, leading to a lot of conflict and murders. And there's the racism, which is connected to the speeches made by public personalities, by conservative congressmen, by fascists. They've been saying [racist] things a lot, helping society feel backed up to be publicly aggressive towards others. This has intensified.

**SF: So you'd say that the racist discourse employed by public personalities and congressmen has worsened in the recent period?**

SG : It has worsened a lot. We've always felt a certain degree of indifference among Brazilians towards indigenous people. But it was a matter of ignoring us. It's a minority of society that knows about the existence of indigenous people in our country. They know that originally [during

colonization] there were indigenous people in Brazil, but they don't know about our contemporary existence.

In the last few years, indifference and ignorance has decreased. But they also began to attack us. Today there are attacks through social media, but also violent attacks leading to deaths. Last year there were a lot of deaths. In the south, Victor Kaingang was decapitated in his mother's arms. This year there was a Xocling teacher in Santa Catarina. There was a Guarani in Rio de Janeiro, a Tapirapé in Mato Grosso, and a Tremembé in Fortaleza. These four murders happened all in the first month of the year. This racism has become very evident, in a very brutal way. It's not just talk anymore, they're killing us.

**SF: Would you say that these racist agitators are confronted more often by indigenous communities now? Are indigenous communities more organized now, more capable of voicing themselves against the structure of white supremacy in Brazil?**

SG :We've always been around and doing our struggle, resisting to protect our territories. Our struggle against mega-projects and the current economic development model. For 518 years we've gone about our struggle to survive. The struggle to exist is something we have to undertake every day, day by day. But now we are mobilizing in a more systematic way. We've increased our mobilizations in Brasília and connected them to other regional struggles. If we go and have a big mobilization in Brasília, we'll do it at the same time in other states. If we call people to stop some anti-indigenous measure at the capital, we call and people come. APIB today has a good level of visibility, and it's very broad, beyond the national level.

We've managed to cross borders, denounce what's going on internationally too. We've been denouncing products produced in unsettled indigenous territories and conflict areas, and called for the international boycott of these products. We've been denouncing ecocide, like what happened at Rio Doce and is now happening at Bacarena, Belo Monte.

We continue to reference Belo Monte as an attack against indigenous peoples, because today we're already suffering its consequences. The consequences are real and we show them as negative examples of hydrodams. I think that this has impacted the legal structures and the agribusiness sectors that we're confronting.

Even if the public sees us as "just" the indigenous peoples, our struggle isn't small. We're really confronting the Brazilian state, its negligence, its denial of rights. To do this we have to confront the agribusiness owners, the business elite, the media itself, the traditional press. Social media has really helped us with this. Today we don't need traditional media as much to have the reach we do. All of this is going to reach the ears of the people. This growing visibility is definitely bothering those in power a bit more.

**SF: Is there a difference between when indigenous issues were translated through a white lens, as with the traditional media, and now, when it can be your voice directly?**

SG: It makes a difference. In the traditional press we say things, and they cut and edit to take away what's not in their interest or what could hurt their allies. Sometimes what we say gets taken out of context and obtains a different meaning. Sometimes what we say in the traditional media ends up interpreted against ourselves. It's very dangerous depending on who interviews you.

**SF: How have you and APIB been received internationally? How do they react to the stories you tell? Are the reactions different from the ones you get when trying to be heard in Brazil?**

SG: Here our ability to denounce things and to speak out is still very restricted. But today we're getting more visibility. Some of it is negative visibility, related to discrimination and hatred. But among social movements, the understanding of the importance of indigenous struggles "how they impact us, the environment, and life in general" is growing.

But it's still difficult to get people to understand the meaning of being indigenous. Most people can't translate it, they look at us as the "other." People make some room for the "Indian" to speak, but most of the time we're just invited to sing and dance; as exotic beings to embellish the place. So we feel that even as social movements try to include us, they still end up expressing a certain kind of prejudice.

**SF: Did the Left forget about the indigenous people for some time?**

SG: It did, it totally did. It isolated us. They'd call us to go to certain places, it looked good, we took pictures, they could say they were supporting us. But it was very isolated in general. I think that one way we found to break through this was to get closer, as APIB, to artists and celebrities. They have a different audience, sometimes shared with our own, but it's way broader. The singers, actresses, they'd come closer and understand our cause; the importance of the territories, of the forest, ecosystems like the Cerrado. How protecting these territories would also protect the water. The discussion worldwide about climate change is also important because it relates to things that us as indigenous peoples have been saying all along.

**SF: So people who wouldn't usually listen to indigenous peoples suddenly become interested when it's coming from a celebrity's mouth?**

SG: People don't want to listen to us. They don't want to understand. When we get an artist to say it, then they go "Wow, that guy said this. He supported it!" It's almost as if we get credibility through it.

**SF: This reminds me of the response to the mobilizations against the Belo Monte dam. That dam was a longtime project that went through different phases and under different names, depending on the government behind it. And through all those phases, the indigenous resistance was always there. But the visibility of the resistance depended on others embracing it, no?**

SG: Yes, [the Belo Monte project] used to be called Karara. And it's curious that people only remember the Belo Monte struggle, because there were many other struggles, that were just as important, that didn't reach the same level of visibility. The biggest struggles "those that reached a high level of visibility and achieved international support" were Belo Monte and Raposa Serra do Sol [an indigenous reservation that landowners tried to reclaim]. Raposa Serra do Sol we won; we got our land settlement. Belo Monte we lost, and now we have Belo Monte stuck in our throats.

In 1989, under a right-wing "I'd say far-right" government, we stopped the Belo Monte dam project. This time was under a leftist government [that of the Workers' Party (PT)] but we couldn't stop the project. It went through anyway and we had to swallow it. It's really complicated when you see so many political contradictions. [With these contradictions] we can't really tell which noise we have to make to be effective.

**SF: What was the logic behind the PT pushing through with a project like this?**

SG: In the beginning we had a guarantee by the government that they wouldn't just go ahead with Belo Monte. They were going to consult us. But later [the attitude was] it happens, or it happens. There wasn't another option. It was a project seen as very important for the country, for the nation, and they couldn't go back on it. It was, in a way, "Well, you don't matter. Whatever the consequences, we'll go through with it." It was very, very bad what happened in the end with the construction of the Belo Monte dam.

**SF: On the one hand, there's the developmentalist view that pushes projects like the Belo Monte dam and views indigenous people as standing in the way of progress. On the other, there are environmentalists that value indigenous people for your role in conservation but their support stops there. How do you relate to these environmentalist groups?**



SG: There are a lot of environmental institutes that say they support us, that they're with us, but they only really care about preserving a piece of forest so it remains intact. They stand up for the environment but sometimes don't care about who's in there; the people, their social rights. It's like only the environmental agenda matters.

In recent years this has improved, and they're finally understanding that to move forward with the environmental struggle, you can't be disconnected from the indigenous struggle. You have to fight for indigenous rights, and if you fight for indigenous rights, one of the results, because of our way of life, will be environmental preservation.

[The improved relationship with environmental groups] has given us a jump in visibility. So much that last year, through APIB, I was at Rock in Rio to send a message to the whole world about the rights violations in the Amazon. I also denounced the alliance between economic power and political power in Brazil, and called for land settlements.

This also means that in the capital, the annoyance with us has grown. The landowning representatives in Congress, the agribusiness, they're more worried. They realized that we gained some strength due to this web of support with the environmentalists and the artists. So they began to attack us more and incite more violence against us.

**SF: Given this, is the Left itself becoming more aware? Is it waking up to the indigenous demands? Because on the other side, we can see that the Right is also trying to get some indigenous peoples on their side.**

SG: Right-wing politicians pretend they're good guys, they get close, and they co-opt leadership by promising that they'll solve some of our crucial problems. They try to buy [indigenous] leadership out with small things or even by outright fooling them. Then they go and publicize that they have indigenous support for their own agenda. This is bad because it misleads the public about the

positions defended by the indigenous peoples. The indigenous movement is invested in preventing this kind of co-optation, but we can't fix it everywhere because everyone is in need right now. We need social policies and support, so people are ready to believe the politicians that offer them that.

On the other hand, the Left is now realizing it needs to value us more. We have a new way of participating in the political parties now, that goes beyond us just being members.

**SF: Is the Left finally seeing you as not just indigenous leadership but as political leadership in general?**

SG: Yes. It's important for us to be there not just for the photo ops; but also to overcome our underrepresentation in political and institutional spaces. It's a beginning. We're trying to put forward more indigenous candidates and get the parties to support them. It's complicated because the parties have difficulty with welcoming new leadership — whether they're indigenous or not. But it's harder when they're indigenous. There's an opening now, though.

**SF: You're currently a pre-candidate for the presidency Brazil through PSOL, together with Guilherme Boulos in a co-candidacy arrangement. Does this signal a realization within PSOL that to go forward with the anticapitalist struggle, you have to bring in different types of knowledge from different social movements?**

SG: Yes, and the recent discussion around global warming has favored this exchange. The whole world is seeking solutions, and in this context, there's no way of denying indigenous peoples. If you compare our way of life to any other, ours is the way that preserves the most, that takes care of nature the most. It's the way that avoids emissions. So there's no way you can ignore ancient knowledge and the traditional, indigenous way of living.

This helped to push people, and the party itself, to understand that as

indigenous people we're not just fighting for ourselves, but can contribute a lot. The Paris Accord helped to promote [this idea], that we need to value scientific knowledge but also include traditional knowledges by first nations and indigenous peoples. Still, we have to fight to define how this recognition should happen in practice. We don't want that acknowledgement to mean commodification of the places we live in and defend.

**SF: One of the themes of your campaign is "Brazil, 518 years later," referencing the start of colonization and the long history of indigenous struggle. Is this a way of reclaiming history from a dominant narrative?**

SG: In Brazil, they've erased this genocide from the country's history. They talk about the "discovery" of Brazil by [Portuguese explorer] Pedro Álvares Cabral and then skip to us fighting for our land settlements today. The five hundred years in between is absolutely annulled. The history books still treat us like the ancient indigenous peoples that Cabral encountered, who were exotic and walked around naked and wore feathers everywhere. They don't really talk about the struggles and the resistance.

And then people, based on this, turn to us and ask "Are you a real Indian?" — I hear that every day. What do you mean by real? I'm real, I'm here. But people express ignorance about what it is to be indigenous. They think that if you're in the city, you speak Portuguese, and you use [modern products], then all of sudden you can't be indigenous anymore. Either you're stuck in the forest, never leaving, or you're not an Indian anymore.

The rest of our history — the killing, the genocide, the sexual violence against indigenous women — people just don't think about it. Sometimes you even hear people say proudly that they descend from indigenous peoples because their grandmother was "captured with a lasso." They don't connect this with the violence their grandmother and their great-grandmother suffered. And it's the same thing for black people in Brazil.

That's why one of our goals is to fight for visibility, so that they know what really happened and that our existence today is the result of a lot of resistance. So to say "518 years later" is powerful because it carries a lot of history, a history that isn't really told.

**SF: Do you think being a pre-**

**candidate to the presidency of Brazil, as an indigenous leader, will make people take notice of how your politics is important for changing society?**

SG: I think so. Even those who didn't recognize us before have to really see

us now. They have to understand that we're fighting for the highest institutional position of power. This is big. We're there not just to represent the indigenous and environmental struggles, but also the reconstruction of society that the world needs.

[Jacobin](#)

# The Battle of Marawi Is Not Over

5 May 2018, by **Nina Trige Andersen**

The surprisingly protracted and intense urban war that erupted between government forces and Islamist rebels in the southern Philippines in May 2017 has created a displacement crisis in the area. After five months of armed clashes and air strikes, the Islamic City of Marawi (more commonly known simply as Marawi) was practically turned into a ghost town; more than 600,000 people sought refuge in neighboring cities. From late 2017 on, people have slowly started returning to Marawi, but at least 50,000 are still internally displaced.

The small township of Saguiran in the outskirts of Marawi has a population of 3,244. Its evacuation center, as of mid-February 2018, was still hosting 187 displaced families, totaling more than 1,000 people. Many of them are women and children, including infants. Noraimah M. Moti, a volunteer in the evacuation center since the beginning, says that previously there were almost twice as many evacuees. The center sometimes receives supplies from government agencies or NGOs, but they never know when the next shipment will arrive.

"What we lack most are diapers, milk and other things for infants," said Moti, while surrounded by inhabitants of the center. The remaining families all share one basic condition: Their homes are in the so-called Ground Zero, which remains closed to the public.

Living on the cement floor under the rusty tin roof of what used to be a gym court, the families' makeshift homes are constructed from plastic, cardboard, cloth, and plywood pieces, separating their small spaces from one another. Some have set up sari-sari (convenience) stores in an attempt to generate income, but potential customers naturally do not have much money to spend after having lived like this for now nine months.

"We have no news of when we can return. We heard from some civilians who managed to enter Ground Zero that our house is still standing, but everything has been looted," says Aisah Pandariga. She believes both Maute rebels and military soldiers were responsible for looting the home that has been in her family for generations.

Military airstrikes have transformed what was once the pride of Muslim Mindanao — the historic center of Marawi — into rubble. The military says they are clearing the area of unexploded devices, preparing for reconstruction, but few people know what goes on inside Ground Zero and the official information coming out is scarce.

On January 30, President Rodrigo Duterte inaugurated the construction of a second military camp inside Marawi, which infuriated local Maranaos, the Muslim tribe that constitutes the majority population in the area. There are three main reasons for the anger: The camp

construction will cause further displacement; it will mean allocating money for military structures rather than rebuilding homes; and it will expand the military presence in Marawi — already home to the controversial Camp Ranao — and thus enhance the feeling that not only are Maranaos denied their decades-long claim for autonomy, they are now practically under occupation.

The entire island of Mindanao, with a population of around 20 million, is still under martial law, declared in the early days of the Marawi siege and recently prolonged until the end of 2018. In the meantime, resentment against the government's handling of the crisis might get out of control. That is the concern expressed among Muslims as well as Christians in Marawi and the neighboring Christian-dominated Iligan City.

"We are fearing an attack here in Iligan," says Rizalina G. Amesola, who heads the NGO Ranao Women and Children Resource Center Inc. (RWCAC). "We don't know if the attack could be from rebels or orchestrated by military — to legitimize the extension of Martial Law — but people are concerned, as there seems to be no real solutions, only continued militarization."

Since the beginning of the Marawi siege, RWCAC has participated in the Mindanao Humanitarian Action Network (MIHAND) program for distributing relief to displaced persons. RWCAC also set up their own

program providing trauma counselling for adults and children in the evacuation centers of Iligan, of which four out of eight are still operating. However, the city government plans to phase out the evacuation centers by February 28, despite the fact that only Ground Zero residents are left, and they have no place to go.

Moumina Sheryne L. Domadalug, a young Maranao lawyer based in Iligan City, is also concerned.

“Setting up another military camp in Marawi is dangerous. The government has to be very cautious, or our *maratabat* will force a reaction,” she says, referring to the Maranao concept of honor.

Though she knows people from her own generation who have joined the Maute group, she finds the claims that Maute had wide local support doubtful. She does, however, fear that the current situation might cause radicalization.

“We know very well what military camps in a civilian area means: The presence of soldiers, predominantly male, and in Marawi their contact will be primarily with women, who in Maranao culture are the ones working in stores and with laundry,” Domadalug says.

“How do you think this situation will be received by Maranao men? Militarization might mean peace right now, but how long? This is the perfect recruitment argument for groups like Maute. By setting up this camp rather

than rebuilding the city, they will have offended us in the worst possible way.”

The lawyer says that ignorance about Maranao culture from the Christian-dominated and Manila-centered Philippine public has fueled many myths about the Islamic City of Marawi in general and the Marawi crisis in particular. One sensationalized example relates to the underground tunnel discovered by the military when driving rebels out from the historic city center. The tunnels sparked headlines such as “Tunnels reveal terrorists’ ratlike tactics” (from the *Philippine Inquirer*).

The existence of tunnels, which also held weapons, food, valuables, and money, was taken as proof that the Maute attempt to take over Marawi had been planned for years under local protection. Though the Maute group certainly made use of the tunnels, they were never meant for them, according to Domadalug.

“It’s not something to be proud of, because it speaks also of the fault of our people, but those tunnels were built generations ago to be used in *rido*, which is why people keep weapons there,” she says. *Rido* is a Maranao tradition of blood feuds among clans.

“And the war erupted during Ramadan, which is why the tunnels held food,” Domadalug continues. “We may be fasting during the day, but after sunset we eat even more, so of course we have storage. And the money and valuables ” - here

Domadalug cannot help laughing – “Well, we are Muslim, banks are against our beliefs! Even I, an educated lawyer, try to avoid them. So where else would we put our money but in the tunnels?”

In the evacuation centers, the sentiment so far is predominantly despair, especially among those in Iligan City who might soon have to relocate to yet another cardboard box home on the outskirts of Marawi.

Omar Dimaporo is the leader of the cluster of displaced Maranaos living in Buru-un Fisheries evacuation center in Iligan City. He got trapped for ten days in what is now Ground Zero, because he went home to get some things after having escorted his wife and children out of the city. He ended up fleeing by foot and empty-handed. He is worried that there are still armed rebels in Marawi and does not believe the promises of either the military or the national or local government.

“My dream is for a new Marawi with peace, work, and shelter,” Dimaporo says. “With the help of Allah, we can have that.” Asked who besides Allah might be able to assist, he is quiet for a while.

“We hope for someone from outside to help,” Dimaporo finally replies, “and whatever help it might be, we hope it will be given directly to the people. We cannot trust the authorities”

February 17, 2018

[The Diplomat](#)

## After the earthquake, the social quake

4 May 2018, by **Houshang Sepehr**

The scope and intensity of this movement, the rapid adoption of slogans against the government and the autocratic political system surprised the Iranian authorities and Western observers. Yet this eruption was preceded by months of protests

by workers against job cuts, plant closures and unpaid wages and benefits. According to government sources, 21 people died and about 2,000 were arrested in clashes between protesters and police.

From the beginning of the movement, the government reduced, and even blocked, the applications of Telegram and Instagram to remove information on future events and the size of the movement.

The scale and intensity of the demonstrations shook the Iranian bourgeois-clerical regime and its rival factions were urged to come together to suppress the movement. During the weekend of December 30 and 31, 2017, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani declared that Iranians had the right to demonstrate peacefully and that his government would soon take steps to address the socio-economic demands of the protesters, adding: "We do not have a bigger challenge than unemployment". But government ministers and security agencies swore to eradicate the protest movement, with the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution declaring themselves ready to use an "iron fist".

The leaders of the regime - from Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to General Sanayee, to the former "reformist" president and ally of the 2009 movement, Mohammad Khatami - "justified" their brutal repression with false allegations accusing protesters of being manipulated by Washington and its regional allies, Israel and Saudi Arabia, as part of an incendiary campaign to bring about regime change in Tehran.

But this wave of protests has a class character quite different from that of 2009 under the banner of the so-called "green movement". In 2009 the protest movement against the fraudulent re-election of former ultra-conservative President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was violently repressed.

On the basis of the best available reports that have filtered through censorship by the Iranian regime or appeared in the Western media, it is obvious that this wave of protests is, basically, an incipient rebellion of the working class. Certainly, the demonstrations are socially heterogeneous and there is a lot of political confusion among the participants. Moreover, as might be expected, monarchists and other right-wing elements allied with imperialism seek to divert it to their advantage.

But the demonstrations, although not a mass movement, were mainly composed of workers, the poor, the unemployed, the young and poor women. They express deep-seated

class anger in a country where 3.2 million people, or 12.7% of the workforce, are officially unemployed. The youth unemployment rate is around 40%, and over 50% live in poverty. However, according to the World Wealth and Income Database, 1% of the wealthiest Iranians own 16.3% of wealth, the equivalent of 50% of the population. The richest 10% hold 48.5% of the national wealth (based on 2013 data).

## **Rise of the opposition of the working class**

There is no smoke without fire. The wave of protest in early January broke out after months evidence of labour unrest and popular demonstrations, especially against job cuts, non-payment of salaries, and the indifference of the authorities to the millions of savers ruined by the fraudulent collapse of many unregulated financial institutions. The total abandonment of the victims of the recent deadly earthquakes as well as the astronomical corruption had an important role in triggering this movement. In September 2017, for example, in Arak, workers at two factories which were privatised in the 2000s clashed with police for two days, after security forces intervened to disperse protesters against non-payment of wages. According to a report by the Agence France-Presse, "minor protests began to stir in the weeks leading up to the current unrest", with "hundreds of oil workers and truckers protesting the late payment of wages, tractor manufacturers in Tabriz opposing the closure of their factory, and Tehran tire workers demanding payment of wages". These protests were treated with indifference by the Western media, while the Iranian authorities did their best to hide them.

In the days leading up to the January protests, an intense and widespread debate raged on social media about growing social inequities. The trigger for this wave of anger was the release of the government's latest austerity budget. It provided for a 50% increase in the price of gasoline, while further

reducing energy price subsidies. Subsidies for basic food and essential services were abolished between 2010 and 2014, during the presidencies of Ahmadinejad and Rouhani.

The 2009 movement was centred almost exclusively in Tehran, particularly in its richest neighbourhoods in the north. On the other hand, the January protests were much wider geographically. Also affected were the smaller and poorer cities that formed the political base of Ahmadinejad and the so-called "hard" faction of the regime's political elite, which combines Shiite orthodoxy with populist calls to the plebeian elements of the regime.

Even more significantly, and unlike the 2009 movement, this mobilization was motivated by opposition to social inequalities. The "Greens", who overwhelmingly supported Rouhani's election in 2013 and his re-election last May, avoided these protests. Prominent representatives of the "Greens" expressed their deep concern about the "leaderless", "violent and undemocratic" demonstrations! For their part, the protesters did not appeal to the key Green leaders and the defeated presidential candidates in 2009, Mir Hossein Moussavi and Mehdi Karroubi, still under house arrest. Instead, they put forward slogans hostile to the clerical-capitalist regime as a whole.

## **Rouhani's rapprochement with Washington and austerity**

The acute social crisis in Iran is the product of economic and military-strategic pressure from the United States, as well as economic sanctions, the global economic crisis and, above all, the collapse of world oil prices, with the failure of neoliberal economic policies and especially the brutal austerity measures that Rouhani has put in place in order to woo Western investment. For years Rouhani, following his political mentor, the late President Hashemi Rafsanjani, has

been the advocate of rapprochement with Western imperialist powers. In 2013, by highlighting the socially explosive consequences of US and European economic sanctions on Iran, they convinced Ayatollah Khamenei and other key elements of the regime of the need for a change of course. Hence a new attempt at compromise with Washington and the European Union.

As in the case of the leaders of the Green movement, four years earlier, this policy was linked to a new attempt to eliminate what was left of the social concessions made to the working class following the 1979 Revolution. Over the last four years, the Rouhani government has continued privatization and deregulation, as Ahamadinejad did earlier. It has followed the IMF's prescriptions for austerity and also redesigned the rules governing oil concessions to seduce the European and American oil giants. In the end, in January 2016, the most severe US and European sanctions were lifted or suspended in exchange for the dismantling by Teheran of a large part of its nuclear programme. But to the extent that the lifting of sanctions has stimulated the economy, the advantages have almost exclusively benefited the most privileged layers of the population. The response from Rouhani, as witnessed by the last budget, has been to accentuate austerity for the masses, while increasing the budgets of the religious institutions and the clergy.

## **A new stage of the struggle**

The demonstrations of the first week of January herald a new stage in the class struggle in Iran. Across the

Middle East, including Israel, there are signs of growing opposition from the working class. The critical question is the struggle to arm the nascent workers' opposition with an internationalist socialist strategy. Iranian workers and young people must fight for the mobilization of the working class as an independent political force, in opposition to imperialism and all the factions of the national bourgeoisie.

All right-wing forces advocating orientation towards Washington and/or the other imperialist powers within the anti-government movement must be combated and politically isolated. It is imperialism that has stifled the democratic and social aspirations of the peoples of the Middle East over the last century. It is the imperialist powers that have devastated the region for a quarter of a century of war, and which today threaten to plunge the Iranian people and the entire region into an even more bloody conflagration.

The Iranian bourgeoisie, as evidenced by more than a century of history since the constitutional revolution of 1906, is totally incapable of establishing a true democracy and freeing itself from imperialism. For this would require a revolutionary mobilization of the masses of a magnitude that would jeopardize the interests and class ambitions of the bourgeoisie.

Workers and young people should also reject those who say that the rise of the masses would solve everything, because in reality they denigrate the struggle for a revolutionary program and its leadership. Lessons must be learned from history, including the "Arab Spring" of 2011 and the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

The Iranian revolution of 1979, which 40 years ago overthrew the tyrannical regime of the US-sponsored Shah, was a massive, anti-imperialist social explosion. And it was the working class that had dealt the fatal blow. It was a growing wave of political strikes that broke the back of the Shah regime. And in the months that followed, the workers seized the factories, putting them under the control of the workers' councils. But the working class was without an independent class organization and was politically subordinated to the Stalinist Tudeh party, as well as to various petty-bourgeois left-wing forces. Unfortunately, most of these organizations rallied behind the so-called anti-imperialist wing of the national bourgeoisie led by Ayatollah Khomeini and the Shiite clergy. Having taken control of the state apparatus, they brutally repressed all independent forms of expression and class organization. They stabilized the capitalist order within the framework of a new theocratic system.

Today, in Iran, a rise of the working class can and must settle accounts with the Islamic political system, the Iranian bourgeoisie as a whole and imperialism, but on the condition of being part of the prospect of an international socialist revolution.

The task of revolutionary socialists is to turn towards this movement and to fight to arm the international working class with an understanding of the logic of its needs, aspirations and struggles. Capitalism is incompatible with the needs of society. The workers, the class that produces the wealth of the world, must unite their struggles across borders and continents to establish the political power of the workers, to undertake the socialist reorganization of society and to end the imperialist war.

## **Oppose the Continuous and Deadly Repression of Palestinians in Gaza**



# 3 May 2018

To date, there have been four mass rallies as part of the Great March of Return series of protests by Palestinians that began on March 30, 2018. Each protest has been met with deadly force by the Israeli military, which has murdered 40 Palestinians in Gaza since 30 March. Thirty-one of those killed, including four children and a journalist, were fatally wounded during protests. More than 1,600 other Palestinians have been shot with live ammunition that has caused what doctors are calling “horrific injuries” likely to leave many of them with permanent disabilities. At the same time, no death occurred on the side of the Israeli occupier. [242]

Videos show unarmed Palestinians fleeing Israeli occupation forces during protests and being shot in the head by Israeli snipers. In a radio interview for example, an Israeli Brigadier-General (Reserve) Zvika Fogel actually confirmed that when snipers stationed along Israel’s boundary with Gaza shoot at children, they are doing so deliberately, under clear and specific orders.

Palestinian journalists covering the protests were also targeted. At least six journalists were shot and wounded, according to a statement by the Palestinian journalists’ union. Yasser Mourtaja, a very popular Palestinian reporter in the Gaza Strip, died on April 7 after being wounded by Israeli gunfire while wearing a helmet and jacket explicitly indicating he belonged to the press.

## Right of Return for Palestinians

The demonstrations organized since March 30, on the occasion of the celebration of Land Day, commemorating the Israeli murder of six Palestinians in 1976 during mass demonstrations against the theft of land by the State of Israel, marked the first stage of six weeks of mobilisations for the “March of the Return”. These will last until May 15,

the anniversary of the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and the symbol for the Palestinians of the “Nakba”, the Catastrophe, during which 800,000 of about 1.4 million Palestinians at the time were forcefully displaced from their land. These mobilizations aim to claim the “right of return” of the Palestinians.

Today, the number of Palestinian refugees exceeds six million. The Gaza Strip alone has no less than 1.3 million people (out of two million inhabitants) officially registered as refugees. Yet UN General Assembly Resolution 194, adopted on December 11, 1948 (which has no binding legal value), supports the right of return of Palestinians. It states that “refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or equity, should be made good by the governments or authorities responsible”.

Furthermore, there is an inhuman and illegal blockade of the occupied Gaza Strip, in violation of international law, imposed by the State of Israel, with the assistance of the Egyptian regime for more than a decade. The blockade has transformed this territory into a huge prison. The asphyxiation is total: more than 80% of the inhabitants of Gaza depend on international aids. Hospitals lack medicines, and electricity is only available for a few hours a day. The water is undrinkable and sewage is poured directly into the sea.

## Complicity of the Great Powers

A draft UN Security Council statement, calling on “all parties to restraint and prevent further escalation” and calling for an investigation into the violence, has

been blocked by the United States. For its part, the European Union still refuses to condemn the bloody crackdown by Israel, whose leaders have already warned that the shooting instructions will remain the same. The deadly crackdown on these demonstrations, bringing together tens of thousands of protesters, has political objectives: to dissuade anyone from participating in similar initiatives unless they are willing to risk their lives.

**It must be clear: these are not “confrontations” or “clashes” as the mainstream media and Western governments are saying. We are dealing with the deliberate crimes of an occupying, colonial and racist force against unarmed protesters.**

At the same time, attacks and night raids against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank doubled in the first two months of 2018 alone. Entire Palestinian villages in northern Israel are threatened with demolition, and some have been replaced by settlements.

## Hamas, Isolation and Pressure

Israel has accused Hamas of being the instigator and organizer of the protests and using them to hide its “terrorist activities”. For its part, Hamas is attempting to politically take over these mobilizations, which were initially and still are initiated by independent and progressive activists, as it was suffering political decline and being isolated internally and externally.

Hamas’ position in Gaza has become in many respects unbearable. Subject to the blockade of Israel and Egypt on the one hand and the economic sanctions imposed by the Palestinian Authority on Gaza on the other hand, the Islamic fundamentalist movement is under pressure from several Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia and

the United Arab Emirates, which see it as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization considered terrorist by these regimes.

Hamas has at the same time strengthened its relations with Iran and Turkey. Hamas officials have praised officials and governments of these countries...

## 70 years of Crimes Against the Palestinian People

Attacks and night raids against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank have doubled in the first two months of 2018. Entire Palestinian villages in northern Israel are threatened with demolition and some are being replaced by settlements. .

One of the main triggers for the increase in Israeli assaults and even more aggressive practices this year is

the decision of US President Trump to move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. This decision, and more generally Trump's support for Israel, encouraged the Israeli government to accelerate plans to expand settlements in the West Bank and further eradicate Palestinian identity. This is not to mention the Saudi pressure on the Palestinian Authority to accept Israeli conditions and a political agreement in favor of Tel Aviv, in other words a form of diktat.

More generally, as we mentioned before, authoritarian regimes in the region are also guilty of bringing about the situation of Palestinians. The ruling classes of the regimes of the region are not interested in the condition of the Palestinians or in any perspective for their liberation. However, at the same time, they use the Palestinian to fulfil their own internal and foreign political interests. For example in Syria, the Assad regime is once again massively bombing majority Palestinian inhabited areas, regardless of the faith

of the remaining civilians. Airstrikes and shelling have hit the Yarmouk Palestinian refugee camp and al-Hajar al-Aswad area, part of a small enclave divided between jihadi fighters and other opposition armed groups south of the capital Damascus.

The pathway toward the liberation of the Palestinians is connected with the liberation of the people of the region.

The apartheid, colonial and racist state of Israel must be punished for its nearly 70 years of ongoing crimes against the Palestinian people. We must continue to support the Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions (BDS) campaign as long as the State of Israel will not respect international law and Palestinian rights.

Solidarity with Palestinians and People in struggle for liberation and emancipation.

*April 26, 2018*

[Alliance of Middle East Socialists](#)

## “Things could go into a spin very quickly in the Macron camp”

**2 May 2018, by Olivier Besancenot**

**Emmanuel Macron has had a very high-profile week in the media. Does he come out strengthened in your view?**

I don't think so. All the signals show that the movement is continuing to take hold. In the universities, it's underway. On 17 April there was a mass meeting of 1,800 people in Nanterre. I remember what I knew in 1995. [243]. If there are mass meetings like that, it's because something is happening. More and more colleges are occupied, like Science Po recently. Among railway workers, the rates of strikers are stronger than in previous movements. The RATP is involved. There is no halt. The battle of opinion will not be won

on a TV show, but in the period of social struggle ahead.

**During his interview on BFM and Mediapart, Emmanuel Macron reproached Edwy Plenel [244] for wanting to create “a coagulation of discontent”, whereas for him, “there isn't that much there”. Is he right?**

No, he's deluding himself. In fact, it is he who is coagulating anger. As often in conflict situations, the powerful are much more effective than the militants in doing that. It is he and his entourage who consciously decided to light all the fuses at the same time: by persisting in the reform of university entry, reforms on pensions, while

pensioners were being pressured with the CSG (Contribution sociale généralisée - social security contributions), or by violently evacuating the ZAD at Notre-Dame-des-Landes. [245] In reality all he has managed to do is to remobilize the movement: there have never been so many zadistes as today. By destroying the “Ferme des 100 Noms”, which was a focal point of the movement, he federated all sectors against him. He thinks he can succeed where previous governments have failed, in all areas and at the same time, but should beware of overconfidence.

**In the first round of the presidential election only 18% of the voters voted for him, and yet**

**he is reforming the country without making concessions. Why does this not raise more street protests?**

To move from non-acceptance to fighting back is a very big step, which is built over time, always in particular conditions. I think that French society is responding to this attack. And that he is too sure of himself, just like his performance against Bourdin and Plenel on BFM. This class arrogance, which he usually displays with a lot of contempt, may make him stumble. He thinks he can do what others have not done before him, because they were held back by their political affiliation. But French society remains very attached to its social model, to its social achievements. Of course, it is not generalized conflagration, but history tells us that conflagrations do not occur spontaneously: they are built.

In May 68, contrary to what the editorial of *Le Monde* claimed, France was not bored. There were plenty of warning signs, strikes, mobilizations. It would be misleading to think that the bulk of the battle is going on right now. Other sectors can do it. The role of activists in this context is to put oil in the wheels, so that when it happens, convergence takes place effectively. The challenge is not just to undermine Macron's legitimacy, it's to win. We need to win.

**In the cultural battle that is going on between the government, which points to the "privileged" status of railway workers, and you who say that "we are all the railworker of somebody", is the relationship of forces changing?** [246]

I do not think it's a question of argumentation or education. Some people think on the left of the left that we need to educate the masses. It's not the case with me. There is, in the depths of the collective memory - to use an expression that Daniel Bensaïd liked - a deep attachment to social protection. The prospect of railway lines disappearing, emergencies in public hospitals which are even more saturated than today, and publicly-acknowledged selection for university entry hurts people, well beyond those who are mobilized. [247]

**With his speech on the "damaged link between Church and State", his statements on "professional troublemakers", and the violent police action at Notre-Dame-des-Landes, do you think Emmanuel Macron is moving to the right?**

For me, there has never been any question that basically he has always been on the right.

But his strategy is indeed to become the leader of the right. For him, this is the political space to occupy permanently. He thinks he has done the job on the left, and that he should turn to this camp now. He has therefore chosen the party of law and order, in all areas: moral and security. But it's double-edged. When the CRS evacuate peaceful students from an amphitheatre in Nanterre, it strengthens and multiplies the mobilization. And at the same time, it frees the entire pack who thinks it's time to attack, even beyond his own camp. This is what happened in Montpellier. [248] All reactionaries now feel legitimised in attacking.

**On the front of the School of Science Politiques, now occupied by students, we can read this message: "Students of Science Po against Macronian dictatorship". Fifty years ago, their elders opposed the "Gaullist dictatorship". Do you think there are similarities?**

The walls are taking the floor again. I saw a poster in Tolbiac saying, "Do not take the elevator anymore, take power." This type of boiling over is peculiar to times when thousands of people are preparing for political action. Of course, we are tempted by parallels, but don't copy and paste. The best way to commemorate May 68 is precisely not to commemorate it, but to remake it under different circumstances. But keep in mind that 1968 was not just a big party, it was also 9 to 10 million strikers. That's what turned everything upside down.

**The government argues that the Vidal law will not endorse selection in university entry, it is a counter-truth. Is this a question of language?**

If they choose to say that it is a pedagogical problem, that students have misunderstood, they will trip up, because the university community - students and teachers - is well informed, and knows what selection is. It was also a cause of May 68. An activist told me that when he was studying geography at the beginning of 1968 at Censier, his first striking image was that of an activist in the Unef [students' union] who went into the lecture hall and said, "Look, at the end of the year, a fifth of this amphitheatre will graduate, the rest will not". He was not politicized, but since he had already passed his baccalaureat [high school graduation] twice, it immediately spoke to him. Selection was already very strong because of social inequalities. And even today there is an unlisted, unconfirmed and effective selection in the university. But putting selection in the law - because that's what we're talking about - is a ticking time bomb.

**Far-right groups have been noted for their aggressive actions in occupied universities. How do you explain this resurgence?**

This is the sign that they understand that something is going on, and that's their way of reacting, through violence. Beyond the fact that there will be opposition to them, it says a lot about the political risk of being the party of law order chosen by Macron: not only will it exasperate and revolt even more those who mobilize against selection, but he is also risking disappointing his own supporters. There are always those who are more royalist than the king. He can lose on both counts.

**Since the second round of the presidential election, the FN has almost disappeared from the political landscape. Can we credit this to Emmanuel Macron?**

Beware of optical effects. The election period certainly weakened Marine Le Pen, but the FN occupies a deep political space. This political space cannot have disappeared like that, it can reappear at any moment. There is a gap between the electoral representation of the political landscape and the forces actually present in society.

On the left, there is a political exasperation that goes beyond the parliamentary and institutional framework. It is certainly partly relayed by some deputies and political currents, such as France insoumise, but it is deeper than that. There is a radical left in the generic sense of the term, which is extra-parliamentary. This is an important reality.

**How do you conceive the role of political organizations, revolutionary or simply progressive, in the current social moment?**

Their role is to connect to political time and social time to the greatest extent possible. When social life is speeding up, political life is often delayed. We must be in unison, and there must be a combination of old and new. That is, between that which goes well beyond existing social, union and political structures, and traditional organizations, because their experience is needed. Our role is to work towards this unity.

This unitary framework exists. [249] We meet regularly, we call for joint initiatives, and a meeting is in preparation for the end of the month. Our contribution is however modest, because the political organizations, even united, cannot replace the real balance of forces, which will crystallize in the fight itself: the strikes, the occupations, the demonstrations, the blockages, and things we have not thought about yet ...

**Macron spoke of “the tyranny of minorities who have become accustomed to being surrendered to”. But what has the government surrendered over the last fifteen years?**

From memory since the CPE there has been no strong social victory. [250] To win, the social movement always has to be strengthened at the base, and at the same time the regime is divided at the top. But the ingredients can be brought together: something is happening in society, and at the top, things could go into a spin very quickly in the Macron camp. We see it on the asylum and immigration law. Making political conglomerates is fine,

but this is also a nest of enormous contradictions, which can explode at any time.

**In the twelve organizations that form part of the unitary framework that you have built, there is one missing: Lutte Ouvrière. Why?**

They came to the first meeting before 22 March [the first strike day of the current wave called for state employees and railworkers], at our invitation, but said they would not be involved. It's their responsibility. However, it is a matter of building a basic unity of action, while acknowledging our disagreements. We know what separates us, but we need to stick together to strike together. One does not lose one's soul by displaying political unity, while clearly acknowledging our differences. In this unitary framework, we do not tell stories: between Hamon and us it is crystal clear. But we have the common will to act despite our differences when we agree to do so. It's pragmatic.

**Philippe Martinez (the general secretary of the CGT union confederation) has said he will not go to the demonstration on May 5, while you have said you will attend. How do you analyse this decision?**

Missed opportunities all originate from the systematic battle for leadership. At the level of political organizations, everyone has come back. That is why in this unitary framework, everyone can get involved in the preparations, and we support all the mobilizations: 1st of May, 5 May, and after 5 May. Not only is this unitary framework holding, it is expanding, while we didn't manage to do this on the XXL employment law at the beginning of last year. This is a good thing.

**Paradoxically, it is in periods of social unrest that you appear most often in the media. Do you prefer intervening outside election campaigns?**

In the NPA, that's how we act, we do not only do politics during elections. The sequence that is opening now will be a moment of politicization that is

worth a lot more than election campaigns. For me the two aspects - social and political - are eminently linked. I feel freer since I made the choice to match what I think with what I do. I gave myself the freedom not to be the eternal candidate of the far left in elections. But I waged the campaign for Philippe [Poutou], I travelled the country, I made broadcasts... I felt completely free at that time too. But this story of the “return” is so far removed from me that I do not know what to say about it.

**Despite your real differences, do you think it's positive that Jean-Luc Mélenchon has managed to establish a left-wing political force on the political landscape?**

My hope is always directed to an alternative political representation. We saw the dynamic of campaign. This was positive because these large gatherings allow activists and non-activists to regain self-confidence. But I still do not feel represented by him today. That does not stop us being able to do things together. What is significant is that we are no longer in the previous period: everyone has understood that he cannot embody by himself the left political opposition to Macron.

**There are former NPA or LCR members in the Assembly: Danièle Obono, Eric Coquerel ... Does this forum that they have acquired seem useful to you?**

It's probably useful for a series of conflicts that they relay in the Assembly, but I'm not going to lie: my eyes are really not focused on that right now. This is not to downplay what they do, and the energy they expend. It's hard to answer that question: I might not say the same thing if we had parliamentary representation. But I think that even if we did, the political support we need to build something in the period starting now would not be there. They have a platform, but I imagine that they themselves are conscious of the fact that it is only a platform.

**Do you think this point of support will always be in the social movement? You don't believe in**



**the interaction between a strong social movement and leftist deputies, as under the Popular Front?**

This would imply an electoral period that would occur in a totally different context. In 2017 [presidential elections followed by parliamentary election in May-June], we can clearly see that the Assembly is a theatre of shadows. I believe that the solution is extra-parliamentary from a political point of view, I believe it deeply. It is not related to France insoumise or the last electoral sequence: I have believed it for a long time. And this belief only gets stronger.

**Several NPA activists have been victimized in recent months: Gael Quirante was fired from La Poste, Aurélie-Anne Thos (a leader of the student movement in Toulouse) was arrested at a demonstration on April 3rd, Victor Mendez was also arrested during the evacuation of an amphitheatre by the CRS in Nanterre. Do you think there is a hardening of repression?**

Absolutely. The cost of activism has been known for several years, and we are not alone. The government wants to create a climate of fear. This policy of disciplinary councils, procedures, summonses and custody has become systematic. But in the poor neighbourhoods, it is much worse: you only have to see the harassment reserved for the Traore family. The systematization of this policy has released forces that the central government does not necessarily control, but to which it has given the green light. We are not crying about our fate, but it is a reality.

**Have these persecutions brought a surge of sympathy around you?**

In the 1970s, the equation "action - repression" was very fashionable. It was thought that repression necessarily generated solidarity. I will not make a theory about it. And what's more, we waste a lot of time in getting people out of prison, of police custody, preventing disciplinary decisions being made by dismissals ... Common sense would require all labour movement, union, social, campaign and political activists to unite to set up

a defence structure, which says: "You touch one of our activists, you touch everyone". It would be a strong signal, and it is more than necessary.

**Is the case of Tarnac, which ended on April 12 in the release of the defendants after ten years of prosecution, part of the same repression?**

Yes, that's why we gave them solidarity from the start. [251] Behind the trial of the ultra-left, a message was sent to all the population: be activists at a cost, if you start it, that's what awaits you. This is also what happened to Gaël Quirante, after three rulings from the labour inspectorate rejecting his dismissal on the grounds of trade union discrimination, the validation of these reports by the General Directorate of Labour, and a political decision taken by Xavier Bertrand not to authorize his dismissal, Muriel Penicaud [Minister of Labour] finally authorized it. It's harsh.

**Since the beginning of the 1990s, we have been experiencing an eclipse of the idea of great utopias. You are a child of that, a revolutionary without revolution. What makes you keep going? Are there any experiences that make you optimistic?**

I do not think that the sequence is characterized by the closing down of our political horizons. I have grown up politically in a world where there is no readily available model, but I have the impression that in recent years, other possibilities are opening, that we are less locked into a role of resistance. For example, the current mobilization is an opportunity to talk about what the public service could be in an alternative way. In the ZAD, we are experimenting with another way of life, another type of agriculture. When there are redundancies, from Arcelor Mittal to Fralib, the idea of creating a cooperative arises. That's why I do not internalize a regression at this level.

**You'll be at the fête de l'Humanité, I guess, to see (French rap band) NTM?**

(Smiles) For sure, yes.

**What do we need to spice things up?**

Just to be a little more numerous! (Laughter)

*Translated from by International Viewpoint from Les Inrockuptibles 19 April 2018 "Olivier Besancenot : "Ça pourrait partir en vrille très vite dans le camp Macron".*

---

## Despite police violence, mobilization continues

The demonstrations of 1 May gathered 200 000 people, which represents an important mobilization, with well-filled demonstrations. The Paris demonstration was particularly massive, while part of the other events took place during the school holiday period in their region. This is the sign of anger rising against Macron, in universities, among railworkers but also in the world of work and youth.

Faced with this mobilization, the government has continued its repressive front. On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, it sent police against students in their universities. In Rennes, they attacked the student cortege. In Paris, it used the presence of "autonomists" at the front of the demonstration to attack the young processions and cut the event, it is its attitude that forced the unions to change the itinerary. The students had to turn back in the face of police violence, whether with batons or mass teargassing. This police violence was planned, anticipated by the communiqué of the Prefecture of Police and by the arrangements put in place, not to mention the provocateurs, police officers in civilian wear mixed with the demonstrators.

While we do not share the politics of the autonomist groups, we understand the growing anger of some of the youth, who face social and police



violence in their daily lives. It is the government that bears the responsibility for the current confrontation, it is at the origin of aggression against the world of work and youth. The response of the social

movement must above all be to protect its demonstrations, in a unitary way between the different organizations, to refuse the police violence ... and to continue the

mobilization, on May 3rd, May 5th and in the coming weeks, to stop Macron.

*Montreuil*

2 May 2018

## 1968 seen from Britain

1 May 2018, by **Phil Hearse**

### Revolutionary Renaissance

In the early- and mid-1960s this first New Left had played a key role in the renewal of radicalisation, ideologically through journals like *New Left Review* and organisationally through the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which in turn had a spin off in strengthening the anti-apartheid movement and other left-wing campaigns. One of the first significant student occupations was at the prestigious London School of Economics in 1967, over the suspension of student union officials campaigning against the appointment of a college director with strong links to Ian Smith's Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), a strong ally of apartheid South Africa.

Because of the global interests of British capital, Britain is a focus of international news gathering, but the mass media is particularly focused on the Anglophone countries, centrally of course the United States. So the TV news bulletins on the evening of January 31 were full of the Tet offensive and the invasion of the United States' Vietnam embassy compound in Saigon by fighters from the National Liberation Front. The NLF-North Vietnamese offensive was like a thunder clap, and for the Left immediately seemed like a vindication of its contention that the US was losing the war, despite the vast firepower of the American military machine wreaking havoc in the villages of South Vietnam and raining death on towns and cities in North

Vietnam. As we now know the insurgents suffered grievous losses but inflicted a heavy political defeat on the United States and its South Vietnamese allies, the beginning of the end for the US war effort. [252]

The Tet offensive was the first of three major events that seemed to give concrete life to aspects of the revolutionary socialist programme – the other events of course being the May-June general strike in France and the crushing of the “Prague Spring” of Czech reform communism, by the Russian invasion in August. These three events together seemed to confirm the idea of ‘three sectors’ of the world revolution. or at least were easily interpreted as such by the Fourth International. [253] This conjunction helped to open up a whole new audience for the revolutionary left, especially among students.

But another process and series of events had a profound impact on the consciousness of left leaning or liberal-minded young people in Britain – the intensification and radicalisation of the struggle for Black civil rights in the United States, and the apparent descent into crisis and turmoil in that country, symbolised by the assassination of Martin Luther King (4 April) and the Black uprising that followed it; the assassination of Robert Kennedy (5 June); and brutal police attacks on protestors at the Democratic Party national convention in Chicago (August 26-9).

### May Events in France

Probably the process that had the most impact on the Left was the student uprising followed by the almost two weeks of general strike in France. Revolt in the “third world” was ongoing and reform communist revolt and repression in the Stalinist states had happened in the relatively recent past. But a month-long general strike, the biggest in world history was something unique. The revolutionary role of the working class, and the conservative role of the official Communist parties seemed to be dramatically confirmed. The dominant discourse on the revolutionary left – that there was potentially a revolutionary situation betrayed by the French Communist Party (PCF) was a bit simplistic. For example, the sight of Georges Seguy, leader of the Communist-led CGT union, being shouted down by a mass meeting at the Renault-Billancourt factory when reporting negotiations with the employers, gave rise to highly optimistic interpretations in the UK. In fact he was shouted down with chants of ‘gouvernement populaire’, the PCF's own governmental slogan – a popular front government. It signified the strikers' wish to take the struggle onto the governmental plane, to be done with the hated authoritarian Gaullist regime, not exactly the demand for immediate socialist revolution. Of course, the PCF wanted to restrict the movement to demands about pay and conditions, and precisely not to generalise it

politically. No one can tell how far the movement would have gone if the PCF had taken a different course.

In fact two of the most widely-read analyses of the events in Britain, France - "The Struggle Goes On" by Tony Cliff and Ian Birchall of the International Socialists (later SWP), and Ernest Mandel's "The Lessons of May '68" both had much more nuanced interpretations than presenting the possibility of immediate socialist revolution. [254], In any case the key point was the conservative role played by the PCF, which handed the revolutionary left everywhere a polemical gold mine. The IS held meetings all over Britain on the theme of the Cliff/Birchall pamphlet.

## Vietnam Solidarity Campaign

The Tet offensive gave a spur to the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign (VSC), helping to make it the centre of the Vietnam protest movement, marginalising the Communist Party-backed British Council for Peace in Vietnam (BCVP). VSC was politically dominated by the International Marxist Group, which had founded the campaign and also the International Socialists. Its theme was "solidarity" with those doing the fighting and for the US to leave Vietnam, not just a call for negotiations, the key demand of the BCPV. Despite differences of interpretation over the nature of the NLF and North Vietnamese regime, the British revolutionary left benefited from appearance that the NLF was involved in something more than a struggle for national unity and independence, but ultimately some kind of revolution.

There were other ideological effects of the May events on the British left. Above all was a key "lesson" from France: that students can in some circumstances detonate a political crisis but only when the working class moves into action can there be any chance of a progressive or revolutionary outcome. In Britain, Maoist, anarchist and libertarian currents were always weak. Those people, sometimes influenced by

Herbert Marcuse and the Frankfurt school, who doubted the revolutionary role of the working class, and instead pointed to students, third world peasants and different liberation movements as the revolutionary subjects, were pushed to one side by the reception of the French events in Britain. From then on, the need to build an organisation capable of intervening among workers became a primary concern among revolutionary and socialist-minded students. This often took a crude "workerist" form, ignoring or downplaying the struggles of the specially oppressed, particularly among supporters of the International Socialists. Nonetheless it was the dominant mood among students.

## Students and Workers

In truth, there never was a mass student movement in Britain on a scale comparable to Germany, Japan, the United States and Italy. In fact, student radicalism was always a minority and never dominant on the campuses, although by its organisation and energy it could politically dominate key universities and colleges. In Germany, Japan and the USA the student radicalisation had generated huge radical or left organisations that were quasi-hegemonic among radicals - in Germany, the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (SDS), in Japan the Zengakuren and in the United States, Students for a Democratic Society (also SDS) respectively. A self-conscious effort was made in 1968 to copy these international examples, through launching the Revolutionary Socialist Students Federation. Animated particularly by members of the New Left Review editorial board, it held a founding conference in June 1968 and another conference the next Spring. [255] But although supported by the IMG, and formally by the IS, it could not, outside a few locations, for any length of time supplant the established left wing organisations; and in any case the founding of a student organisation at a time when the best revolutionary students were looking for an avenue to the militant workers, was doomed to fail.

## Rebellion in the Six Counties

In Northern Ireland the movement for civil rights for the oppressed nationalist minority - Catholics in the Six Counties suffered from notorious discrimination in jobs, housing and voting rights - was greatly inspired by the civil rights movement in the United States, and the non-violent civil disobedience politics of Martin Luther King.

The first civil rights marches were held in 1968, from Coalisland to Dungannon on 24 August and in Derry on 5 October. Both marches were confronted by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), and the latter violently attacked - the Nationalist member of parliament Gerry Fitt was one of the demonstrators clubbed to the ground.

The Derry march led directly to a mass meeting at Queens University Belfast on 9 October where a more radical action-based movement, People's Democracy, was formed, including as leaders people influenced by the revolutionary socialist tradition like Eammon McCann and Bernadette Devlin (later McAliskey).

In January 1969, in imitation of Martin Luther King's Selma to Montgomery march, about 40 People's Democracy members held a four-day march between Belfast and Derry. The march was repeatedly attacked by loyalists along its route, most violently in an incident at Burntollet bridge on 4 January, where the marchers were assaulted by about 200 loyalists, including off-duty special constables, armed with iron bars, bottles and stones - while the RUC stood by and watched. These shocking events, and the anti-Catholic pogrom in Belfast in August 1969, led directly to the sending of British troops to the province, and the emergence of the Provisional IRA - and a 20-year war with the British state.

One thing that could easily be seen from Britain in 1968 was that the "stars" of the far left and insurgent movements - like Rudi Dutschke, Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Alain Krivine,

were mainly men. The platform at the famous May 12 mass meeting organised by the JCR on the eve of the "night of the barricades" didn't include a single woman. [256] People like Bernadine Dohrn in the US SDS and Bernadette Devlin in PD were exceptions. [257]

The radical energy of 1968, and the movement before and after it, was creating a new cultural space in which not just radical socialists, but rebel mass movements of the oppressed, could organise, grow and announce themselves on a mass stage.

## Popular Culture

That radical energy benefitted enormously from the general cultural upheaval of the 1960s, in which Britain and the United States were central participants. This was of course located mainly among young people and promoted counter-cultural thinking and lifestyles. These included fashion, music, film, drug taking and a freer attitude towards sexuality enabled by the widespread availability of the contraceptive pill. (That sexual freedom included huge chunks of misogyny and homophobia - the women's movement was just about to get going). In time the lifestyles promoted by the 'swinging sixties' were easily recuperated by capitalism, but at the time they helped to promote anti-authoritarianism, from which the left could mainly benefit, although revolutionary Marxists at the time were decidedly snuffy about the plague of anarchists 'spontaneists' and libertarians of all sorts, who complicated recruitment to Leninist organisations.

At the level of the mass media there were few direct crossovers from cultural to political revolution. Mick Jagger, influenced by the October 1968 Vietnam demo, sang 'the time is ripe for violent revolution', an attitude on his part that was fleeting. Socialist film director Ken Loach had made his first dramatic TV impact with 'Poor Cow' (about homelessness) in 1967 and was already working on his breakthrough film 'Kes'. French movie director Jean-Luc Godard collaborated with six others to make *Far From Vietnam*. The

radical theatre group, the Cartoon Archetypal Slogan Theatre (CAST), had been founded in 1967 and was much in evidence in 1968.

The one area where leftist politics intruded directly on popular culture was folk music - mainly American musicians inspired by the radical tradition of Woody Guthrie. The included Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Peggy Seeger and her more famous brother Pete, Tom Paxton and the most political of that generation, Phil Ochs. By the late 1960s Dylan had wandered off message, but the others mainly persisted.

Limited though the impact of leftist politics was on popular culture, the cultural revolution of the 1960s broke the stultifying conformism and abject respect for authority that the 1950s represented.

## Women's Movement

Women's groups of different sorts had been emerging in Britain during the 1960s - in part from the influence of the growing movement in the US, but the focalising event was the Ford women workers' strike in June 1968. This led on the one hand to the formation of the National Joint Action Campaign Committee for Women's Equal Rights (NJACCWER) which called a national demonstration for equal pay in 1969; and on the other to the visit of the first woman Cabinet minister, Barbara Castle, who promised Equal Pay and subsequently introduced the Equal Pay Act in 1970. At the same time women in left and academic circles, notably the radical history movement, were organising, and after an overflowing workshop on writing women's history at the History Workshop in 1969 Sheila Rowbotham and others called for the first national women's liberation conference in Britain in February 1970 - itself originally called as conference on women's history. [258] While the influence of the US movement was clear - including an initiative at the Miss World of 1979 - the British movement was notable for the strong influence of historians in its founding members and closer ties with the

trade-union movement. The TUC adopted its Working Women's Charter in 1974.

The Gay Liberation Front, Britain's first campaigning gay rights movement, was founded just a few months later and clearly inspired by the example of the women's movement.

## Civil Rights

The civil rights movement in the United States and its follow-on Black Power movement generated enormous sympathy among the Left and liberals in Britain. In the uprising in dozens of US cities following the killing of Martin Luther King, upwards of 45 people were killed, and 2500 were injured - nearly all by the police, National Guard and regular army sent to crush them - and 15,000 people were arrested. In Britain there was no autonomous mass Black movement created, but anti-racism became a mass phenomenon and a linchpin of the activity of the British left from the 1970s onwards. One cloud on the horizon in 1968 was the mobilisation of hundreds of dockworkers and Smithfield meat market workers in London to support the anti-immigrant rantings of right wing Tory MP Enoch Powell. Security Service documents re-leased 30 years later showed that these 'spontaneous' demonstrations were in fact organised by far-right activists. [259] Powell's views, considered extreme at the time, later became mainstream in the Conservative Party.

The rhythm of far-left mobilisation was strongly affected by the cycle of Vietnam demonstrations. In March the famous "Battle of Grosvenor Square" took place, where VSC's relatively small demonstration of 15,000-20,000 achieved massive publicity because of the fighting with the police protecting the American embassy. The evening before the demonstration, a meeting was held addressed by French revolutionary leader Alain Krivine, and interrupted by the noisy arrival of dozens of demonstrators from the SDS in Berlin chanting "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh".

The next scheduled VSC

demonstration was in October 1968. Attended by more than 100,000 mainly young people, it was preceded by a clamorous press campaign claiming that the demonstrators planned an attempted “revolution” on that day. One indicator of the mood was a gigantic banner proclaiming “NLF-AEF” – AEF being the acronym of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering and Foundry Workers, the name that the giant engineering union AUEW was briefly known by. “NLF-AEF” was of course a fumbling attempt to indicate the unity of anti-imperialist struggles with that of the British working class. The October 1968 was the last mass Vietnam demonstration – after that the concerns of the audience of the far-left organisations had moved on.

A month after the start of the French May-June events, a new revolutionary left-inspired newspaper edited by Tariq Ali was launched. Called the *Black Dwarf* after a radical newspaper in 19th century Britain, its front page proclaimed “We shall fight, we shall win, Paris, London, Rome Berlin”.

In truth most of the British far left outside the IMG didn’t know very much about its comrades in the rest of Europe; but the IMG strongly promoted the role of the Fourth International-influenced Jeunesse Communiste Révolutionnaire. The important role of JCR leaders like Alain Krivine, Henri Weber and Daniel Bensaid in the May-June events was an element of prestige attractive to the bigger milieu of sympathisers around *Black Dwarf*. And the same time the International Socialists advertised the role of “our comrades in Voix Ouvrière [260]”, an alliance without much staying power as it turned out.

Just as had happened after the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary, the decision by the Soviet Union’s Politburo to intervene militarily in Czechoslovakia did immense damage to the prestige of the Communist Parties, including in Britain. The party’s General Secretary John Gollan made mild criticism of the Soviet intervention and an immediate split was avoided. But it helped to mature the trends of thought that would eventually emerge as the party’s

Eurocommunist wing, ending ultimately in a disastrous split.

One notable blind spot in Britain was the relative lack of interest in Latin America. The death of Che Guevara in August did lead to a meeting of maybe 400 people, addressed by future MEP Ken Coates, IMG leader Pat Jordan and the founder of *Monthly Review*, the Marxist economist Paul Sweezy. However, the October 9 massacre of 400 student demonstrators in Mexico City’s Plaza of the Three Cultures hardly raised a ripple of interest outside the revolutionary hard core.

World events up to and during 1968 had an immense effect of the British Left. Political organisations that were minuscule emerged after it with some force, particularly the International Socialists and the IMG. Part of a whole generation was radicalised, and part of that was won ideologically won to Marxism. Given the importance of English as the first language of international communication, that had important effects on the political Left and the academic Left in several countries for decades.